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YOUR HOME

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TIPS AND TRENDS TO HELP MAXIMIZE HOME BUYING AND SELLING

PLAY NICE

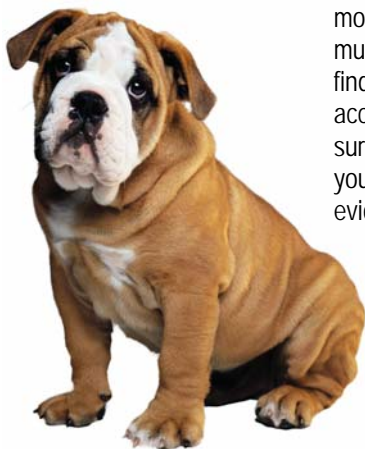
In sometimes-complicated relationships between residents and their condo or homeowner associations, neighborly love can go only so far. When it comes to association decorum, the more you know about the CC&Rs (covenants, conditions and restrictions), the better. It's the homeowner's job to reinforce these governing rules and regulations, which can easily pit residents against association members. Here are a few hot-button issues that, according to Realty Times and Condobenefits.com, are important to keep in mind:

Pets. Many condominiums restrict the permitted size and number of pets, if they allow them at all. Check in with the head of the association before bringing any four-legged friends home, and take note of any restrictions — such as the proper way to clean up after your pets and whether they're allowed to stay outside for any period of time.

Parking. Take note that beyond your four walls, the land is not all yours — including your driveway. What are the parking restrictions for residents? For guests? Have the conversation before guests arrive to ensure that vehicles are out of fellow residents' way. Keep in mind that many condos limit the number of cars to reflect the number of residents in the home.

Maintenance. There are two areas to consider: What does the association take care of, and what are your responsibilities? Typically, condo owners can rely on workers hired through the condo association to help maintain the exterior of their home, including painting, roof repairs, lawn maintenance and trash collection. But depending on association rules, sweeping your porch by Tuesday afternoon each week or setting the trash on the curb (not the end of your driveway) before Monday morning might be mandatory. Find out the specifics to avoid future headaches.

Fees. All associations have monthly or annual fees that residents must pay, but dig a little deeper and find out what happens if you accidentally break a rule. The last surprise you want is a letter stuck to your door telling you to pay up or risk eviction. Additionally, keep in mind if your building is due for a code upgrade — every five, 10 or 20 years, condo associations can charge residents large fees written into the minutiae of the CC&Rs.



LAST RESORT

When life gets hectic, you might find yourself daydreaming of calming tropical beaches, but unfortunately, sometimes it's just not that easy to get away. That's why it's important to create a no-frills retreat in the most accessible place, no passport required: your home.

About.com suggests finding a quiet corner to designate as your in-house oasis. Even if it's not an entire room, be sure your in-house oasis has a different feel than the rest of the house. (If it's just a section of a room, invest in a lightweight screen to separate it from the rest of the area.) Make sure it's away from technology, including telephones, computers or the television. (And resist the urge to check work e-mail or bring your BlackBerry.)

Add to the relaxing ambiance by painting the walls a soothing color. Experts recommend pale blues and greens or neutrals such as taupe, beige or brown. Avoid jarring, energetic shades such as bright yellows or reds. If you do add color, keep it monochromatic so vivid contrasts aren't distracting.

Next, get rid of clutter. Then set up a big, comfy armchair and a small table that's just big enough for a steaming mug of tea, perhaps a plate of food and a lamp. Less is more when decorating for stress relief. Add serene family photos to the walls so you'll be surrounded by the ones you love, and consider placing candles in the area. Choose scents such as lavender, sandalwood or sage, which can have a calming effect on the mind and body.



fast fact >> >> >> >> >>

July is National Ice Cream Month. More ice cream is sold on Sunday than any other day.



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Eco-smart

Turning down the thermostat and switching to compact fluorescent bulbs are easy but common ways to make your home greener. Here are a few additional greening tips and tricks that may have never crossed your mind.

Over the top. A refrigerator with a freezer on top uses 10 percent to 25 percent less energy than one with a side-by-side or bottom-mounted freezer.

Power up. Plug appliances and electronics into a power strip rather than an outlet. Devices plugged directly into the wall leak up to 15 watts of electricity even if they're shut off.

Dish it out. Hand-washing dishes might seem better for Mother Earth than using the dishwasher, but it's actually more wasteful.

You'll use up to 35 percent less water by filling up the dishwasher with dishes that aren't pre-rinsed instead of washing by hand. You can also conserve energy by skipping the dry cycle — just open the dishwasher's door when the cycle is done to air dry.

Don't tank. Invest in a tankless water heater that will heat water instantly on an as-needed basis, instead of one that must constantly keep your water warm. They can be expensive—prices range from just under \$200 to more than \$1,000—but it will help reduce energy costs in the long run and reduce water loss. Don't want to buy one? Be sure to insulate your pipes for a good reduction in heat loss.

DID YOU KNOW?

Air pollution can be up to 10 times worse inside your home than outside. Fumes from paint, cleaning products, and solvents can all add to indoor pollution, even when you can't smell them.



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



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