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property



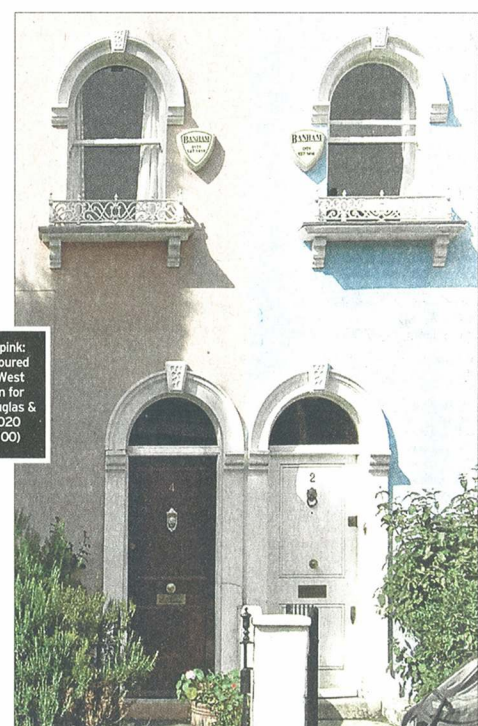
A bright front door and colourful garden will always attract buyers; Sarah Beeny finds a stately front in Belgravia

I t doesn't work for books, but it does for houses – judging them by their façade I mean. A property's outer appearance, its kerb appeal, is often the deal maker (or breaker) when it comes to buying a home. It takes potential buyers no more than eight seconds to decide whether or not they like a house. During my recent hunt for a new flat I often found that a split second was long enough to write off a property; the flat approached via someone else's gnome-filled backyard, and the one up a fire escape with plaster peeling off the front of the building, for example. At the other end of the scale, Sarah Beeny, the *Property Ladder* presenter, and her husband had decided to buy their house before



Pretty in pink: Pastel-coloured house in West London on for £1.2m (Douglas & Gordon: 020 8563 7100)

they'd even reached the front door. "We were halfway across the garden and were already staying to each other, 'how do we make this house fit our family?'" she says. "It was May, and there were forget-me-nots everywhere. It was such an unusual plot to find in London." But imagine if the garden was over run with brambles and there was rubbish blocking the pathway. "First impressions count for a lot," Beeny says. "A bad appearance can do a lot of damage. It doesn't take a great deal of effort to change this though." Some houses have natural kerb appeal; the wisteria-clad Queen Anne rectory with a tree-lined drive, for example, will attract potential buyers even if it's a little dilapidated. "For the best country



ALAMY/JANE MINGAY

houses, the setting is the kerb appeal," says Crispin Holborow of Savills estate agency. But on the whole, kerb appeal is more than just a good-looking house – even the ugliest house can have it. "A house with real kerb appeal lifts your spirit – it's a house where the front garden is well-presented, the railing is in perfect condition, the door immaculately painted, perhaps with roses growing over it," says Lindsey Cuthill of Savills. Unfortunately, improving the kerb appeal of a house is unlikely to add much to its value. "But if you can get someone in a positive frame of mind before they've stepped through the front door it can help sell it," Beeny says. She has recently set up Tepilo, a home-selling website, and has

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A Georgian country house near Market Harborough, with flagstone floors and sash windows. Four bedrooms, large gardens, outbuildings and paddocks. Price: £950,000. Fisher German: 01858 410200.



10 WAYS TO IMPROVE THE KERB APPEAL OF YOUR HOME

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1 Paint your front door. It sounds simple but this is the first thing that people are going to look at. "Go wild with colour, it's the one place you can," says Sarah Beeny, whose favourite door colour is currently cerise pink. Strong, bright colours in full gloss are popular at the moment but if you haven't got the nerve, black is always a safe bet, or a flat, dark plum colour such as "Pelt", by Farrow & Ball, says Tacina Smith of interiors shop Smiths of Kensal Rise. For a contemporary look, matt, muted and washed-out colours are favoured in smart London streets.

2 Invest in quality door furniture. "Spend an extra £100 to get really good things," Beeny says. "Cheap generally looks cheap." Try to choose furniture in keeping with your property; heavy Victorian door knockers and letter boxes will look ridiculous unless your home is Victorian. Priors Reclamation specialises in period door furniture (www.priorsrec.co.uk), as does Drummonds (www.drummonds-arch.co.uk). For a more contemporary look go for brushed aluminium or chrome (Knobs & Knockers; www.diytools.co.uk/diy/Main/knobsandknockers.asp). Avoid tune-playing door bells.

