

Property Opinion

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BRING INDEPENDENT, we at Blekin & Co. joyfully sidestep business jargon and eschew many corporate procedures, but we do take continuous professional development – otherwise known as CPD by acronym aficionados – very seriously indeed. Now a standard requirement to ensure that professionals continue to perform safely, effectively and

legally within their changing scope of practice, it is largely ignored in the heterogeneous field of estate agency. Why, I ask? Surely, it's only by conducting our own house sale that we can gain an insider's understanding of how 'the times are a-changing'.

In a world of shifting technology where grey-haired experts flounder and the closely guarded secrets of the professional classes are laid bare on the internet, estate agents need to be fleet of foot and sure of mind.

They must see how things look

from the other side, not just in an empathetic way but in a practical and disciplined way. Estate agency is a curious beast, at its heart lies a system of rudimentary transactions mediated by primary human emotions, held in check by a lumbering legal system, and supercharged by technology. It requires a deft hand. If we don't take our professional development seriously, then we'll 'sink like a stone' for how else can we expect the sophisticated, internet-savvy homeowners of Yorkshire to take us seriously? But do we practise what we

preach? In short, yes. In April, my wife and I put our house on the market, and in three days had agreed a sale to a cash buyer at the full asking price. In May, Hilary Pogran, who heads up the marketing, followed suit; a sale was agreed to a cash buyer within nine days. And in the last four years, Tim Blekin has sold two of his homes, in both cases on price. Neither were on the open market; instead, buyers were found using our in-house brokerage service.

These four sales have helped to reinforce our understanding

of how a strong and successful sale hinges on price, presentation and location. Price is, of course, an ineluctable in our counsel when recommending a listed guide price. In many ways, however, the conversion of progress is presentation and difficult ground must be traversed in order to advise. Significant rewards can be reaped from spending a few thousand pounds on sprucing up, and it is our role as marketing specialists not to shy away from making recommendations.

Finally, the crown of these labours in photography – a single photograph can make or break a launch. Through our recent experiences, we have learnt to be sympathetic to all our clients' travels. Uncertainty is the cause of much stress, and its presence is felt from early negotiations through to completion, and beyond to the triggers, striving to find sources and by conveying every nuance of information related to the minutiae of progress, we can minimise the pressures. Finally, what these four sales

have really brought home is how critical it is for us estate agents to take a holistic view of the whole. Micro-management, reducing the probability of a sale keeping an eye on the ball, requires days a week. Any fluffing arms leaves the sale to the vagaries of fate. As an independent agent, you might not be constrained by the stifling corporate identity and ideologies, but continuous professional development is a concession I'm happy to make; it encourages us to be progressive and enables us to adapt to the times that are a-changing.

Outdoor in-crowd cook up new ideas for entertaining in garden

It's summer and time to make the most of the outdoor room. Sharon Dale looks at alfresco fashions and fads for catering and entertaining.

THE APPEAL of hard-to-light and highly unpredictable charcoal barbecues is waning. Anyone who has visited friends and family Down Under will tell you that most Aussies use gas "barbies".

The built-in gas barbecue is an integral part of an outdoor kitchen, which comes complete with cupboards, worktops, oven, sink, fridge and sockets.

Once a multi-millionaire must-have, they are becoming more mainstream. Developers in London are now putting them in more modest properties. Are they worth the investment? Probably not, given the British weather. Here are some other trends.

■ Pizza ovens: Margo Leadbetter and Hyacinth Bucket would be first in the queue for a super-size, brick-built wood-fired pizza oven in a bid to push themselves up the social ladder. They cost from £2,000. You can buy cheaper metal versions from £150. Fad or fancy, they make a pleasant change from the aforementioned barbecue.

■ Outdoor lounge: Sunken rooms with built-in fires or fire pits, herringbone tiled floors warmed by underfloor heating, hot tubs, outdoor televisions, chiller cabinets and sound systems are the optimum in luxury outdoor living but you can create a cut-price version by zoning a section of garden with low walls and paving. Put a fire pit in the middle, add some seating and oversized lanterns and hook some speakers up to the wi-fi. Radio 6 Music is the cool channel of choice.

■ Furniture: The best-selling outdoor seating at the moment is grey, which is fine as it doesn't show the dirt and you can add colour and warmth with blankets and cushions. Benches are also a great investment as they can be used as seating or as a plinth for a display of plant pots. If you want wow factor then invest in a hanging chair. Made.com at redbrickmill.com has a Copa hanging chair on a stand for £449.

■ Lighting: Outdoor lighting systems are becoming ever more sophisticated but it's hard to beat candlelight and twinkling fairy lights for parties or those summer nights a deux. Yorkshire-based Lights4fun.co.uk has a great selection of solar and battery-powered outdoor lights. If you fancy splashing out on a design classic, Anglepoise has manufactured a giant outdoor version of its iconic original 1227 lamp, which costs £750.

