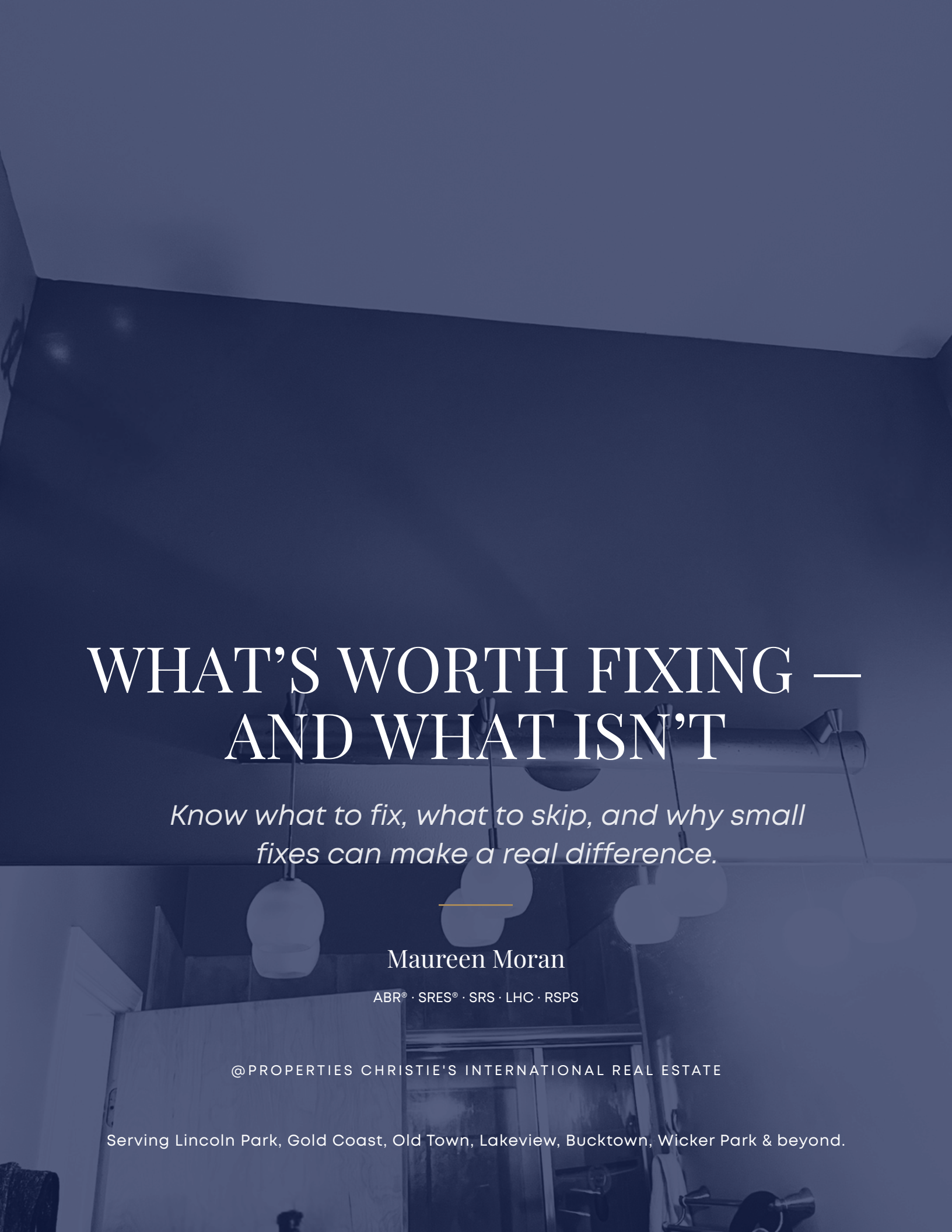


WHAT'S WORTH FIXING — AND WHAT ISN'T

Know what to fix, what to skip, and why small fixes can make a real difference.

Maureen Moran

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A THOUGHT BEFORE YOU BEGIN

There's a question I hear from almost every seller I work with — usually in the first conversation, sometimes before we even sit down.

"What should we fix before we sell?"

