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## The Home Designer First Impressions

By Brandon Neff



Fresh orchids, contemporary lighting and an antique Chinese cabinet make an interesting composition in a small entry. Photos courtesy Brandon Neff Design

According to recent national survey of both men and women on what qualities each sex notices first about the other on initial introductions, the results were fairly typical - men say they notice nice hair and posture (yeah, right), and women claim that good teeth and a great smile are at the top of the list. (I cannot speak to the honesty of these answers, people.)

Interestingly, neither gender listed a "winning personality" or the ability to speak in complete sentences as a priority - looks trumped all. Please, don't kill the messenger.

The reason I bring this survey up is to remind us all that when it comes to making a good first impression, how we present ourselves aesthetically matters. From finding a mate to finding a job, what we present to the world is often judged and evaluated. And it matters in other aspects of our lives - specifically our homes.

Walking into an unknown domicile for the first time one draws conclusions about who lives there - the resident's style, their personality and overall taste level all jump to mind as we cross the threshold.

Truly, if we connect this hypothesis to the importance of how first impressions impact the respective value of our homes, it starts to add up. As the real estate market continues its ascent into the stratosphere, and home selling becomes even more congested - each seller competing for the same buyer's dollar - distinguishing your listing is essential to capturing top prices. If, as I've said in this column before, making a great first impression is everything when selling a house, then let's focus on the first thing they see when they open the front door - the entry.

Remember, I was a home stager long before I entered the world of design - I know of what I speak. Pulling in a

buyer, or simply extending a gracious welcome to guests for that matter, is all about setting the tone from the first step inside. Here then, are a few of my first impression "greatest hits" to create an inviting and personal foyer.

An entry table or bench. Whether you're working with a tiny vestibule or grand foyer, you need a place for your visitors to land upon entering. A graceful chair in an interesting fabric, or a vintage hall table, gives your guests a place to set down a coat or purse (or housewarming gift!), before you properly invite them into the rest of your home. Even an interesting coat rack standing guard can offer real interest to a typically dead corner.

A mirror. From contemporary and clean to ornate and embellished, a mirror can offer a reflective energy to a dark space, or even embolden a light filled one. Not to mention it's always handy to have a mirror by the front door to check your cow lick, or that spinach in your teeth before you throw open the door to collect your Publisher's Clearing House prize money!

Beautiful wallpaper. Small spaces are perfect for bold statements, and an ideal place to experiment with something daring. Look, you don't spend a lot of time hanging out in your foyer, so take a risk. Set a dramatic tone with a textured grasscloth, or add some panache with a historical Morris floral that lets all who enter know that you've got personality. I advise this even if you're planning to sell. Never before have buyers been more informed about interior design, and offering them something other than beige walls will be appreciated.

Good lighting. Unless you're fortunate to have a foyer flooded with natural light, most homes need a boost. Entering a dark space feels depressing and a little scary. Unless you're the Addams Family, install adequate lighting - a properly placed recessed can, a pair of eye level sconces or just a stylish table lamp can make all the difference.

Art. Last, but never least. A well-chosen canvas or provocative photograph works like Prozac for your home - it elevates the mood like no other. Art speaks to your individual style, and gives your guests an insight into how you live in the world. Art, more than any other home accent, gives the strongest first impression. I love to scour flea markets and consignment shops for vintage portraits, cheeky abstracts, and black and white architectural photographs. Look for something that's meaningful, that draws an emotion and offers a subtle, personal introduction to all who enter.



A well lit foyer highlighting the natural stone flooring and custom iron work sets the tone for the rest of this Mediterranean style home.



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