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Market Ready

By TIM McKEOUGH
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Q. The carpeting on our stairs is worn. Should we replace it before selling our home? And if so, with what?

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A. At the very least, you should tear it out. "I always recommend taking the old worn carpet off," said Jamie Marcantonio, a real estate agent at Coldwell Banker in Northport, N.Y. "Similar to how we like to get curb appeal at the front of the house, stairs are the visual entryway to the upstairs," Ms. Marcantonio said, and can influence the way people feel about the rooms at the top, even before they see them. When carpeted stairs look worn or dirty, it immediately creates the wrong impression.

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But you might not need to buy new carpeting. "Today's buyers prefer hardwood flooring," she said. If the stairs are made from an attractive wood, and are in good condition, "the preference would certainly be to leave the wood stairs exposed."

If the hardwood stairs look worn, though, you should refinish them or add a carpet runner down the center that leaves the edges of each step exposed. "It's less expensive

than full carpeting," Ms. Marcantonio said. "And it provides a nice, crisp look that people are looking for."

Lynne Scalo, an interior designer in Westport, Conn., suggested adding a tasteful runner even if the wood underneath isn't worn. Particularly in large houses with high ceilings, she said, a runner can make the space feel warmer while providing a more forgiving surface for children.

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Ms. Scalo often uses [Grand Tournai carpeting by Merida](#). “It’s really fresh looking, wears well and has an organic feeling to it,” she said, that resembles sea grass, but it is actually made from 60 percent wool and 40 percent sisal. It also comes in neutral hues (Ms. Scalo’s favorite is Honey) that appeal to a wide range of tastes — perfect when your intention is to sell.

“It’s not million-dollar carpet, but it’s also not cheap,” she said. (The retail price is \$17.90 a square foot; information: 800-345-2200 or [meridameridian.com](#).)

Then again, carpet is not a good thing to skimp on. As Ms. Scalo put it, “Cheap tends to look cheap,” a signal you would not want to send to potential buyers.

To finish the edges of a runner, she typically uses suede binding and leaves about three inches of exposed wood on either side.

It’s an investment, she acknowledged, but making your staircase as appealing as possible is worth the time, money and effort.

“A lot of people instinctively react to a home,” Ms. Scalo said. “Their gift isn’t in imagining what the space could be, so the closer you can get it to a streamlined, clean, well-done and thoughtful environment, the better.”

Questions about repairs or redecorating in preparation for putting a home on the market may be sent to marketready@nytimes.com. Unpublished questions cannot be answered individually.

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