

OWNERS' GUIDES: COUNTDOWN TO SELLING A PROPERTY

Spend some time preparing your house before launching it on the market, but don't go overboard, as buyers will see through the old tricks, says **CHERYL MARKOSKY**

AS we approach the prime property-selling season for many country homeowners, it might be tempting to rely on the much-touted methods of baking bread, burning scented candles and playing music to make your home appear attractive. However, prospective buyers can see through these ideas and regard them as cheap gimmicks that could be masking deeper problems.

The sight of a seller roasting coffee beans or making toast in an effort to look homely fools no one, says property search agent Robert Bailey from Robert Bailey Property. 'Immediately, I think it's a trap inducing you to buy something flawed. I always turn down the music to hear if there's any road noise and switch off lights and draw curtains to determine the amount of natural light.'

As dull as it might sound, Mr Bailey believes your energy is better directed towards simple tasks: scrubbing down the stone steps, taking up shabby old rugs and tidying the garden.

Concentrating on the house in stages makes sense, starting with the entrance. Make sure the driveway is properly gravelled and hedges are tidy. Large pots of lavender and topiary on the doorstep can be particularly striking. The next stage is the main hallway, and if the buyer isn't captivated by now, you're going to be fighting a losing battle, points out **Simon Buhl Davis**, head of interiors at [redacted].

Other practical tips include open racks of shelving with large plastic buckets for children's toys and plastic packing cases

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Connect your home with a story. It needn't be earth-shattering, but it helps people connect emotionally and think of it as more than just bricks and mortar
- **Park cars somewhere other than in the driveway to give an impression of space**
- A laptop on the kitchen table with a slideshow of pictures of the garden in summer could be a good idea, especially on an inclement day
- **Get a dog to make your property feel more like a country house. Or, at least, pretend by getting a lead and basket**



Grand entrance: Beech House has been refurbished, and is back on the market with [redacted] at £3.5m

in the basement to house papers and files. 'Good storage means people can see the house being used to its maximum potential,' explains **Mr Buhl Davis**.

Identify the one feature that makes your property special. It could be a spectacular view, the farmhouse kitchen or a perfectly proportioned reception room. Whatever it is, capitalise on it, making it as perfect as possible. Often, purchasers fall in love with one constituent of a house, and, if not blind, love is very forgiving. Any drawbacks are likely to be overlooked, or viewed with fond affection.

'Scrub kitchens and bathrooms to the point of exhaustion and get all the carpets cleaned,' advises Charlie Comber, a partner at Cotswold estate agency Hayman-Joyce in Broadway. 'If you have children, make yourself unpopular by mucking out, cleaning

and painting their rooms. If necessary, use bribery to ensure their rooms remain in a viewable state until contracts are safely exchanged.'

Another crafty trick is to give your house a name. 'I had a potential buyer once who loved the house and street, but wouldn't buy because the digits of the house number added up to nine. I suggested the vendor drop the number and give it a name,' recalls Jason Tebb, director of Chesterton.

Mr Tebb also comes up with the novel suggestion of making your home messier. 'I've seen some properties that've had all the character stripped out, because vendors watch too many house-doctor TV programmes. Make the house feel friendly by putting children's wellies in the hallway and toys out in the playroom to show this is a useable family home and not a show house.'