■ Faking it: Artificial grass and ants, along with living walls/ritual gardens of climbing stic foliage and flowers,



OUTDOOR DECOR: Miami solar lanterns, £7.99 each, lights4fun.co.uk; La Hacienda pizza oven £700, debenhams.com; Copa chair, £449, made.com at redbrickmill.com. redbrickmill.com



are becoming more popular, especially on apartment balconies where lawnmowers aren't practical. Carpetright's Northumberland at £14.99 per sq metre looks convincing. However, fake grass and flowers in a conventional garden look distinctly naff and they are not

eco-friendly. Instead, invest in a garden designer to give you tips on layout, bee, butterfly and bird-friendly plants and vertical gardens. Gardening brings you closer to nature and is therapeutic. Even weeds are better than a dusty, plastic desert.

■ Water features: The look and sound of flowing water is said to improve mental and physical health, which is why water features are gaining popularity. They cost from about £80 upwards. Garden centres are good hunting grounds or if your budget can stretch to £2,000-plus check out solusdecor.co.uk

■ Tinting: Adding different levels to a garden, even a small one, makes it instantly more interesting. If you can't manage to build a terrace, add height to the space with tall planters. Mia Fleur has a gorgeous selection of zinc planters.

■ Gimme Shelter: Given our unpredictable, often wet summers, it pays to create some shelter. There is a variety of options here ranging from the cheap and cheerful but flimsy polyester gazebos to the

substantial investment that is a summer house or porch shed. The latter are usually a good investment and are likely to increase the saleability of your home. Slowly making their way back into fashion are awnings, which were popular in the 1960s and 70s. There are some attractive, contemporary versions and the traditional cafe styles all shade you from the sun and the worst of the rain.

They are, in effect, a giant roller blind fastened to the wall that can be pulled out across the

patio to make a little roof for your seating area.

The most expensive are remote controlled with wind and rain sensors and can cost about £3,000. The less expensive ones are operated by a hand crank and chain. They cost from £100. manomano.co.uk has a good selection and it also sells retractable side screen awnings from £72. For a bespoke, wooden gazebo with a tiled roof, check out Harrogate-based Simon Bowler, simon-bowler.co.uk, who makes them from £895 and can add in everything from outdoor lighting to heaters and log burners.

Or, if you have space to store it in the colder months, buy a canvas bell tent. It's a perfect escape for children and grown-ups. You can find them for £400 from boutiquecamping.com.

Buy a canvas bell tent. A perfect escape for children and grown-ups.

Property writer Sharon Dale's advice on making the most of the outdoors.

Briefing

Sales shortfall due to 'missing movers'

MOVE: Before the recession, there were about 1.6 million home sales a year in the UK which plummeted to 860,000 in 2009 but has since recovered to around 1.2 million. New research by the Council of Mortgage Lenders suggests that the shortfall is largely the result of "missing movers" – mortgaged home-owners not moving up the housing ladder.

The research suggests that the availability of sufficient funds and equity is the dominant factor preventing people from moving up the property ladder. The CML suggests that unless novel policies are introduced to stimulate the market, moving will remain constrained.

Work on vicarage in awards success

BUILDING: The North and East Yorkshire Building Excellence Awards saw Brierley Groom Architects and York Builder win best extension to an existing home for The Old Vicarage, Bradford. Best conversion of a listed building went to Bramhall Blekinham Architects and Woodhouse Barry Construction for Middlethorpe Stables. Bramhall Blekinham won best new home for Sandstead House. Best local builder was Brian Fell of Leven Ltd. Best small housing development was The Parade, Sandstead, by JRP and Mulgrave Construction. Best volume build was Kings Court, York by Jennesson and Berkley DeVeer.

Quaker landmark house on market

RYLSTONE: A grade II listed property in Rylstone with a fascinating history is for sale. The Quaker House, which is on the market for £515,000, dates back to the late 1500s, and in the mid 1600s became the home of the Watkinson family – active supporters of the Society of Friends.

In the mid-1600s, the Watkinson estate hosted the inaugural General National Meeting of the Society of Friends. The Yorkshire Dales property, near Skipton, has five bedrooms, three reception rooms and three bathrooms, a garage and home office. Contact Linley and Simpson, tel: 01943 916888, linleyandsimpson.co.uk

Developer brews up interest in homes

UNVEILING: A developer has adopted a novel way of brewing "interest" in its latest collection of homes – by staging the launch event in a local pub. Whitfield Homes is toasting the official unveiling of its 14 new homes by linking up with the Angel Inn at Topcliffe, near Thirsk.

The pub will throw open its doors between 3pm and 7pm on Thursday, July 13, to give people a sneak preview of the second phase of its scheme at Fairfield Close in the village of Dalton.

The new collection of two, three, four and five-bedroom homes are for sale from £165,000 and Help-to-Buy is available. For details visit www.wharfedalehomes.co.uk

More agents see rent costs rising

RENTS: More than a quarter of agents saw rent costs rise for tenants in May – the highest level since July 2016 when 7 per cent saw rents increase according to the Association of Residential Letting Agents.

Over the last year, the 51 of rental stock has risen 11 per cent. David Cox, ARLA Propertymark Chief Exec says: "Private rents rose 1 cent in the year to May 21 the last thing tenants need them to get even higher: the new government's Tenants' Fee Bill, we call them to rise by up to £10 (hitting loyal tenants long-term agreements. This is on top of organi



STYLE: Solus decor water bowl, £2,750, solusdecor.co.uk; add height with zinc effect planters, £72 each, miafleur.com; Bell tents from £429 at boutiquecamping.com