

Residence

STYLING THAT PERFORMS

A RESIDENCE GUIDE FOR VENDORS

Where to Spend, Where to Hold Back

Preparing your home for market without overspending, so every dollar lands where a buyer will feel it.

A NOTE FROM TAM & JAC

There is a moment, right before a home goes to market, where every decision feels heavy. What to fix, what to leave, where to spend, and where to hold your nerve.

After 16 years and thousands of homes prepared for sale, we have learned that a strong result is rarely about spending more. It is about spending in the right places, on the things a buyer actually feels when they walk through the door.

The market is discerning at the moment, and that is exactly why preparation matters. Buyers are taking their time and comparing everything, and they can tell when a home has been thoughtfully readied for sale.

This guide is the shortcut. It is where we would tell a friend to put their money, and where we would gently tell them to stop.

Tam & Jac

THE ONE IDEA BEHIND ALL OF IT

Buyers do not price a home on a spreadsheet.

They decide how a home feels in the first 90 seconds, long before they reach the numbers.

Most of us believe we choose a home on logic, the price, the size, the location and the features. The research on how we decide tells a warmer story. In those opening moments the brain is already forming a view, reading the light, the space and the flow, and quietly asking whether it feels safe and whether life here is easy to imagine.

That first impression colours everything after it, as later facts are weighed against the feeling. Emotion leads, and logic follows to justify it. A home that feels calm, light and resolved lowers resistance, and a buyer at ease is more confident, more connected and more willing to pay. This is why preparation matters more than budget. Spend where that feeling is made, and hold back almost everywhere else.

Drawn from research on first impressions and the role of emotion in decision-making. Sources: Psychology Today, 'First Impressions'; Harvard Business Review, 'The New Science of Customer Emotions' (2015).

WORTH EVERY DOLLAR

01 Where to spend

These are the places money works hardest. Each one shapes how a buyer feels in those first moments, and each returns far more in confidence and price than it costs to do well.

○ Presentation and styling

The single highest-return decision most vendors make. A well-styled home helps buyers picture their life inside it, sets the emotional tone the photography captures, and holds its price when it matters most, in negotiation.

○ A fresh coat of paint

Few dollars work harder. Clean, neutral walls make a home feel cared for, brighter and larger. Keep to warm whites and soft neutrals that let each space breathe.

○ Deep clean

Nothing signals a cared-for home faster, and few things cost less to do. Clean everything, from the light fittings and vents to the kitchen rangehood, bathrooms and toilets, and deal with any mould or lingering odour. Then clear the surfaces, empty the wardrobes by half, and let every room show its space. Buyers notice a smell before they notice anything, and they read clutter as a shortage of room.

○ The entrance and kerb appeal

The first 10 seconds set the tone for the whole inspection. A tidy front garden, a clean path, a fresh front door and a welcoming threshold earn goodwill before a buyer has stepped inside.

○ Light

Light sells. Clean the windows, swap tired or mismatched globes for a warm and consistent tone, open every blind, and let each room feel as bright and airy as it can be. Where a room or a whole side of the house sits in shadow, it needs a decision of its own, and there is more on this over the page.

○ The small repairs a buyer notices

The dripping tap, the cracked tile, the door that sticks, the scuffed skirting. Minor on their own, together they whisper neglect. Fixing them removes every small reason for a buyer to hesitate.

○ Flooring that presents poorly

Worn carpet or tired floors pull the eye and date a home. A professional clean, or replacing the carpet in the worst rooms with a neutral choice, lifts the whole feel for a modest spend.

○ The outdoor entertaining area

In Melbourne this is often where a buyer imagines the best of life in the home, so treat it as another room. Feed and mow the lawns, pressure wash the decking or pavers and give timber a lick of staining oil, patch any cracking paint, fix leaking outdoor taps or pipes, and declutter the space the way you would inside. Then style it: a table set for long lunches, a few healthy plants, soft seating and a little shade. Spend on a proper clean and considered styling. Hold back on new decking, a built-in kitchen or a full landscape build, which rarely return their cost before sale.

○ Professional photography and the campaign

Most buyers meet your home on a screen long before the door. Beautiful, well-styled photography is what earns the inspection. This is the spend that brings buyers to you.

WHERE ADVICE PAYS

Dark rooms, and which way they want to go

Almost every home has them, the darker rooms and the shaded side of the house. Often the answer is to lift them. A lighter, warmer wall colour bounces what light there is and makes a room feel larger and calmer.

For some rooms, depth is the answer. A formal sitting room in a period home, colour drenched in a deep and considered tone, can feel rich, intimate and quietly memorable, the kind of room a buyer carries with them.

Knowing which way a room wants to go is rarely obvious, and getting it wrong is costly. This is one of those decisions worth a considered eye before you commit a brushstroke.

