



# Judging a book by its cover

First impressions do last when it comes to selling real estate. And a few minor value-adding changes can give your home the eye-catching facelift it needs to sell for the price you want, writes **Amanda Horswill**

**T**HE ad for the property sounds fantastic: four bedrooms, two bathrooms, recently renovated inside, with a large back yard and a huge deck. Sounds like the perfect new home... until you drive past the house and see the boring facade sporting two huge garage doors; the unwelcoming, peeling front door that you can only just make out; the scraggly bushes bordering the front path; and the letterbox on a dangerous lean. Will you go in?

Probably not, says Real Estate Institute of Queensland managing director Dan Molloy.

"The importance of first impressions when selling a home cannot be overstated," Molloy says.

"Although it is indelible there are many other factors that attract buyers to an area, there's no doubt about the strong correlation between street appeal and real estate sales."

If a house were a book, its front yard would be the cover. Whether people choose to enjoy the story within is the difference between an effective facade and one that leaves a reader cold. Achieving a fantastic front facade is all about achieving street cred and making the front of a house as user-friendly as possible for both visitors and inhabitants; while also making it look appealing and homely from the street.

The changes do not have to be expensive.

"Making low-cost improvements and repairs inside and outside your home can have a dramatic impact not only on the property's presentation but also on the prospective buyers," Molloy says.

"Many potential buyers drive past a home before they inspect it so it's important sellers keep the lawn mown and raked, and make sure the driveway and paths are swept, including the footpath outside your home."

"The garden is also more often than not the first aspect of a home that potential buyers see and can be the difference between a quick sale and having real trouble finding a buyer."

"Sellers need to consider what they're

trying to achieve with their garden. Some of the most attractive and functional gardens are designed to complement the home; the height and type of trees and shrubs have been thought out and blend well with their surrounds and add to the general aesthetic appeal of the property.

"At the very least, having a well-tended, well thought-out garden that suits our climate and environment may ensure a quicker sale of the property."

"At best it could add some thousands of dollars to the resale price of a home."

Ron Tanton, from Archicentre, the building advisory service of the Australian Institute of Architects, says sensible changes to the front of a home can help shore up value.

"If you are giving a property a 'street-cred' facelift, make sure you use appropriate materials that match the original materials," Tanton says.

"Do not devalue the property by doing cheap looking 'trick ups' that quite clearly do not reflect the heritage or original building style. It will devalue your property when it comes time to sell."

"If you are in a neighborhood of period homes, a coat of paint in heritage colours can be the quickest and easiest way to boost the value of your home."

**'Making low-cost improvements and repairs inside and outside your home can have a dramatic impact not only on the property's presentation but also on the prospective buyers'**

"And make sure you spend time in picking out the details with different colours to give your home that quality craftsman look."

"Complement your paint job with a makeover in the garden that reflects your heritage look by providing a focal point through plants or, if you have space, a simple bird bath."

"By downplaying the garage and making it look like another room on your home, it'll make your house seem bigger from the street when it really isn't."

"Incorporate decks and screened porches into your designs or upgrade



them. If you have the space, a decent front porch – including a spot to sit – immediately provides the view from the street with an indication of a substantial home.

"It also can be designed with semi-privacy to give you and your family a pleasant spot for community interaction with the neighbourhood."

"That connection to the neighbourhood is the key to making a house feel like a home, says architect Shaun Lockyer. He's renovated his own home (pictured on the cover) with that principle in mind. The existing post-war style home was expanded with a large rectangle structure to one side. The front of this structure is glass, the bottom section frosted, and Lockyer says that's a deliberate move as it allows people outside to see a little bit of what life is like inside. It allows people inside to feel connected to the street.

"Light is a big part of that. When you drive down the typical suburban street, a significant bulk of the houses might have a porch light on and that's about it," Lockyer says. "But with our turn, even when there is no outside light turned on, the house is alive and animated and light projects out of that box and on to the street. The house is a lively part of the street."

And it's the perceived "life" of the house that visitors respond to and what makes it feel so homely. Although privacy is maintained by frosting the glass, Lockyer says he has no concerns about security as a result of being so open to the street.

**CREATE SPACE:**  
 A facelift by Baden Design and Drafting gives a Sunshine Coast home (main image) a makeover, while Shaun Lockyer Architects have created the impression of a big structure with a post-war home (right).

"I think there needs to be a balance," he says. "You can't make your house a fortress and also be part of the street but it's also a private domain so you have to be able to secure it."

"So it's designed to be security conscious. You can't climb up it."

However, there is a trend taking hold where people renovating their homes whack up a huge, rendered front wall in the name of security.

"Yeah, people think they are hiding behind their wall and they think it's secure and it is until someone jumps over it. Then you have zero security," says Sunshine Coast building designer Eddie Baden, from Baden Design and Drafting.

"It's false."  
 The proliferation of walls also means that lots of places look similar. But Baden says there are ways to differentiate homes, such as building a gatehouse, which is becoming more popular. A gatehouse is a roofed structure with a gate or door that mimics the style and roofline of the house, and creates a grand entrance. However, Baden prefers to use soft landscaping to create impact up to the front door.

"Front doors and entry ways create the welcome for the person coming to the house and the doors they have available these days are just brilliant," he says.

"If the entry way is made a feature then people think 'I am welcome here' but if it's not inviting or people don't know how to find it, then people get confused and lost."

"They don't feel welcome."

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**Architect Dion Seminara offers this advice when giving a home a facelift:**

1. Consideration starts from the street – your footpath counts. Established trees on the footpath (council permitting) will enhance and frame your home.
2. A fence can often distinguish one home from another. Ensure you construct a fence to suit your home and at the appropriate height to ensure your house remains the dominant feature, not the fence.
3. Establish appropriate landscaping in and around this fence.
4. Add a gatehouse to emphasise pedestrian entry.
5. Add gates across a driveway to reduce the impact of an expansive area of concrete in front of your garage. Play down the garage.
6. If you have a good aspect out the front of your house, use your front yard and integrate internal areas out into the external spaces creating great indoor outdoor flow.
7. Use colour to distinguish your home from others.
8. If you have poor orientation, use screen and sunshades to give windows protection and interest.
9. Use light and shade to provide balance and interest. If you have a veranda, ensure it opens out to the street and avoid solid walls facing the street.
10. Use balance and proportion and think before you act. Use an architect if you are not artistically inclined as great street appeal will add thousands to your property's value.

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