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IMPROVING YOUR CURB APPEAL

By Gale Steves

Gale Steves knows all about home trends. During the ten years she served as Editor-in-Chief of HOME Magazine, Gale provided a conduit of information from the 4 million readers to retailers and manufacturers and vice versa. Today, through her public and media appearances and writing, Steves continues to reach and serve both groups.

When was the last time that you really looked at the outside of your home closely? How does it look from the street as you drive by? Are the shrubs overgrown? Does the paint need retouching? Are there lights to welcome you on a gray day or at night? Does your garage door look like it was from another century? Is your front door hidden from sight? Is your driveway in poor repair? The answers to these questions can help you determine the curb appeal of your home.

Simply defined, curb appeal is the first impression the house makes from the outside. It is a term that real estate agents use frequently when helping homeowners who are about to sell their home. Because many house-hunters do make up their minds about a house before they even enter it, realtors do emphasize the importance of a home's exterior appearance.

However, if you have no plans to sell your house in the near future, then why bother with curb appeal? Do an inventory of exterior impressions anyway. Make the changes so you can have a sense of pride, and you can enjoy the appearance of your home as you drive into it. If you want to change the message your home is sending, improving its curb appeal is a great place to start, says the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI).

Brainstorming

This process starts with your slowly driving through your own neighborhood or one that you admire. Look carefully at the other homes. What catches your eye? Which of these homes stand out? Write down the details of what you like in a particular home. Even snap a picture of outstanding ideas with your camera phone.

Now, take a long, hard look at your own home. Look at it with clear eyes. Take a picture and compare it with the others. Make a list of things you would need to do to get your home to the level of the best homes. Set aside budget and time for improving your home's exterior. It's time to replace, repair or renew!

Major Focus: The Garage Door

The most noticeable architectural element of today's home is the garage door. Many houses are designed with garages that are visible from the street. If the garage holds two or more cars, then it is a dominant feature. What does yours look like?

Replacing an old, worn-out garage door with the latest carriage house-style door can totally change the look of your home. In fact, this can do almost more than any other improvement to dress-up the exterior – especially one with a front-facing garage. And replacing your garage door with a new upscale model may even boost the resale value of your home. A recent online survey revealed that a whopping 71% of homeowners who recently replaced their garage door believe it definitely increased the value of their home.

This is a project that needs professional assistance. The good news is the replacement job takes less than half a day to complete, and the installer hauls away the old garage door for you.

If you have not been in the market for a garage door, then you have a surprise coming to you. Today's garage doors are better insulated and stronger as well as safer. And there is an amazing range of styles, colors and new materials from which to choose – wood, steel, fiberglass, or even molded plastic. Take time to learn the advantages of each material. Even the window treatments on these doors have been redesigned to match your own window style.

Most architects or designers would advise that you begin your choice of garage doors by considering the style of your home. The new door should complement the architecture of the house, not confuse it. For example, a carriage house-style garage door might look out of place on a fairly contemporary house. Determine if you want your new door to look outstanding or simply blend in with the other exterior details. The color of your garage door should complement the overall house color as well as the window trim colors. Some models are available in a limited range while other manufacturers offer custom colors as well.

Weather plays an important part in determining which door is right for you. If your location is subject to hurricanes or violent storms, then wind resistance and impact resistance are essential to consider. And in the northern as well as southern climates, an insulated garage door will add to the energy efficiency of your home as a bonus.

Other Smart Upgrades

Once you have resolved the garage door update, then it is time to consider some other upgrades to help make your home all it can be:

Renew the color of your home by painting or power-washing your house's siding. If your home blends in with the neighbors, change the color slightly to make it more outstanding. If the colors are predetermined, then think about adding some decorative molding so you can introduce another complementary color. Sometimes re-painting the trim of the windows or shutters with a contrasting color will add to the visual appeal.

Revise your exterior night appearance by changing those out-of-date light fixtures or add lights if you do not have them. Light up your doorways and walkways as well. The idea is to have more lights at a lower wattage than a single very bright light. If your front yard seems gloomy, then consider some landscape lights as well. This will transform the look of your property at night without making it look like Hollywood. This can be done simply with solar-powered lights so you do not have to run wires in the yard.

Rethink your landscape. If your shrubs and trees have become overgrown over time, then prune or remove them. Do not let them hide your house or make it appear dark. Rake up dead leaves, pull those weeds and spread mulch in the plant beds. How you maintain your front garden is one of the key aspects of curb appeal. To add instant color, plant some annual flowers that work with the color scheme of your home. Ask at the garden center about shade- or sun-loving varieties, if you are unsure. Place some in the ground and others in containers on your steps or by your front door if space permits. Remember to water them so they always look fresh and inviting.

Resurface your old driveway, whether it is made of gravel, tarred or cement, especially if it needs repair. There are many choices of patterned concrete or even woven stone that can improve the appearance of your entrance. Then think about the walkway or path going to the house at the same time. They should present a welcoming effect.

Redecorate your house's street exposure with shutters on the windows or a fresh coat of paint on the front door. Polish or replace the door's hardware. Even think about adding attractive house numbers or a striking new mailbox. Do not forget to clean those windows as well as the garage windows so they are sparkling. These are smaller changes but they can make your home look inviting and eye-catching.

The idea of getting the most out of the curb appeal of your home begins with refreshing the look of your home and front garden. Most of these updating ideas are simple yet subtle alterations that have minimum cost and maximum impact.

For the latest information, be sure to keep checking GarageWowNow.com!