

**FROM THE PUBLISHER**

The local property market is a beacon of hope for hard-pressed South African investors who have become wary of the erratic swings in the stock market.

Interest in tangible assets is rising rapidly and we see investors flocking back to property, with attendance at show houses notching up an incredible 300 percent increase in the past month. Interest is also translating into actual sales and although the ratio of bond approvals to applications is still low, the volume principle means that more loans are being approved than in the very recent past. This will boost the market.

Meanwhile, the severe beating the rand has been suffering at the hands of strong currencies has also stimulated renewed interest in the local market among foreign and expat buyers. Buyers with euros, dollars and pounds are once again able to buy local property at very reasonable prices when the sales price is converted into their own currencies, and their confidence has also been boosted by the shelving last month of the controversial Property Expropriation Bill.

A further factor that is underpinning confidence in the local property market is that South Africa is one of very few countries with a "market in waiting". Like China and India, we are likely to benefit mightily over the next few years from a vast number of new homebuyers who are becoming financially able to buy property.

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Every month the **Property Signpost Newsletter** will be issued to all our subscribers, filled with real estate information to help you make an informed decision, whether you are buying or selling a property.

**In This Month's Newsletter:**

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**Our first Home Makeover completed**

Celebrities and hundreds of kind-hearted volunteers rolled up their sleeves recently to transform Kids Haven, a children's shelter in Benoni on the East Rand, in the first Chas Everitt International Home Makeover project.

This was run along the lines of the popular TV show Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, with the children being treated to an exciting holiday while their home was totally renovated and transformed into a warm, homely and welcoming environment.

Betterbond and Nedbank were platinum sponsors of the project, as were Jack's Paint and Hardware, STBB Attorneys, The Home Channel and Ferreira's Décor World.

Teams of volunteers converged on Kids Haven for the weekend project and were assigned rooms to paint under the keen supervision of representatives of Jack's Paints, who donated all the required materials. Unexpected plumbing problems were rectified, which added an extra day to the planned schedule, but it was not enough to dampen the enthusiasm of the volunteers.

The delay also proved a boon to the young residents of Kids Haven - they had been ferried by Springbok Atlas bus to Magaliesberg Retreat for fun-filled weekend while their home was renovated, and got to stay a whole extra day.

They then returned to find their home completely transformed. Four classrooms, four large dormitories, the school hall and stage alongside the training kitchen and storeroom, the recreation room, dining room, locker room, computer room, TV room and sewing room as well as six bathrooms were all freshly painted and decorated.

Each dorm was fitted out with new mattresses, pillows and duvets, scatter cushions and beanbags as well as two changes of linen. Gift packs for each child included towels, face

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cloths and toiletries and the younger children also each had a Chas Bear teddy waiting on their beds.

The home was also fitted with new television sets and the children will be able to watch the marathon makeover when it is screened on DSTV's Home Channel at 12:00 and 20:00 on Saturday 22 November and again at 15:00 and 22:00 on Sunday 23 November.

Celebrities who lent a hand included Ryk Neethling who proved a dab hand at painting and lent some muscle to move heavy furniture. Volunteers from Chas Everitt branches, Betterbond, Nedbank, Rosebank College, University of Johannesburg, Ferreiras and Springbok Atlas all helped to complete the project and local sponsors pitched in by supplying food to the volunteers to keep their energy levels high.

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### Gadgets chomp electricity

Eskom's power cuts at the height of the electricity crisis painfully illustrated a modern truth - most of us are lost without our gadgets ranging from cell phones and iPods to home computers.

And if South African trends mirror experience in the US, an increasing proportion of electricity usage can be attributed to running these devices. Studies estimate 11% of household electricity was used in 2006 to power such devices and the figure is expected to increase to at least 18% by 2015.

While few would be willing to forego their growing array of gadgets, there are ways to minimise electricity usage. A first step would be to determine how much energy is consumed by devices when they are in use, on standby, or just plugged in. This can be determined by using a electricity usage meter.

