

Real Estate

YOUR HOME | YOUR LIFE



Avoid 'For Sale By Owner'



SELLING YOUR OWN HOME COMES WITH RISKS

Whether you are buying or selling a property, 'For Sale By Owner' is a hazard you should try hard to avoid.

The concept sounds simple enough. Sellers can avoid paying the extra percentages to Realtor fees while buyers can speed through the purchasing process without having to sign papers all day at the bank.

Not so fast, say most industry experts.

PAPERWORK HEADACHES

The documentation required to execute a for-sale-by-owner transaction is reason enough to avoid falling into the trap. Complex contracts, legal papers and disclosures complement the buying-selling process and are best left to experienced professionals.

Real estate agents can steer you toward the safest, most current methods for selling or buying a home in your region. They can also provide a checklist of the required steps to make a transaction official, including purchasing title insurance and having the deed recorded properly at the courthouse.

Missing any of these steps can lead to big

problems down the line.

MARKET KNOWLEDGE

Real estate professionals have it, but common homeowners do not. Extensive market knowledge is something that takes years of industry experience and comprehensive research to accrue.

Agents are skilled in analyzing all of the factors that contribute to properly pricing a home. Aspects like proximity to good schools, nearby flood zones and neighborhood reputation can be the difference between a good home and a great one.

Real estate agents are experts in gathering and communicating this information. It is in your best interest to let them help

you avoid potential pitfalls that could leave you regretting your decision for years to come.

RISK MITIGATION

Real estate agents have seen it all, from the sneaky homeowners who try to hide potentially dangerous aspects of their home to the aggressive buyer who makes an offer at far less than market value.

Realtors are able to spot such behaviors and alert buyers/sellers to the red flags.

Without professional help, you may encounter a challenge that requires industry pedigree and past experience to overcome, and by the time you conduct the necessary research, it could be too late.

To Build or Not to Build?

Weighing your options between new home construction or buying and remodeling an existing home? Then you know the decision is a complicated one.

There are many factors to consider while you mull the option of having a brand new home that will require no immediate maintenance once completed versus buying a home that is probably in need of at least some cosmetic updates to fit your style. Also consider the following:

CONSTRUCTION PROS

Location, location, location. If you are planning to build your dream home, then you have the luxury of deciding where to put down your roots.

There are numerous land options available, ranging from smaller in-town lots within family-friendly neighborhoods to multi-acre country settings surrounded by fields, forests or pasture.

You also have the freedom from the jump to customize every aspect of your home to fit your needs.

CONSTRUCTION CONS

Expense can rack up quickly when you're building a new home on your own. Your cell phone contact list will soon include a contractor, subcontractors, architect, designers, city officials and numerous other external partners who will all play a role in turning your vision into a tangible reality – and who will all require payment for their ser-

vices.

Time is another drawback of new construction, as building a new home can take many months to plan, execute and refine.

To avoid these issues, one good option can be purchasing a pre-built home from a local homebuilder — if you can find the right neighborhood and the right price.

EXISTING HOME PROS

Existing homes, conversely, are move-in ready and can make for a more seamless living transition. This option also allows for more wiggle room in terms of buyer negotiations.

If you play your cards right, you can walk away with an existing house for a price that will keep you from draining your savings.

EXISTING HOME CONS

You are obviously at the mercy of former owners when settling on an existing home.

And although outdated decorations and layout might be the first things you want to address, you could also be looking at underlying structural issues that previous owners may keep from you or not be knowledgeable of themselves.



Save for Your Down Payment

Overwhelmed at the thought of scrounging together 20 percent for a down payment on your dream home? Don't be.

Saving for a down payment is serious business, but is not an insurmountable task. It takes dedication and discipline, and can be achieved with the help of the following tips.

CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS

A down payment is traditionally 20 percent

of the final price of the home, but buyers can actually pay as little as five percent or less in some cases.

Most lenders will allow buyers to pay a smaller down payment, but it comes at the cost of extra non-principle payment on their monthly mortgage payments.

Private mortgage insurance is what banks use to protect themselves from buyer default, and it will typically add a chunk to your monthly payments until 20 percent of the home is paid down.

Your lender can educate you on the different rates and options that are available when it comes to private mortgage insurance.

ASK FOR HELP

Some lenders participate in down payment assistance programs that can help buyers expedite the process of moving into their dream

home.

Acceptance into programs can be dependent upon your past payment history and credit reports. Qualification requirements vary by lender and state, so be sure to explore your options. You never know unless you ask.

