

THE FIX

Want to Increase Your Home's Value? Start With the Entrance.

A few inexpensive changes can boost curb appeal — and your asking price. Here's where to start.



By Tim McKeough Sept. 14, 2021

The entrance to your home is often its public face, communicating your sense of style to the world. It's also a transition space that can be either inviting or forbidding — a source of pleasure or frustration.

"I think of it as an outdoor room, and it's the first room you come into contact with, which sets the stage for everything you're going to experience in the house," said Scott J. Sottile, a partner at [Ferguson & Shamamian Architects](#), a New York-based firm whose latest book, "Collaborations: Architecture, Interiors, Landscapes," will be published next month.

So getting the design right, Mr. Sottile said, is "incredibly important."

The front entrance is also a place where a few inexpensive changes can boost a home's overall value. "In a very direct way, we think curb appeal increases property values," said Prentis Hale, a principal at the Seattle-based architecture firm [Shed](#). In fact, a [recent study](#) published in the Journal of Real Estate Finance and Economics estimated that curb appeal alone could account for up to 7 percent of a home's sale price.

So it's nice to have an attractive front entrance, but there's also a strong financial incentive. Mr. Hale and other architects and designers offered some advice about how to proceed.

Break Out the Paint

It's conventional wisdom that paint is among the easiest, least expensive ways to transform a room. But "easy" is a relative term, and doesn't take into account the hours required to prepare, prime and paint four walls and a ceiling.

Painting the front door is a more manageable task. To give your front entrance a new look in a hurry, paint the door a color that is different from the rest of the house and the trim, making it a focal point.

"It's something that causes the eye to stop, so you say, 'Yes, that's where I'm supposed to go,'" Mr. Sottile said. "It can be a strong, contrasting color, or a fun color," he said, like a bright red or yellow. "Or maybe it's a lush green, to blend in with the plantings."



Anyon Interior Design had the ceiling of a porch in Sonoma, Calif., painted light blue and added containers planted with rosemary, along with plenty of comfortable seating. Bess Friday

Even if you choose a subdued color, changing the sheen can make the door appear special.

[Philip Gorrivan](#), an interior designer based in New York, painted the door to his London townhouse high-gloss black to make it stand out. "I love a lacquered door," Mr. Gorrivan said. "It adds a little personality."

If you're feeling more ambitious and have a front porch, consider painting the ceiling. It could be a traditional light blue, long popular in Southern states like South Carolina and Georgia, or something unexpected, like a light yellow, said Lindsay Anyon Brier, the founder of [Anyon Interior Design](#) in San Francisco.

But choose "a really subtle shade," Ms. Brier advised, "so there's just a little pop of color."



Beth Webb, a designer in Atlanta, added a faux-wood bench to hold bags and packages on the porch of a home on Brays Island, S.C. The boot scraper is both functional and decorative. Emily J. Followill

Change the Lighting

Lighting around the front door can do more than simply illuminate for safety and help you find the lock at night — it should set the mood.

"You don't want a blaring security light when you come through the front entry," said [Beth Webb](#), an interior designer based in Atlanta. "Exterior lighting is so incredibly pivotal. You want that soft glow."

A large hanging lantern is a good way to provide general illumination while making a statement, Ms. Webb said, as is a pair of wall-mounted lanterns.

When choosing decorative fixtures like that, think carefully about scale. Fixtures that look big in a store, or inside your home, can sometimes appear diminutive when you move them outside. Depending on the size of the house, bigger is often better.



When choosing outdoor lanterns, bigger is often better, as seen at the entrance to a house in Kenwood, Calif., with interiors by Anyon Interior Design. Paul Dyer

Then look for ways to add accent lighting. "I always like to layer lighting," Ms. Brier said. Options include step lights above stairs, fixtures that wash textural walls with light, landscape lighting and candle lanterns.

Mr. Gorrivant tucked landscape lighting into the planters flanking the front door of his London townhouse, and Mr. Sottile uses candle lanterns at his home. When equipped with battery-powered LED candles with built-in timers, he said, they can provide worry-free illumination every night.

Plant It

Placing a few containers planted with greenery around the entry is an easy way to make it more attractive. "Just putting some plant material out there always makes a difference, whether it's boxwood, bougainvillea or something else," Ms. Webb said.

One way to add containers is to install a matching pair of tall pots or urns on either side of the front steps. For a more casual approach, cluster two or three pots of various sizes to one side of the front door.

“Even if you have a house that’s very formal, urns with loose plantings make it feel a bit more friendly,” Mr. Sottile said. “You’re adding things that bring life and softness.”

Ms. Brier looks for plants that are not just visually appealing but also smell good. Sometimes she fills pots by the front door with rosemary, for a touch of green and a pleasant scent — as well as a convenient supply for cooking.

Add a Perch

If you have an expansive front porch, there might be room for a fully furnished seating area. But even with a smaller front entrance, it’s usually possible to add a single small stool, chair or bench that serves multiple functions.

“It doesn’t have to be as contrived as a whole seating arrangement,” Ms. Brier said. “It could be a stump or a pedestal of some sort that provides an impromptu place to perch.”

Such a surface — a ceramic, teak or metal-mesh stool, for example — offers a place to sit during casual encounters, as guests come and go, and serves as a place to drop bags and packages, said Ms. Webb, who placed a compact faux-bois bench on a client’s porch for precisely that purpose. “When they’re unloading the car, there’s a bench out there to put packages and luggage on,” she said.

Upgrade Your Hardware

Many homeowners have improved the look of old kitchen cabinets or a bathroom vanity by changing the hardware, and the same technique can be used to upgrade a front door.

“Your front door hardware is very important,” Ms. Webb said. “It’s your exclamation mark.”

If the door has a transitional-style, satin-nickel handle but you want a more modern look, for instance, replace it with a clean-lined design in matte black. If you want more character, consider a traditional brass or bronze handle with intricate detailing, or one with handmade appeal.

But don’t stop at the handle: Mr. Gorrivan frequently recommends installing a distinctive door knocker, for extra visual interest.

“They can be wonderful, whimsical and unusual,” he said.

Other functional pieces can add more decorative flair, like the boot scraper topped by a horse figure that Ms. Webb installed beside the door of a house in South Carolina.

House numbers are also worth attention. “Often they’re an afterthought,” Mr. Hale said, but they should be chosen and placed with just as much care as any other decorative element. For some of Shed’s projects, the firm designs custom metal panels with water-jet-cut digits; for others, the architects choose modern numbers installed on raised posts, creating elongated shadows.

Roll Out the Welcome Mat(s)

It’s called a welcome mat for a reason: A small rug placed before the front door is an inviting gesture that has the advantage of scrubbing dirt from shoes.

“You can monogram them or have logos on them, but I like to keep them very simple,” said Mr. Gorrivan, who recommended installing a plain, coarse coir or coconut fiber mat in front of the door. “The focus should be on the door and door hardware,” he said, not on a quirky mat.

Ms. Brier also uses simple coir mats and suggested choosing the largest one you can reasonably fit in front of the door. “The idea is that, with your natural stride, both feet hit the mat before you get into the home,” she said.

Ms. Webb recommended a two-stage approach to welcome mats: “We do a decorative one inside the front door and a more practical mat on the exterior,” to remove dirt with progressively finer fibers.

Outside, she often uses a rush mat. Indoors, she said, “I try to use something either super textural or antique, with a pattern that just isn’t going to show anything” — even if it gets trampled by muddy boots.