

# How to get the best price for your house this spring

By [Rachel Grunwell](#)

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Appearance matters when selling your home. This is according to Paul McKenzie, marketing manager for [Realestate.co.nz](#), which lists most of the houses for sale nationwide.

He says getting your house ready for sale should start with a big clean up and clear out. Don't even think about calling an agent before you've got rid of your junk and de-cluttered.

And if you think you can skip scrubbing inside cupboards, think again – some people peer into every space to judge if a home is well kept. Get rid of mould and musty smells, wash windows, clean the inside the fridge and tidy that overflowing wardrobe.

"Getting it perfect is key," says Paul, "because people want to be able to envisage your home as theirs."

Aim to have your house as immaculate as a hotel with the emphasis on luxury and comfort. Become a neat freak.

He advises "de-personalising" your house by storing away family photos, but a top-selling agent for Barfoot and Thompson, Ketiesha Elliott, adds that you should pull back from making your house too sterile. "It's worth keeping a few personal touches because people like buying a home that has heart and soul," says Elliott.

The good thing about these first steps is they cost nothing.

Where you should spend money is on fixing things, such as leaky taps, creaky doors or drawers that won't open. Buyers note everything that could cost them; little glitches are viewed as flaws.

Paul says space matters too and there are tricks to opening up rooms. One tip is to give away, store, or sell some furniture that hogs space and makes the place "cluttered". Keep only the most essential pieces of furniture in any room.

An extra step is to paint the walls a light colour, and add light-coloured curtains to create a sense of more space.

Go the extra mile and get your timber floors re-polished – they will look stunning and you'll get your money back come sale time.

Come open home day, display flowers and candles, and exchange your workaday towels in the bathrooms for fluffy new ones. Ketiesha advises to heat your home in winter, and leave it cool in summer. Turn on lights in hallways and shady rooms. Take one last spin around the house to gather up family clutter, then leave the agent to show off the house so buyers have a free reign to look around.

If you have the cash, Paul says consider "dressing" your lounge, dining room and the master bedroom in particular. It may cost about \$2500 to stage a three-bedroom home with artwork and furniture, but you are likely to recoup the costs when you sell because your home will be more appealing.

Street appeal will also get buyers through the door, and when they reach the back yard they want to see that the section is low-maintenance.



These tips will come in handy when it comes time to selling your house. Photo / Thinkstock

Paul encourages sellers to clean the outside of the house, mow lawns, trim trees, weed and even plant flowers to make the place pretty. Waterblast paths, decks and outdoor furniture. Light is a big "want" on buyers' lists, so if there's a hedge or tree shading a window, cut it back.

Next, think about energy efficient features such as insulation. It's one of the top things house-hunters look for, according to a survey undertaken by Realestate.co.nz in association with the Green Building Council for the Sustainable Housing Summit.

According to Albrecht Stoecklein, technical manager at Right House Ltd (which offers energy efficiency products), it costs about \$3000 to insulate a three-bedroom home. This isn't a huge investment when Stoecklein says overseas studies reckon houses can sell for up to 6 per cent more if they're energy efficient.

"Years ago buyers were all about the Italian bench-tops, but now they look closely at energy efficiency," he says.

When you think you've done all you can to get your place ready for market, Paul suggests getting a mate to walk around and spot things you might have missed. After that, it's a matter of keeping it clean and tidy throughout the marketing campaign.

### Choosing an agent

Paul advises finding a good agent by looking at their online profile and homes they are selling on Realestate.co.nz.

Philip Macalister, who publishes NZ Property Investor Magazine and runs [Landlords.co.nz](http://Landlords.co.nz), recommends finding an experienced agent who is a "best seller".

"If they're good, they'll tell you," he says, adding that good agents don't tend to negotiate on their rates or marketing packages, but tend to have options for the latter.

Don't worry about dodgy agents too much, he says, as the industry is now well policed. However, people can check that an agent is licensed and whether they have had claims brought against them on the Real Estate Agents' Authority [website](http://website).

Macalister cautions sellers against being too lean with their advertising budget, saying "you have to market it", especially if your property is in a high value bracket for which there might not be a big pool of buyers. Clever marketing can make the difference between getting a small audience, or filling an auction room with bidders.

Ketiesha also believes good marketing matters, and great photography is part of that. Most agents will have a professional house photographer they recommend and the results will be well worth the extra cost.