INVEST YOUR MONEY

Experts urge savers to keep their down payment stockpile separate from their other accounts. This helps refrain them from dipping into the house savings for unexpected expenditures that can crop up at any time.

Savers are also urged to invest their home savings into low-risk options like money

market accounts or certificates of deposit.

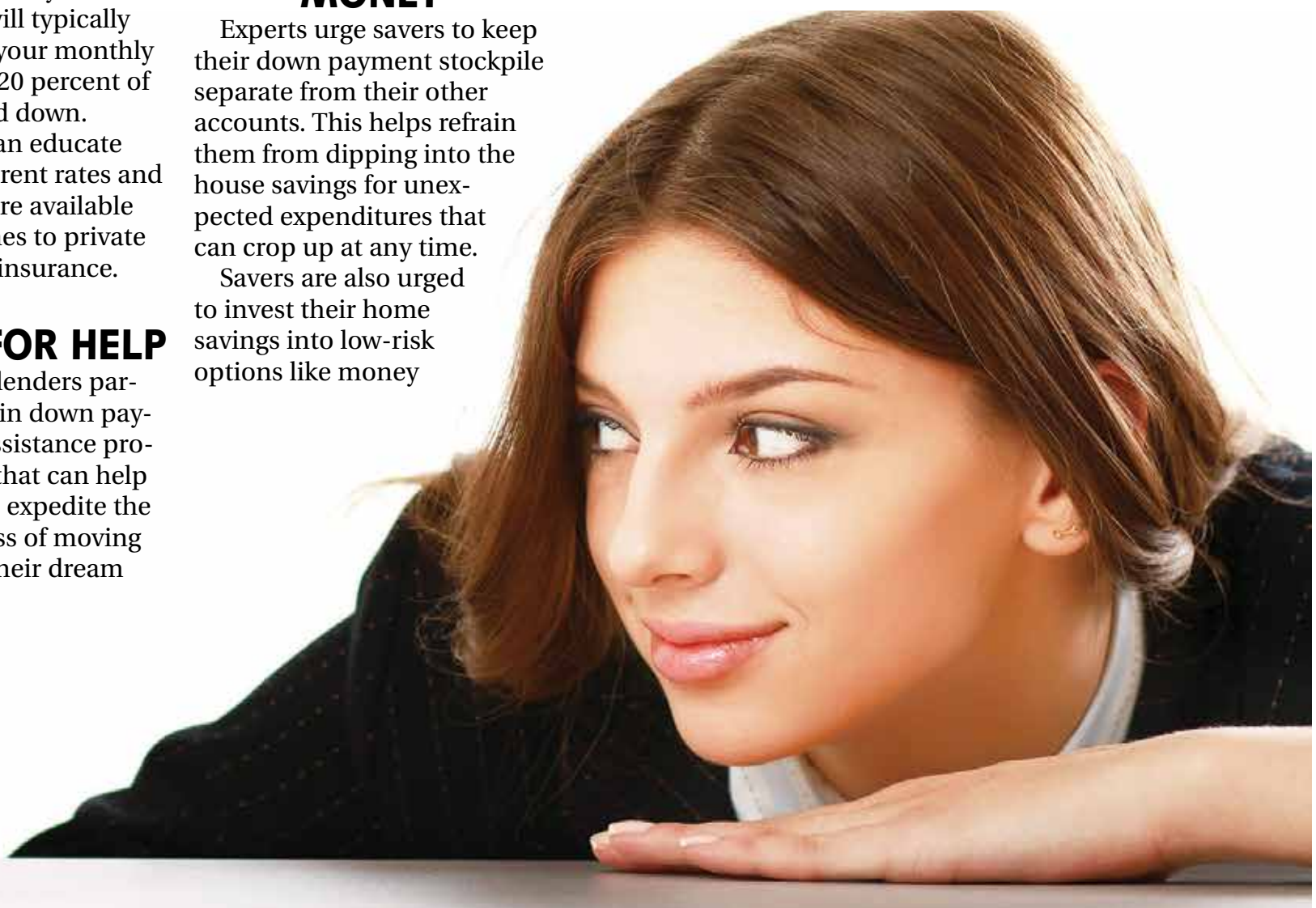
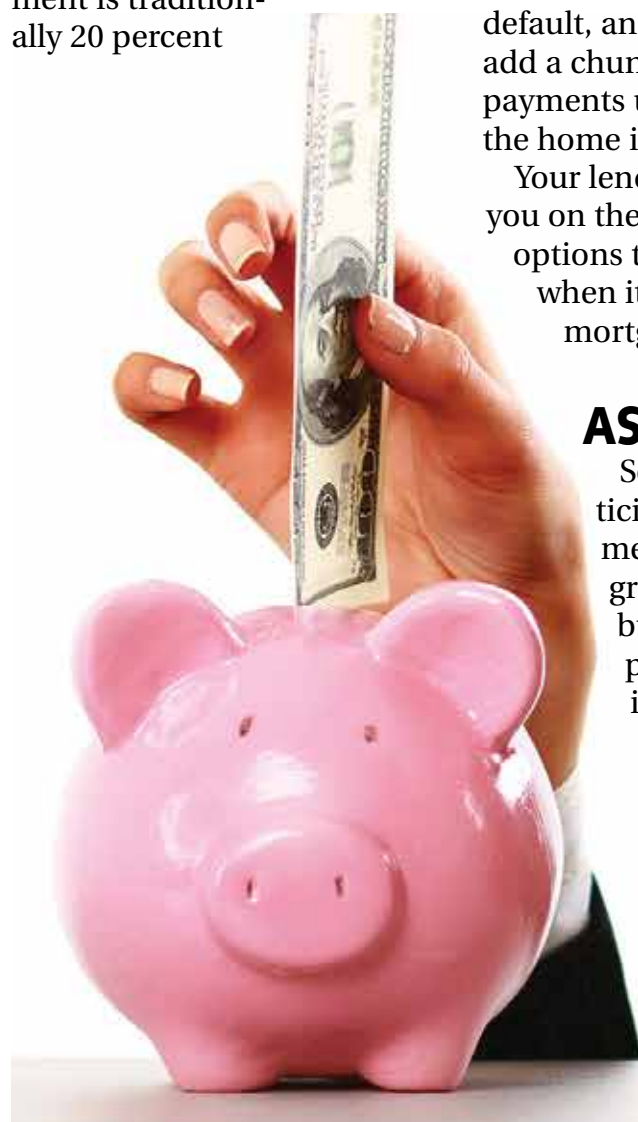
TIGHTEN UP