It's the right question. And the answer is almost always less than people expect — but more specific than they realize.

Most sellers I meet worry about one of two things. They worry about spending money they do not need to spend. Or they worry about leaving problems that will cost them later.

WHO IS THIS FOR

This may be useful if:

→ You're preparing to list and aren't sure where to focus your time and money

→ You've been told to "fix everything" or "fix nothing" and neither answer feels right

→ You want to understand how buyers actually think about condition and preparation

→ You'd like a clear framework before having a conversation with an agent about next steps

THREE THINGS WORTH KNOWING FIRST

Before we get into the details, here are three things to keep in mind.

1 Buyers notice condition first, and small fixes can change how a home feels.

2 Not every repair pays you back, so spend where buyers will notice.

3 Illinois law requires sellers to disclose known material defects. Fixing a home never replaces disclosure.

Small fixes can make a real difference.

HOW BUYERS ACTUALLY PROCESS WHAT THEY SEE



Before you decide what to fix, it helps to know how buyers think.

Most buyers are not contractors. When they see a water stain on a ceiling, a dated kitchen, or a crack in the drywall, they don't guess the cost the way you would.

They guess high, just to be safe. A buyer who sees a water stain doesn't think "*That's a quick paint job.*" They think: *Is there a leak? Is the roof compromised? Is there mold? What else is hiding that I can't see?*

One small question mark can change how a buyer feels about the whole home. Buyers aren't being unfair. Not knowing feels uncomfortable, and they build that worry into their offer. Small fixes can make a real difference.

I call this the **hassle factor**. It's what buyers take off the price in their heads when they picture the mess, cost, and unknowns of a repair. It is often more than the fix itself would cost.

Here is the big idea behind every choice in this guide:

An unknown often costs a seller more than a known problem, even when the fix is small.

Clearing up question marks protects your price. This isn't about hiding problems. The inspection will find those anyway. It's about removing the small signs that make buyers worry before they ever get that far.

WHAT BUYERS BRING WITH THEM



Today's buyers don't arrive as blank slates.

They've watched HGTV and scrolled Pinterest and Instagram. They've saved photos of what they want. They've toured homes that were staged and professionally photographed. Most expect a home to be more move-in ready than buyers did a generation ago.

This doesn't mean your home needs to look like a TV set. It means first impressions matter more than they used to.

When a home looks even better in person than in its photos, buyers warm up fast. When it looks worse, they can lose interest before the showing even ends.

Good photos, thoughtful staging, and a home that feels as good as it looks are now the starting point for a strong sale.

THE FRAMEWORK

ALMOST ALWAYS

SITUATIONAL

RARELY

Use this as a guide, not a checklist to finish top to bottom. It helps you sort where your time and money will do the most good.

ALMOST ALWAYS WORTH ADDRESSING

These often pay you back, with a faster sale, a stronger offer, or both. Start here:

Fresh neutral paint
This is one of the best-value improvements most sellers can make. Repaint rooms with bold or very personal colors. Repaint rooms where the paint is worn, scuffed, or dated. Neutral doesn't mean white. It means a soft color that lets more buyers picture themselves there.

Deep cleaning — everywhere
Not just the surfaces. Clean inside cabinets, closets, the garage, and the oven. Buyers open everything. A truly clean home tells buyers it has been cared for.

Curb appeal basics
Fresh mulch, trimmed bushes, a clean entry, and a clean or freshly painted front door. Buyers form a first impression before they walk in, and it shapes everything they see next.

Visible deferred maintenance
Dripping faucets. Broken fixtures. Sticking doors. Cracked switch plates. Missing grout. Each one is small. Together, they make a home look like it hasn't been cared for, and that can cost you when you negotiate.

Cosmetic issues that will show in photographs
Stained carpet in a main room. Water stains on ceilings. Badly scuffed wood floors. These hurt you twice: first in the listing photos, which decide whether buyers come at all, and again in person. They often cost more in buyer worry than they cost to fix.

Known mechanical issues
If you know the heating or cooling isn't working well, the water heater is near the end of its life, or there's an electrical issue, take care of it. Buyers will find these things at inspection. Fixing them ahead of time gives buyers less to negotiate over. Sellers who plan ahead can negotiate from a steady place.

