

THE COSTCO CONNECTION

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A lifestyle magazine for Costco members

Making a difference

Costco members create change at home and abroad **22**

Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea*

Special Section: For your home

- Upgrade and enjoy
- Break the rules of décor
- Buyers' picks

Page 39

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Return to Woodstock **29** Destination: Hawaii **53** Buying Smart: Oral care **58**

Selling your house ... someday?

Improvements to make and enjoy now



FANCY PHOTOGRAPHY

By **Tonya M. Williams**



DAVID ESAREY

Tonya M. Williams

AS I PULL into the driveway of a cute Craftsman bungalow, I grab my Starbucks and listing paperwork and take a moment to survey the front of the home: corner lot, nice neighborhood, the grass is neatly edged, although the gutters need cleaning. So far I am pleased with the curb appeal.

As the real estate expert on HGTV's *Designed to Sell* Atlanta edition, I am used to sizing up a home in an instant. I also own a staging and décor firm and have been a Realtor in Atlanta for almost 10 years. As a result, I've become an expert on how to transform a plain house into one that's designed to sell.

I've always wondered, however, why homeowners will live uncomfortably with the quirks of their house, then literally pull out the kitchen sink and remodel/replace everything only when they are ready to sell. I've seen this

pattern of "decorate and depart" remain constant—until the third and fourth quarter of 2008, when the housing market softened.

Today I see a positive trend that finds homeowners investing money into improvements and replacement projects with the intention of remaining in the home to enjoy the new upgrades. When the market picks up and the time comes for them to sell—these improvements will add value to the home and the owners will actually be able to use and enjoy the improvements in the meantime.

Sizing up the job

Curb appeal is not an option; it is a necessity. Realtors and buyers rarely, if ever, stop to view a poorly maintained home. I recommend looking at your home as a Realtor or a potential buyer would. Start upgrades on the exterior of the home—roof, gutters, fascia boards, front door, garage doors, driveway. Fix any existing or potential problems with the above items; they are essential to achieving curb appeal.

Kitchen remodels, bath remodels and deck additions typically give the highest return on investment (ROI). In regions where there is a high premium on outdoor activity and favor-

able weather, a deck is a wonderful feature. The addition of a deck increases the usable outdoor living space and can be relatively inexpensive to build. Surprisingly, the addition of a deck has an 82 to 100 percent ROI depending on the region where the home is located.

The following are my top upgrades that give the greatest ROI and enjoyment/use factor for the homeowner. But remember, improvements don't have to be major projects. My rule is: if you can see, sit or stand on it, it qualifies as a worthwhile project.

Upgrade and update

Painting is an inexpensive way to give a room a complete face-lift. However, lack of surface preparation is the most common mistake I encounter. The taping, caulking and sanding is just as important as selecting a great paint color. I can tell when a room was painted without the proper prep work. The lines and trim are wavy, not crisp, the finish is usually wrong and there is often shine-through of the previous paint color. A bad paint job is noticeable; if the walls require extensive prep work, hire a professional.

Updated appliances and fixtures bring a fresh, clean look to a home. They are energy-efficient and modernize kitchen, bath and bedroom areas instantly. In addition to new appliances, I love simple upgrades such as replacing worn-out barstools and installing new lighting to spice up a kitchen.

Updating a bath can be as simple as installing a low-flow toilet and showerhead, hanging a new shower curtain and replacing the vanity. Kitchens, baths and bedrooms are high-traffic areas that should look good, be comfortable and be user-friendly.

Windows are the eyes to a home. I recommend thermal pane, double-hung replacement



After



Before

TONYA M. WILLIAMS

Subtle changes can have a dramatic effect on the comfort, style and livability of every room in the house—and can contribute to resale value.

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Whether you're planning to sell your home or just spruce it up, Costco warehouses and Costco.com have furniture, home improvement partners, Special Order kiosks and other services to assist you.

for your
home

windows. In addition to increasing home value, these windows are easy to clean, come in a variety of styles and can make a tremendous difference in heating and electric bills. Energy efficiency is an important selling point. This is an upgrade that actually pays for itself.

FANCY PHOTOGRAPHY

Easy dress-ups

My favorite activity when choosing the décor for a space is to accessorize. I love colorful accent pillows, area rugs, window fashions and, believe it or not, wallpaper is back in style! Accessories can range from a flower vase to accent furniture to a chaise lounge.

When staging a space, I consider the amount of natural light as a guide for my color palette. For rooms with little natural light and dark flooring, I select lighter furniture and window coverings to open up the space. I want each furniture piece to accent the room without overpowering it. Furniture is an accessory, but a large one. I select the largest piece(s) first and build the look and feel of the room around those one or two core pieces. A sectional couch, a chair in a fun color, a beautiful set of floor lamps all arranged correctly can complete a room perfectly.

I also love creating an atmosphere for outdoor spaces. Remember, the purpose of

patio furniture is to enhance outdoor living spaces and make them fun and functional. A bistro-style table with seating for two is perfect for small spaces. Larger areas ideally should have patio furniture with seating for at least six. Summer is about bright colors and fun accessories, so make a splash with touches of bold color.

Overall I see very positive signs that the housing market is slowly improving. For-

tunately, homeowners don't have to wait to make upgrades and begin enjoying their spaces. Homes are still selling, and with the right improvements, furniture and staging, your home can be designed to sell, even in today's soft market. [E]

Tonya M. Williams (www.tonyaMwilliams.tv) is Home & Garden Television's real estate expert on *Designed to Sell Atlanta* edition.



Buyer's pick

Valerie Van Valkenburg
Furniture Buyer

MY FAMILY loves to entertain, and providing enough comfortable seating for our guests can be a challenge. The Addison Chair is a stylish and comfortable solution, with its smaller footprint and open design. This classic, low-profile, armless chair is upholstered with garnet red leather that has been hand-rubbed for maximum beauty. This chair has been handcrafted using the best construction methods and materials and should provide years of comfortable support in your home or office. Costco offers this striking chair at a savings of 30 to 40 percent compared to the prices charged by national competitors.



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