You may be surprised by how much you are spending on fast food, movies, and rounds of golf.

Create a spreadsheet and document your spending over

the course of a couple of months, and find out exactly where your money is going. The results may change your spending habits and might convince you to cut out or reduce some of your monthly bills.

Every penny counts when you're saving for your new home's down payment.



This Year's Kitchen Trends

Kitchen trends can be tricky to pinpoint from year to year, especially considering the subjective nature of design in general.

But there are certain aspects of kitchen layout, colors and decorating ideas that are presently trending across the board. The key to finding the right design for your own personal kitchen is identifying a color scheme and sticking with it.

All of the peripheral pieces, appliances and flooring can be based upon the color strategy you decide to implement.

SUBTLE COLORS

The buzz coming out of this year's annual High Point Market – the global authority on furniture and design trends – was centered upon subtle grays, blacks and whites accented by splashes of bright fluorescents.

The combination works well for kitchens of all shapes, sizes and floor layouts. Color lovers shouldn't be afraid to paint one or two walls in a vibrant hue but should ultimately let accessories, fresh flowers and wall decorations do most of the heavy lifting when it comes to color.

GO COMMERCIAL

As cooking shows and chef competitions have infiltrated popular culture, the appeal of industrial-type kitchens has increased.



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Large commercial ranges can serve as a stainless steel centerpiece from which to build around. The shiny gleam of stainless works well with bright oranges, greens or blues, and also complements muted granite countertops.

Duo sinks – one in the traditional counter-space and one

inset in the island – offer kitchen masters the versatility they need.

DESTINATION KITCHENS

If you have been inspired by a recent trip to Italy, Ireland or anywhere else

abroad, you have probably come home with some ideas on how to integrate a little foreign flair into your kitchen design. Go for it!

A Tuscan-inspired kitchen can be recreated with muted yellows, rich wood cabinets and expansive wine racks. Nature enthusiasts can opt for

a lodge-like design complete with dark wood walls and floors, ultra-simple floor plans and rustic light fixtures.

Destination kitchens afford us a daily escape into our past travels and memories. For that reason, this is a trend that isn't going anywhere any time soon.

Find the Right Agent

So you're anxious to sell your home and you choose the first real estate agent you find in the yellow pages.

Big mistake. Just like any of life's most important decisions, selecting the right agent to market your home and negotiate final pricing should not be done without thought.

