

your home

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Tips and trends for homeowners, buyers and sellers



WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Moving is hard: With all the logistical considerations of buying the home, closing, moving out of the old place and then into the new, unpacking and then getting settled, you might be too overwhelmed to actually get out and meet the neighbors. But nothing will make your new house feel like a home like knowing the area and the people around you. Here's a few ways to get involved: look pretty attractive, but homeowners looking to take advantage should make sure they understand the following information first:

- ➔ **Get outside.** Nothing is quite as easy or effective as showing your face in the neighborhood. Do some yardwork, take frequent strolls or take the kids (or the dog) to a nearby park.
- ➔ **Volunteer.** Whether you can spare a few hours at your kids' school, with a service group or at an animal shelter, volunteering will allow you to meet people while doing good. Try VolunteerMatch.org or contact your local municipality about opportunities.
- ➔ **Join a club.** Try your local library, events listings for the area or Meetup.com for groups that might share your interests.
- ➔ **Take a class.** Community colleges, local art and music schools, fitness centers and libraries all offer classes that provide you with the ability to learn something new while networking with neighbors.
- ➔ **Get connected online.** So much of our socializing is done online. Try searching for local Facebook pages or join Nextdoor.com, a social network dedicated to neighbors.

THE TOP 10 trendiest HOME FEATURES

Whether you're thinking of selling soon or have an eye on remodeling with solid return-on-investment potential, think about which features make your home oh-so-desirable when it's time to list. An analysis of the Realtor.com listings over the past five years found that the following items were listed most often, solidifying a venerable spot among buyers' favorites:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Fireplace | 6. Open floor plan |
| 2. Wood floor | 7. Walk-in closet |
| 3. Carpet | 8. Formal dining room |
| 4. Granite counter | 9. Vaulted ceiling |
| 5. Stainless steel appliances | 10. Open kitchens |

Do trends lose steam? Oak and cherry cabinets had a strong foothold in the cabinet marketplace but are no longer popular.





the energy audit math

between \$103 and \$618 annually. Over the years, those numbers really add up.

But an energy audit isn't exactly cheap. According to HomeAdvisor, most average between \$218 and \$551. To save the upfront cost of hiring a pro, you could conduct an amateur version yourself by following the steps outlined at energy.gov. Typically this involves a visual inspection of any place two materials meet, electric outlets, doors, windows and a few other spots.

However, there are benefits to hiring a pro to perform a diagnostic test. Professional audits typically employ a blower test. A powerful fan mounts into the frame of an exterior door and pulls air out of the house, lowering air pressure inside, which then allows the outside air to flow in through all unsealed cracks and openings. This is a more thorough method of detecting leaks and can help the auditor offer better recommendations for ways to address your home's energy inefficiencies.

A professional may also be able to determine how useful your insulation is acting and other ways your home may be losing energy.

If you want to hire a professional, try searching through the Department of Energy's Residential Energy Services Network, resnet.us.

✔ You've heard of home energy audits or assessments. You may have even thought they sounded like a pretty good idea: A professional auditor comes to your house, assesses how much energy your home uses—and loses—and makes recommendations for steps you can take that will save you money over time. But you just haven't pulled the trigger. Well, why not this year?

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the average energy audit saves homeowners between 5 and 30 percent off their energy bills each year. With the average household spending \$2,060 on energy bills every year, according to EnergyStar, that means an audit could save

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