KEEP YOUR CAPITAL

02 Where to hold back

These are the places vendors most often overspend. Money here tends to disappear into work a buyer will not pay you back for, or into choices that narrow the buyers who connect with your home.

A full kitchen or bathroom renovation right before sale

Unless you renovate homes for a living, a full rebuild rarely returns its cost in a pre-sale window, and buyers often prefer to plan their own. Clean, repair and restyle so the room presents at its best.

High-end custom finishes and bold personal choices

The statement tile or dramatic feature wall you love can narrow the pool of buyers who feel at home. Keep finishes broad and calm so more people see themselves living there.

A full landscaping overhaul

Established gardens take seasons to settle. Tidy, mulch, prune and add a few healthy plants near the entrance rather than starting again from bare ground. Give your energy to presentation, and let the garden read as cared for.

Replacing things that are dated but present well

A benchtop or vanity that is not to current taste, yet clean and functional, will often photograph and show far better than its age suggests. Style around it before you replace it.

Expensive fixes that are not dealbreakers

Unless it affects safety, finance or a building inspection, hold your capital and direct it to the presentation buyers respond to.

Furniture for a home you are leaving

Buying pieces for a home you are about to sell rarely makes sense. This is where professional styling earns its place, the right pieces for the campaign without the cost of owning them.

BEFORE YOU STYLE

Your own furniture, an honest look

How you live in a home and how you present it for sale are two different things. You may love your black leather sofa, and the real question is whether a buyer will. Step back, set personal taste aside, and see the home the way a buyer would, then ask yourself these.

01 Who is the most likely buyer for this home, and what will they be looking for?

Picture them. A young family wants a safe yard and room to gather; a downsizer wants ease and calm. Style for the buyer most likely to love it.

02 Seeing it fresh, would a buyer take in the room, or the things inside it?

Walk in as a stranger would. If the eye lands on a busy shelf, an exotic table, a bold furniture piece or a wall of family photos, the room is competing with your things. Clear it so the space speaks.

03 Does each piece make the space feel larger, lighter and more resolved, or is it filling it?

Be honest about scale. An oversized lounge suite can shrink a room, and a little space around each piece lets it breathe. Keep what earns its place.

04 Is the scale right for the room, and does the look feel current?

A heavy dark bedhead in a small bedroom, or a tired rug, can quietly age the whole space. When in doubt, store it and let the room feel lighter.

05 What would I keep, what would I store, and what needs to come in?

Make three lists before the campaign. Keep what flatters the home, store anything personal or oversized, and bring in what fills the gaps.

Answer these honestly and the path usually becomes clear. Where it does not, this is where a stylist's eye earns its place, seeing your home through the buyer's eyes.

A NOTE ON PAYING FOR IT

You may not need money up front

The cost of repairs, improvements and styling can usually be bundled together and covered by a third-party provider, with nothing to pay up front and the balance settled at the end of the campaign, from the sale proceeds. Most agents and stylists offer this as a low-cost facility, so preparing your home well need not mean finding the money before you sell. Ask your agent or stylist what they can arrange.

BEFORE YOU SPEND A DOLLAR

3 questions that settle it

- 1 Will a buyer feel this in the first 90 seconds?
- 2 Does it make the home feel more cared for, more spacious, or more filled with light?
- 3 Will I recover more than I spend, or am I buying peace of mind for the next owner?

If the first 2 answers are no, hold your money. The best-prepared homes are seldom the ones with the biggest budgets. They are the ones where every dollar was spent where it shows.

ROOM BY ROOM, AT A GLANCE

ROOM	SPEND HERE	HOLD BACK
Kitchen	Deep clean, clear the benches, fresh paint, new handles or tapware if inexpensive, considered styling.	New benchtops, full cabinetry, replacing working appliances.
Bathrooms	RegROUT and reseal, fresh silicone, a clean mirror, new towels, clear surfaces.	Full retile, a new vanity, moving fixtures.
Living areas	Paint, styling, warm light, a professional floor clean.	New flooring throughout, built-in joinery.
Bedrooms	Neutral bedding, halve the wardrobe, soft lighting, a fresh coat of paint.	New robes, custom cabinetry.
Outdoor & entry	Pressure clean, mulch, potted greenery, a freshened front door.	New decking, a fencing replacement, a garden rebuild.

ONE LAST THING

The hardest part is knowing where to start, and when you have done enough.

You do not have to guess. Before you lift a paintbrush or call a trade, a short conversation with someone who prepares homes for sale every day will often save you far more than it costs. The right preparation, guided well, is what turns a discerning market into your advantage.

WHEN YOU ARE READY

Let us tell you where your money will work hardest.

If you are thinking about selling this year, send us a message. We are always happy to say honestly where to spend, and where to save.

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FOR MELBOURNE VENDORS

If you are based in Melbourne, Australia and would like a free 15 minute call to discuss your project and how we might assist you, [click here](#).