As a rule of thumb, devices left on standby suck energy and it is a moot point if the time that one saves by not switching them off makes up for the money spent. It is also useful to remember that devices still use a lot of energy even when they are nominally turned off but not unplugged. The same goes for power adaptors - even when they are not plugged into gadgets like phones and laptops, they still consume power.

Multiplugs can save time and hassle by allowing you to switch off multiple devices with the flick of a single switch. Newer models are even more convenient in that they automatically switch off devices when a sensor detects that a device is not in active use.

Finally, shop smart when in the market for upgrades. It pays to check the power consumption of different models of your gadgets since the power saving over the device's lifetime can be considerable.

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### Home-cooking back in vogue

With dark clouds looming on the economic horizon, home-cooking is set to regain favour - and the kitchen will undoubtedly reclaim its traditional status as the heart of the home. Large kitchens offer much scope in this regard as it will not be too great a challenge to make room for family activities such as sharing meals and entertaining, or to find a spot for a homework or hobby desk.

But even small kitchens can be reorganised to optimise available space. The first rule should be to get rid of clutter and to keep surfaces clear. If possible, additional storage space should be created by adding cupboards and any other kitchen furniture could be pressed into double service. For instance, a breakfast nook can double up as a homework or hobby station.

Those lucky enough to be able to plan renovations should keep in mind that an upgraded kitchen can add substantial value and that the cost of renovation will probably recouped when the time comes to sell. However, it is important to consider popular trends and make sure that the style and layout of the new kitchen will appeal to a broad swath of potential buyers.

Homeowners with a small kitchen and an even smaller budget need not lose heart - there are a few tricks that can make a small room appear larger. Once again, the first rule is to declutter. A fresh coat of paint in a pale colour will reflect more light and make the kitchen look larger. And proper lighting can transform the look of a compact room.

Then if the budget allows, small kitchens can be enlarged by demolishing an internal wall. It is often possible in older homes to incorporate a dining room into the kitchen by breaking down the connecting wall, or at least to create a large hatch that can double up as a breakfast or bar counter.

In cases where this is not possible, a relatively cheap alternative is to turn to the exterior of the house. An open patio at the kitchen door can be used for al fresco meals and can probably be cheaply constructed in a weekend by a handy homeowner. When finances allow, the patio can be roofed and the kitchen door replaced with a large sliding glass door.

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### Light up your garden

A well-lit garden is a switch-off for burglars and other unwanted guests - but can also add drama to your night-time garden and be a plus-point for potential buyers.

The trick is to plan the lighting scheme carefully to prevent an Alcatraz-look where the subtleties of a night garden are wiped out by glaring security lights and, of course, to keep

electricity consumption within reasonable bounds.

Layered lighting that makes use of different types of light at different levels works well to create night-time interest in the garden and allows you to create pools of light in areas that may otherwise provide hiding spots for intruders.

For instance, floodlights can be used with great effect to create a dramatic focal point while acting as a deterrent to intruders. A flood light set in a lawn and directed upwards towards a tree with interesting branches will look attractive and will show up anybody approaching the home in stark relief. Up-lit statues or other interesting architectural details work equally well.

Low-intensity lights can be employed among shrubs to create a soft woodland effect while at the same time discouraging intruders to use the shrubs for cover. Solar lamps are well suited for this purpose, provided that they receive adequate sunlight during the day to recharge the batteries. Another advantage of solar lamps are that they can be easily rearranged to create different effects or light up a previously dark spot.

Solar lamps are also ideal to light up walkways and garden paths. To prevent the "runway" look, lights can be positioned at different heights and angles to add interest. However, care should be taken that lights still fulfil their prime purpose, namely to illuminate the walkway.

Surface or deck lighting works well on garden walls or other flat vertical surfaces. Interest can be created by positioning lights on different levels on a long wall, but the effect is usually more pleasing if some sort of set pattern rather than random pattern is followed.

Last, but not least, swimming pool lights can extend the use of the pool and create a shimmering effect at night. Similarly, judicial lighting of water features will enhance any garden at night.

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