



THREE

What Buyers and Sellers Are Really Thinking

Before you begin to implement your list, it's important to understand a bit about the mindset of today's buyers and sellers. Most people buy homes based on how they feel about a home, not how it's decorated. Their feelings come from a place inside them that holds all their memories and defines what *home* means to them. Over the years, I've talked to hundreds of people who told me they just *knew* when they pulled up to the house or walked in the front door that a certain house was meant for them.

Buying a home is an emotional response. *It's about psychology, not decorating.* How else can you explain that it can take months to pick out a sofa, but only a couple short visits to buy a house? Most folks spend more time choosing their furniture than the living room they're going to put it in.

A buyer purchases a house because it *feels* right, not because they have examined every square inch and found it perfect. However, what is going on in the sellers' psyche is quite different. Sellers evaluate their homes through the rose-colored glasses of nostalgia.

This Sold House

The seller's inner dialogue goes like this:

"I know no one else in the neighborhood has gotten as much as we are asking for our home, but it really is the best house in town. All it needs is a little work and some paint.

"Just look at those marks on the inside of the kitchen archway where we measured the kids' height every year; it seems like only yesterday. I probably should paint, but the new owners most likely wouldn't like my paint colors anyway.

"After all, that's part of the fun of buying a new house—coming in and making it your own. I'll accept a little lower price so they can fix things up for themselves and choose their own paint colors.

"I know that some of the branches of that big old tree in the backyard are resting on the roof and the tree should probably be cut down, but I remember the kids playing on their tire swing and jumping into leaf piles in the fall.

"This has been a wonderful home, I'm sure people will fall in love with it, just the way we did!"

The seller's view is based on emotion, sweet memories, and rationalization. They believe they are making a rational judgment about their home when they are really expressing their feelings. Sellers are biased and believe their home is worth as much to buyers as it is worth to them.

The seller is selling a home.

The buyer is buying a property.

It is how *the buyer feels* about the house that counts.

The potential buyer's inner dialogue sounds more like this:

“This house is cute, but it looks like it’s been neglected. The color is fine, but the Internet photos didn’t show that the paint is peeling. And all those marks on the side of the kitchen archway, I can’t believe they didn’t bother to paint over them.

“I just don’t feel comfortable buying a house that looks as if it hasn’t been maintained. I’ll keep looking until I find one that feels right. I’ll know it when I find the right house for me. And that big old tree in the backyard—some of the branches rest right on the roof! I wouldn’t be surprised if the roof needs replacing. I bet, in the fall, all they do is rake leaves.

“If they don’t care enough to fix the things people can see, I wonder what else is wrong. Besides, they’re asking more for this property than other homes in this neighborhood. There are lots more houses for sale, I may as well look at the others instead.”

Buyers look for visual cues. Whether a seller admits it or not, condition, care, and cleanliness (or the lack thereof) are the subtle visual cues that register with buyers. **Prospective buyers make assumptions about your house based on *what they see* and *how they feel* about what they see.**

It’s unlikely you’ll have the opportunity to explain why you haven’t taken down that old tree or why you haven’t painted. Instead, buyers assume the house has not been maintained—and move on to another property.

The Problem With Perfection

In the same way that obvious problems are trouble, so is perfection. Some of the most difficult houses to sell look like a page out of *Better*