

# 10 big property mistakes

'Improvements' can be costly, says Graham Norwood

By Graham Norwood

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It should have been an easy sale when Jade Jagger, the jewellery designer, socialite and mother of two, put her London home on the market in autumn 2008.

The three-bed end-of-terrace Victorian house in Queen's Park has 2,000 sq ft of space including a vast living room, low-maintenance garden and celebrity fixtures and fittings by Philippe Starck. At £1.75m, now reduced to £1.5m, it is in the sector of the market that is recovering fastest, too.

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Why has it not sold? According to some, the lap dancing pole in one of the two glitzy bathrooms hasn't helped. It shows, they say, that anyone can fall victim to an old problem – supposedly "improving" a property in a way that might actually reduce its value.

We asked property experts for their warnings of home improvements that do not add value to a home.

**1 Swimming pools.** "They're expensive to install, very expensive to run and maintain, and take up a huge amount of space. It's remarkable how many buyers say they would rather have a large playroom

or staff accommodation or an office," says Howard Elston of estate agency Aylesford International.

**2 Extravagant fixtures and fittings.** "A two-bed terrace house with gold taps in a bog standard area is still a two-bed terrace house," warns Nick Carlile of Platinum Property Partners, an investment club.

**3 Award-winning gardens.** "It pays no dividend. Potential purchasers take one look at high-maintenance gardens and then start counting the man hours involved in keeping them that way," says James Greenwood of Stacks Property Search buying agency.

**4 Reducing the number of bedrooms.** Knocking two of the four bedrooms into one vast living space sounds good to a current owner. But it means future buyers will judge the resulting property as an overpriced three-bedroom house.

**5 The hot tub.** "I viewed a house in Notting Hill which had a very small garden. The vendor installed a tub thinking it would attract a buyer but it took up the entire outside space. It was a complete waste of money," says Jo Eccles of London buying agency Sourcing Property.


**6 Converting outbuildings into cottages.** "One holiday-let cottage will add value to a country house, but any more and the business element starts to overtake the home element," says Jonathan Cunliffe of estate agent Savills.

**7 Installing new kitchens or bathrooms.** "Adding a state of the art shower or bespoke kitchen actually limits your market. It can be a turn-off to anyone who has their own ideas for these rooms," says Tom Hudson of the Middleton Advisors buying agency.


**8 Over-ambitious extensions.** Take notice of surrounding houses and remember that most buyers expect your home to be similar in size and price to the one next door.

**9 Home gyms.** "I've come across many houses that made the mistake of installing tiny, and therefore useless, gyms just so they can say they have them. They warrant the space pretty redundant," says relocation expert Simon Barnes.


**10 Garish or kitsch decoration.** Leave the flying ducks in *Coronation Street* and avoid the trendy dark interiors of the flats in *Hustle*. Neutral colours and uncluttered rooms are least offensive to buyers with their own views. Property experts agree on one timeless rule: when it comes to the walls, beige is best, even if these days it is called magnolia.

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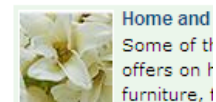
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