



PREPARING YOUR VINTAGE HOME FOR SALE



By Yvonne Meacham Buchanan

When you own a vintage home, you know what you love about it. It's the ornate woodwork, ornamental trim, pocket doors, moldings, high ceilings, and vintage fixtures. You also know what you don't love about it: those small closets, creaky pipes, and poor insulation. But those are mere annoyances, and, like the character quirks of your favorite elderly aunt, they only endear the house to you more.

When it comes time to sell your vintage home, however, other factors apply. Buyers of vintage homes are looking for specific features, and many of them are naïve about "character quirks," and will want you to fix every floor squeak. While "eye candy" can blind buyers temporarily, once an offer has been made and accepted, the inspection process begins. That's where the money hits the road, so to speak.

To make sure you get the most out of your vintage home at sales time, even if you don't plan to sell immediately, keep in mind the following tips from Risa Davis, managing broker of Nouveau Realty Group in Portland, OR. Davis is also on the board of the Architectural Heritage Center and has been certified in historic homes.

Don't remove what's special. Davis once toured a Laurelhurst home in Portland for a prospective client who was preparing to sell, and commented on the beautiful vintage light fixtures. The owner, an elderly lady, told her, "My daughter is taking those." While light fixtures and other removable items may have sentimental value to the homeowner or family members, finding suitable replacements may be difficult and costly. "Keep what's there, there," said Davis.

If you need to replace something, stay with the period. Frequently Davis will find that a homeowner has replaced fixtures that are simply wrong for the house, often mixing styles such as Victorian and Craftsman. Davis recommends her clients consult lighting store catalogs such as those published by Schoolhouse Electric and Rejuvenation. "They divide their fixtures by era, making it very easy to see which fixtures are right for a particular home."

Replace like with like. If you need to replace a door or molding, perhaps due to deterioration, damage, or a remodel, make sure it matches the rest of the home. Nouveau Realty provides their clients with a list of vendors who can custom-match woodwork.

Hardwood, not laminate or carpeting. "One of the first things buyers will ask me,

when calling about a vintage home," says Davis, "is 'Does it have hardwood floors?' The importance of maintaining them cannot be overstated." Davis adds that there is "nearly always an alternative to replacing a hardwood floor." If a hardwood floor has been carpeted over, "Great!" says Davis, because it tends to preserve the floor. "But remove the carpeting before sale, and make sure tack strip holes are covered and the floor is cleaned and/or refinished if necessary."

Linoleum, not vinyl. Linoleum, like the brand Marmoleum, is a period flooring; vinyl flooring is not. Marmoleum is available in many beautiful colors and styles, just don't go too wild, and try to make sure it suits the house.

Repair, don't replace those wood windows. Although wood windows can be problematic and require maintenance, they are a particular favorite with today's vintage homebuyers. There are several local window repair companies that will bring your windows back to a usable state, including replacing broken sash cords.

Don't worry about patina. If brass hinges on your windows or doors have been painted over, by all means, have them stripped and restored. But if you're worried about a little green patina, don't! Most buyers prefer the lived-in look to brightly polished brass.

If it's wood, don't paint it. Don't paint over wood molding, doors, and wood trim if it hasn't already been painted over. Buyers love the natural wood.

If the house is missing elements, try to replace them. In the '60s and '70s, many older homes were remodeled to try to modernize them. Chair rails were removed, ceilings were lowered and recessed lighting installed, and soffits were installed. If it's at all possible, try to undo what's been changed.

Replace non-period kitchen cabinets. Kitchens are one of the first places "remuddling" often shows up. While modernization is fine (there is no need to stick with a wood-fired stove, for instance!) sleek '50s metal cabinets in a 1913 Craftsman are an eyesore. "Custom cabinets really do not have to cost more than prefab," says Davis, "particularly with some of the excellent custom cabinet makers we have locally." Davis recommends having the cabinets go all the way to the ceiling, because, "that's period."

Keep fireplaces as natural as possible. If your fireplace is wood burning, and the damper is functional, it's probably best to leave it alone. However, if you would



like a gas fireplace, or it's already been converted to gas but you don't like the look, there are low-profile gas conversions that are aesthetically pleasing and convenient. However, never do anything to cover up beautiful tile work. Fireplaces are a focal point and buyers will notice.

Just prior to the sale:

Clear closets. Because older homes tend to have small closets, clean closets thoroughly, remove clothing you don't need handy, and make sure nothing is on the floor so the wood floor shows through (one or two pairs of shoes is fine).

Start packing. Clear out everything that you won't be using before the house sells. Box items you don't want to remove from the house and stack them neatly in one area of the basement or garage.

Clean. Give your home a thorough once-over, hiring a cleaning crew if necessary, paying special attention to windows, floors, wood work, walls, ceilings, light fixtures, bathrooms, and kitchens.

Brighten. Make sure all light fixtures work and that they contain the highest wattage bulbs the fixture allows. Avoid halogen and spiral light fixtures, use incandescent.

Repair. If there are any repairs to be made, make them. "It's better to get that out of the way before the inspection period," says Davis, "because when an inspector finds needed repairs, buyers tend to get nervous."

Rely on the professionals for staging and photography. Davis works with vendors who can help stage your home, often using existing furniture and accessories, and a professional photographer

to take photos for the multiple listing. "I can't overemphasize the importance of good photos," says Davis, "they're the first things buyers see."

Highlight features. If your home has features that are not readily noticeable, let your agent know so he or she can point it out during showings. If you have architectural renderings of your home, original blueprints, historic photographs, or know the architect or builder, or something interesting about former owners, be sure and tell your agent so this information can be highlighted on the listing on a showing book or flyer.

Curb appeal. Make certain that your front walk way is free of needed repairs, and the yard is kept trimmed and edged. Hang a beautiful wreath or have potted flowers by the front door to make your home more welcoming. "If buyers see something they don't like on a drive-by, they may not book an appointment," warns Davis.

In short, says Davis, "I tell my clients to look at themselves as stewards of their homes, not owners, and when they're ready to sell, to think of it as passing over the keys to the home's next caretakers. We are blessed to live in an area with so many beautiful vintage homes, homes that were there before we got here, and homes that will be here long after we're gone. While we're here, we need to take care of them." A lot like that favorite elderly aunt. ■

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