



Spruce up your home to make that elusive sale

In a tough selling climate, peeling paint and wonky shelves send the wrong message to any wannabe buyers, says **Sophie Morris**

The housing market has no hope of recovering until people start to put out their "For Sale" signs again. Despite some early signs that house prices are rising, many sellers are afraid they won't get a good price for their property, as it's a buyers' market out there. In fact, while buyers do hold the advantage, competition among sellers is not huge - Hometrack reports that over the past three months, the number of buyers has grown by 32 per cent, while the number of new homes available has risen by less than 10 per cent.

If you do want to sell, securing viewings is your first battle. To succeed here, it can be worth speculating a little on home improvements, and following expert advice rather than throwing thousands at a new kitchen. House doctors, stagers or stylers are not the preserve of those selling multi-million pound properties in Chelsea.

There are professionals who will visit your home for less than £100 and help you make your property the most attractive sale prospective in the area.

"I don't believe you need to do a full interior design job, and I would advise against spending a large amount on anything, such as replacing an entire kitchen or putting in a large conservatory," says Lynn Pick of Home Stylers Ltd, based in the Midlands.

Pick, who has worked with Channel Five's House Doctor Ann Maurice, says the initial work is about cleaning, decluttering and "neutralising" the house, by which she means removing anything personal, such as photographs. She advises clients to spend between one and two per cent of the value of their property, some of which you could carry forward to your next home - new furniture, for example.

John Lewis offers free consultations with furnishing advisers at all stores

and home visits for £200, redeemable against any purchases.

Estate agents have an interior services department, which liaises with clients having trouble selling, but its director, Simon Buhl Davis, says any outlay is always determined on a case-by-case basis. "You do have to put some money in to get some money out. Spending won't add value, but it will help you sell."

He agrees with Pick that a reshuffle and a few hundred pounds might

"From the moment someone walks up the street they are taking notes"

be all that is required, and says first