3 Lighting is vital, placed either side of the front door to add symmetry, or a lantern in a portico entrance, says Alex Michelin, of swanky London developers Finchilton. Don't be afraid to try out lights in situ before you commit; if they're too big or too ornate they can look trash. If your property is approached via a garden, light it sensitively. "Good garden lighting is unseen," Beeny says. Hide lights in the trees or conceal them in the garden path or drive. Carolyn Trevor, an interior designer who has a long list of celebrity clients, recommends Charles Edwards for wall lanterns and lights (www.charlesedwards.com) or Phillips and Wood (www.phillipsandwood.co.uk).

4 The approach to the front door (steps, a path and/or a driveway), should be swept of leaves, and free from rubbish. Cars, bicycles, horse boxes must be neatly parked, Alex Michelin recommends marble, sandstone or Portland stone for steps



Clockwise from top, Tudor Cottage, Essex, £600,000 (Savills 01245 293233); Finchilton's 52 Chester Row, SW1, £5.75m (Wellbelow Quested, 020 7881 0880); Porchester Terrace, W2 (Kay & Co 020 7262 2030)

and paths, and newly painted railings. Porches can give an air of distinction but can become dumping grounds for clutter. "They can be awful if they are stuck on as an afterthought – they must be in proportion," says Crispin Holborow of Savills.

5 Numbering or naming a house can easily go wrong. Wonky numerals, badly painted names, or plaques with pictures (such as birds, trees) do no justice to the front of a house. There's a trend in London for shiny oversized chrome numerals or stencilled numbers, which can be ordered from Turnstyle Designs at www.turnstyledesigns.com or www.ni-line.net/nl. For houses with fanlights, Carolyn Trevor suggests the number or name is acid-etched into the glass. Or for an affordable alternative, Tacina Smith recommends number



stickers from www.simplystick.co.uk. Holborow would steer away from putting a name plaque on a country house. "If they don't know where you live you don't want them there," he says. For those who insist, names can be wrought into gateways, or inscribed tastefully on brass or slate, and screwed to the gate post or porch.

6 Windows look sad when they are dirty, so make sure yours are cleaned regularly. Rotten window frames are also unacceptable and if you're putting in new ones, make sure they are appropriate with the design of the rest of the house. "The position of the glazing bars is massively important," Beeny says. "And don't feel you have to paint them white. They look great in lots of different colours from stone to dark green to black." Bear in mind the colour

FOR SALE Picture perfect

Warwickshire
£875,000

The Limes, in Welford on Avon, is a 17th-century house with superb kerb appeal, thanks to a row of ball hedges, a neatly painted façade and a rose climbing over the front door. Inside there is plenty of space, including a large kitchen/breakfast room, conservatory and four bedrooms. Outside are landscaped gardens, a store and a workshop. Knight Frank: 01789 297735




Kent
£895,000

This pretty house in Penshurst is approached by a neat paved path across a mown lawn. The owners have paid meticulous attention to the outer appearance of the house; from the white-painted front door and windows, to the pink climbing rose and flower beds. The interior is also in immaculate order, with a large kitchen/breakfast room, dining room, drawing room, four bedrooms and a study. There is also a sizeable detached studio in the grounds. Chesterton Humbers: 01732 741212.



Cheshire
£745,000

Hibbert Court near Alderley Edge is one of six apartments within Birles Hall, a dressed-stone hall with wisteria-clad elevations. The exterior appearance of the property is an artistic feat, with clipped box, colourful planters and a tidy entrance porch. The apartment comprises a large kitchen/breakfast room, drawing room, and three double bedrooms. There is also a garage and beautifully presented communal gardens. Jackson-Stops & Staff: 01625 590340.



8 An impressive entrance gate is a "must have" for a country house, Holborow says. But entrances should reflect the period of the house; wrought iron electric gates are in keeping with a new-build home, while a white-painted gate with simple stone pillars is better suited to a manor. Carved owls and eagles should really only adorn the entrance pillars to stately homes and castles.

9 Spruce up a tired façade by repainting, re-pointing, or rendering over ugly brickwork. Don't go too crazy; paint colours should be more sensible than on the front door, and in keeping with the period of the house (and the ones either side, if you live on a street). This doesn't mean to say that they have to be the same colour (unless you are in a heritage area).

10 Don't let the house next door ruin your kerb appeal. If your neighbours have rubbish outside their house, suggest you remove it, rather than whinging about it, Beeny says. "And if you're trimming your hedge, ask if you can do theirs while you're at it – 10 minutes mowing, or rubbish collecting is worth the effort." Try to conceal their rubbish bins (and yours) behind a hedge or a small fence. If you have to have them on show, make sure they are clean and the lids are on.

◆ Tepilo.com, Sarah Beeny's website lets vendors advertise their homes online for no charge
◆ Finchilton, 020 7591 2700; finchilton.co.uk
◆ Carolyn Trevor Design, 020 7737 6181; www.carolyn-trevor.co.uk
◆ Find your nearest Farrow & Ball paint stockist on www.farrow-ball.com