
DWELLING ON DWELLINGS



HomeSellers, Don't Neglect the Home Cellars

By **Brad Boisvert**

It's autumn, and most homeowners start taking their cues from our arboreal rodent friends. We begin to squirrel away our treasured items, cleaning out our lawns and cluttering our basements and attics in anticipation of long winters.

If you're a homeseller, however, that's just a little nutty.

To often, homesellers become so keen on keeping their houses' exteriors and living areas clean, they neglect their all-important basements. Basements? All-important? You bet.

Consider when you buy a car. What's one of the first thing you do? You look under the hood ... even if you couldn't tell a carburetor from carbonara. You assume, if the engine is clean and everything looks in place, the car runs just fine. The same holds true for homebuyers and basements.

Looking at a basement is like looking under a car. There, potential homebuyers will scrutinize the furnace (the home's "engine"), water heater, water pump, oil tank, any radon mitigation systems (the house's "exhaust"), and all the exposed water and fuel pipes. If everything looks clean and orderly, they'll assume your house clicks all on cylinders. (And if everything is legitimately clean and orderly, chances are it does.)

How well a house functions is particularly important to homebuyers looking at houses in autumn and winter. They need to feel assured that they and their families will stay warm during New Hampshire winters. And they start looking more closely at furnaces.

Additionally, homebuyers most often want larger homes and more storage space. They want comfortable places to do laundry and perhaps places to set up rec rooms, exercise areas, or home offices. In this light, a clean unfinished basement can be great selling tool.

Especially in New Hampshire. Unfinished basements are not included in a home's listed square footage. Savvy homebuyers will see potential in a clean unfinished basement ... and realize that the extra storage space shouldn't come with an additional property-tax liability.

So, if you have an unfinished basement on the market, clean it thoroughly. Take out as much as the clutter as you can muster. Cluttered basements are more apt to retain moisture and mildew smells; this may lead buyers to believe that there is an

excess-water problem -- even when there is not.

To make your basement palatable to buyers:

- Fix any water problems thoroughly. Most basement water problems stem from bad landscaping and outside drainage. Before you spend big bucks on a waterproofing, make sure your down spouts are dispelling water away from your foundation and that rain and ground water drain away from your house rather than toward it. Water in the basement is a huge red flag to buyers -- and not just because of lost storage space. Excess basement dampness increases the potential for structural damage and rot; left unchecked and unfixed, it can break a deal.
- Clean out the typical basement mare's nest and remove the detritus. Rent off-site self-storage space if you have to. If you must store items in your basement, do it neatly. Don't store boxes on pallets, however, as it may raise buyers' eyebrows.
- Mop the floor. And consider painting a plain cement floor. It will brighten the area and demonstrate your confidence in its potential.
- Wipe the furnace, tank, and water heaters. Remember, you want your house to look immaculate "under the hood." Make sure your furnace has been properly maintained and cleaned.
- Organize the laundry area. If you have your washer and dryer in the basement, make it look amazingly convenient, with neatly kept hampers, available baskets, and a ready ironing table.
- Boost the light. Make sure all lights work and increase wattage if you can. Adding florescent light panels will very much brighten the basement and may make it appealing to the home handyman looking for a subterranean workshop and getaway.
- Swipe all the spider webs out of the ceiling, corners, and windows. (Don't worry, our little spider friends will survive.)
- Wash down the cement walls with bleach or other mildew-killing cleanser. Clean and/or remove any sources of musty smells.

Remember, the point here is not to finish the basement. It's to let buyers see the potential of such untapped space. And it's to make buyers more comfortable with the overall condition of your home.

Basements aren't necessary the windows to the soul of a house (windows are windows to the soul of a house), but a sparkling basement says an eyeful.