So should you sell by auction, negotiation or fixed price? Macalister says a skilled agent can advise on the best method of sale for your type of home and your area. Where demand is high, auctions can work well in driving up the price. More unusual houses, or those in less desirable areas, sell better through negotiation.

Ultimately, Macalister advises shopping around for an agent and getting them to make a pitch on what they think your house is worth and how they would market and sell it. Seek recommendations from other homeowners in your area, and ask local real estate offices who their most successful agents are. Agents with plenty of experience in your patch will have a database of potential buyers, know what they want, and know how to market your place to them.

### Lick of paint earns big bucks

Penny and Scott Bower recently paid \$918,000 for a two-bedroom 1940s brick bungalow in Mt Eden. That's \$200,000 above its CV, and they're thrilled.

The original home was cleaned and de-cluttered, so bidders could visualise living there, and there was fierce competition at the auction.

The Bowers say they are rapt to have secured the well-loved and well-looked-after home in a

spectacular spot.

Ray White agent Robyn Hoonhout says two parties asked post-auction if the Bowers would on-sell it, such was their "devastation" at "letting it go" at auction.

"But we said we'll never leave," says Penny, "only in a pine box!"

The home is in their dream location: a sun-drenched position in the heart of the double grammar zone, walking distance to Mt Eden Village (they have views of the mountain too) and it's in a quiet cul-de-sac that's "a real community" for their children Oscar, 5, and Alexi, 2, to grow up in.

The couple have already renovated by painting inside, lifting worn flowery carpets, polishing wooden floors, installing a heat pump and making a third bedroom out of part of the old laundry and some cupboard space, so the kids have a room each. They'll renovate the large storage area downstairs in the future.

Penny says after they finished the \$80,000 renovation, friends who initially "looked horrified, bless them" at the house when they first bought it, have since said "wow!"

The couple say they could afford to buy in Mt Eden after selling their 1920s ex-state house in Orakei.

Initially they couldn't sell their old house because buyers were put off by the work that it needed, says Penny. So they sought advice from a real estate agent and a professional building inspector on what to do and then "listened to every instruction" about renovating it properly. They painted, stripped door handles back by hand, insulated and landscaped.

The top class renovation cost about \$100,000 but resulted in the house selling for \$780,000, \$230,000 above CV.

Penny says their Barfoot & Thompson agent, Bruce Christian, was great during the process, advising them to not take pre-auction offers that were \$100,000 less than the eventual sale price.

"People think real estate agents do not earn their money, but this is a case in point where one totally did," she says.

Penny says renovating the Orakei house was good for their confidence as homeowners, because it meant "we were not afraid to renovate" the Mt Eden pad they went on to buy.

## Market heats up

New Zealand is supposed to be in a recession but the real estate market is running hot in some spots, particularly Auckland and Christchurch.

It's a sellers' market due to factors such as lack of supply and relatively little building going on to meet demand. This has created a build-up in buyer numbers. Meanwhile, low interest rates are enticing and banks are competing for clients.

This is according to [QV.co.nz](http://QV.co.nz) research director Jonno Ingerson, who forecasts home values will continue to grow, particularly in Auckland.

"What would cause them to drop is a massive over-supply and it's unlikely that the balance is going to swing around anytime soon," he says.

Ingerson says family homes in good school zones are in demand, first-home buyers are hunting and investors are also wanting to get back into the market. Other factors include people leaving Christchurch for Auckland after the earthquakes, and there's a limited stock in Christchurch due to earthquake-damaged homes.

However, Ingerson says Kiwis remain fairly cautious about taking on too much debt: they're watching Europe and there's a general feeling we're not out of the woods yet with the recession.

According to QV data on sales that occurred in the three months to the end of June, Auckland City suburbs are selling on average 10 per cent above CV, while on the North Shore, Waitakere and Manukau the average is about 8 per cent above CV. The top performer was North Shore's Stanley Point, selling on average 18.4 per cent above CV.

Ingerson says nationwide property values had risen in June. Values are up 1.8 per cent over the past three months, 4.2 per cent over the past year and are now only 1.3 per cent below the previous market peak of late 2007.

Across the wider Auckland region, values are now 4.8 per cent higher than the 2007 market peak, and in the old Auckland City Council area values are 7.6 per cent higher than the peak.

In Christchurch, values now sit 1.5 per cent above the previous market peak.

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