With the advancement of technology and social media sites, it is easier now more than ever to find online reviews, complaints and professional backgrounds of real estate agents in your area.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Just like a doctor or babysitter, you should do your homework on potential agents before hiring them to handle the monumental process of selling or buying a home.

Ask for references on recent sales to find out how past customers feel about the agent's professional capabilities, ethics and service performance. Write down any feedback that comes through the reference checks.

If you uncover negative attributes like unprofessional, pushy or stubborn, feel free to continue your search. There are plenty of other fish in the real estate sea.

HONESTY COUNTS

Sure, we all would love to hear our real estate agent give us a high value for our homes. But we

also want honest assessments that will help set us up for a quick, painless and profitable sale.

Having a home improperly priced can mean a major delay in the selling process. Experts agree that if your home is on the market for more than seven months, you probably have a pricing issue.

Continually lowering your home's price is not only frustrating but it might give buyers the inclination that you can be talked into a considerably lower price than what your home is worth. Find the right agent to price your home right the first time.

BE WILLING TO PAY

Unless the difference is extraordinarily vast, choosing a real estate agent based on commission prices is a strategy that can backfire.

Like any other professional service, you generally get what you pay for. If an agent charges a basement-level rate for his or her time, what does that say about the effort you will receive?

You want a confident, full-service agent who will go to bat for you at the bargaining table. Choose wisely to find the support and advice you need.



Strategic Remodeling

Think you're ready to sell? Before entering the market, grab a notebook and take a room-by-room walk through of your home.

Imagine yourself as a prospective buyer and write down any potentially off-putting characteristics as you see them.

Once you have your list, conduct some research on how much money, time and effort it would take to resolve these issues. Then consider the following strategic remodeling projects that will help you get more cash out of your home when you do decide to take the plunge into the market.

CURBSIDE APPEAL

This is probably the easiest, most cost-effective place to start. And since this is the first thing buyers will see when they pull up to your home, it is also an ideal area to focus on.

Clean up any clutter, trash cans and kids toys that usually reside within eye shot of passing vehicles.

Once they are tucked away into a shed or garage, add a nice variety of vibrant flowers and colorful mulch to capture and retain the attention of prospective buyers.

THE KITCHEN

This is where the money is. According to Realtor.com, home owners who invest into a kitchen remodel can expect to earn a nearly 90-percent return on investment.

And the remodel doesn't have to be a floor-to-ceiling overhaul. You are probably still trying to save for your next home's down payment, after all.

Strategic decisions like replacing aged light fixtures, updating the backsplash with mosaic tiles or adding stainless steel appliances can wow prospective buyers and convince them that your kitchen should be their kitchen.

THE BATHROOM

Bathroom updates also net positive returns, but they can add up quickly if you are considering updating the toilet, shower, fixtures, vanity and flooring.

Choose one or two projects and make them shine. Replace your show-

er unit with large, modern tiles and add some neutral, fresh paint to the walls to make the bathroom seem large and inviting.

Simple improvements can also include re-glazing your tub or updating the lighting fixtures. A little can go a long way in the bathroom.



Do You Need More Space?

Are the walls closing in? Are your totes and boxes piled high the basement? Are the kids short on room to run?

You may have a space issue. It happens to all of us as we move through life. What once served as the perfect starter house gradually turns into the cramped shoebox of a home that is simply too small.

If you're on the fence about upgrading, the guidelines below can help you decide.

BATHROOM FIGHTS

If an argument about bathroom time is becoming a common pillar of your morning routine, then you might be in need of a larger home.

Life is stressful enough without competition for the commode. A larger home is likely to come with an extra bathroom or two.

More bathroom space means less stress. It's a win-win.

CABIN FEVER?

Sometimes making a move isn't about the house, but more about the land.

If you find yourself making a quick escape from your cramped yard every weekend for the respite of camping or hiking, it might be

time to consider moving out of town and settling down on an acre or two.

More yard space could be just what you need to stretch out and enjoy the nature around you – right from your own backyard.

THE APARTMENT

Apartments are great for college students and young professionals, but

their minimal storage space and yards are not conducive to the needs of a growing family.

Often just one or two bedrooms, apartments can quickly begin to feel cramped with the addition of a new family member or pet. Speaking of pets, a home with a nice yard can go a long way toward improving the health of both dog and owner.

GUEST ENTERTAINMENT

Are you a natural party host? If your weekends consist of inviting and bringing people into your home, wouldn't you love to have more space to share with your friends and family members?

Finding a home with a larger kitchen and more sitting space will help to enhance your get-togethers, and will make your place a sure hotspot.



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