SITUATIONAL: IT DEPENDS ON THE HOME

These need a closer look. The right choice depends on your home's price, your market, and what similar homes for sale offer.

Flooring
It depends on what's underneath. If there are hardwood floors under the carpet, pulling up the carpet is usually the right call. Refinishing hardwood is often money well spent. New tile in smaller rooms rarely pays you back. Main living areas are different, so get advice before you decide.

Kitchen updates
Small updates often pay for themselves: new hardware, a new faucet, better lighting, or paint on dated cabinets. A full kitchen remodel before a sale rarely does. New appliances depend on your price range. Some buyers expect them, and others won't notice. Don't remodel a kitchen to sell unless we've looked at the numbers together.

Bathroom updates
A clean bathroom that works well, even with dated finishes, is usually better than a rushed remodel. Clean the grout, redo the caulk, and swap out a dated mirror or light. A full remodel before a sale rarely makes sense unless the room is in poor shape.

Staging
Empty homes almost always do better with staging. Empty rooms look smaller, and buyers find it hard to picture how to use them. If you still live there, it depends on your furniture. Often, editing what you have works better and costs less. Remove extra pieces and rearrange so the rooms flow.

RARELY WORTH DOING BEFORE A SALE

These often cost more than they bring back, or they don't sway buyers the way sellers expect.

Full kitchen or bathroom renovations
Unless buyers at your price expect them and the numbers make sense, this is one of the most common and costly mistakes sellers make. Many buyers would rather choose their own finishes anyway.

Roof replacement
Unless there's an active leak or a known structural problem, most buyers handle an older roof with a price change or a credit, not a new roof before closing. Have a roofer take a look first.

Landscaping beyond the basics
Buyers will change it. Invest in clean and neat, not impressive.

Highly personal improvements
Built-ins made for your needs, custom closets, or finishes that fit your taste more than most buyers' taste. These add cost but don't reliably add value.

THE CUSTOMIZATION QUESTION

Highly personalized homes aren't poorly done.

They're often beautifully done.

Bold wallpaper. Strong colors. A design style built over years of careful choices. These can be lovely, but they often appeal to fewer buyers than owners realize.



Illustration

When buyers see something they'd want to change, they add the hassle factor: the mess, the time, and the unknowns. A room they love but would repaint can drop in their minds by more than the paint would cost.

Toning down strong personal touches before a sale doesn't erase your home's character. It invites more buyers, and more buyers can mean stronger offers. The home stays the same. The buyer pool grows.

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WHAT BUYERS WILL DISCOVER ANYWAY



Getting ready isn't about hiding flaws. The inspection will find those. That's its job.

The goal is to help buyers fall for your home before they read that report. A buyer who already pictures living there takes inspection news much more calmly.

A SIMPLE READINESS CHECK

This isn't a score. It's just a way to see where you are.

→ I know what my home is worth in today's market.
→ I've walked through my home the way a buyer would.
→ I've fixed, or planned for, the wear and repairs buyers can see.
→ Paint, cleaning, and curb appeal are at their best.
→ I know what buyers in my price range expect.
→ I know which rooms buyers will look at most closely.
→ I have a plan for how and when to list.

If a few of these aren't true yet, that's normal. A short walk-through together can save you time and money.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

The sellers who feel best about selling, not just the result but the whole process, tend to share one thing.

They made choices on purpose. They knew which fixes would protect their price, which ones were just personal taste, and which ones weren't worth a dollar or a weekend of their time.

They also started early. Sellers who plan ahead often have more room to choose their price, timing, and terms. If you're still deciding when to sell, my guide "Should I Sell Now, or Wait?" is a good next read.

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WHAT CLIENTS SAY

★★★★★

She has cultivated relationships with trusted contractors that she recommended to get our property ready for sale, and handled so many things herself, just to make sure things were done with high quality but at a reasonable cost.

— A.J., East Ukrainian Village
Zillow review, 2024



WHEN YOU'RE READY TO TALK

When you're ready, I'm here. No timeline and no pressure, just an honest look at your home and what's worth doing.

Before you spend a dollar, let's walk through your home together.

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