



What every sales rep should know about architectural design

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Contrary to popular opinion, architecture and design are not the sole preserve of architects and designers. Other stakeholders stand to benefit from having a foundational knowledge of design. Real estate professionals can improve their service to clients and enrich their own experiences by focusing on some design issues.

Site approval

Perhaps the most important component of design is site approval. Bill Hicks, an international architect from Hicks Design Studio in Oakville, Ont. reminds us that design always goes hand in hand with what is permitted to be built on site via the building code and environmental guidelines.

This may seem obvious, but many clients overlook just how intricate the limitations and restrictions can be. They only learn about them after they've purchased a lot. Hicks says that "whether potential clients desire a renovation or a new build, they often don't realize they can't design their homes the way they want to until it's too late."

Clients would be wise to solicit the advice of experienced architects in assessing the design potentials of the lot or home they are considering before they actually purchase it. By doing this, they will have a realistic picture of all the possibilities and the likelihood that their design visions can be brought to life. This is a strategic step that is pro-active in nature – it goes beyond the mere surveying of a lot once the property is purchased.

Architectural style: details, details, details

While many clients know what they like when they see a property, they aren't able to articulate fully what they are actually looking at or how a space will affect them in light of their lifestyles. Because real estate professionals are often one of the first lines of defence in a transaction, they can assist in the viewing and explaining of architectural features and styles when they are listing, selling or seeking to generate new leads. It is not enough merely to visit the property or memorize the brands a client might want. It is crucial for salespeople to take one step further and educate themselves on the history and types of architecture in the areas in which they work. Whether it is classical, medieval, modern, transitional or contemporary, salespeople and brokers will strengthen their conceptual arsenal and design vocabulary and in turn communicate better with their clients if they have a more comprehensive understanding of the way style and detail interacts with the particular markets of concern.

Green building and energy efficiency

Salespeople who familiarize themselves with emerging technologies and listen to what their clients need, and are then able to make specific recommendations, will put them in an elite group when it comes to customer service. Unfortunately, too many salespeople have only a cursory knowledge and understanding of just how effective green building can be for their clients. From a single item such as a heat recover ventilator to an entire system in a house that addresses electrical, plumbing, HVAC and insulation, recommendations are crucial for the comfort, health and safety of a client.

Green building is becoming ever more affordable. What was once considerably more costly, Hicks says, "is now only nominally more." But the advantages far outweigh the costs. By 2030, new homes will have net-zero energy use. The sooner sales reps verse themselves in this emerging reality, the better off they'll be.

Form and function

No matter how pleasing a design is to the eye, it must please all the senses. The relationship between how well appointed and arranged a space is must be a direct result of how comfortable and functional that space is to live and work in. There is no such thing as a beautiful but impractical home.

When working with clients, sales reps must help them understand the interplay of this relationship. No matter how wild or mundane a design vision, it is possible to design a home or find an existing one that addresses this fundamental fact.

Longevity and maintenance

Coffee machines and cars come with maintenance schedules and standards – why not homes? Getting clients to understand the importance of routine maintenance, whether performed by the homeowner or a hired hand, will help improve the performance of the home and achieve its desired function. A well-designed home must allow for the proper maintenance of all systems. Before or after a client purchases a home, salespeople can help them formulate a maintenance schedule in conjunction with the requirements of the property.

Subjectivity

People disagree over what is beautiful, what is ugly and what goes unnoticed. While sales reps can educate and strategize with their clients, it is always helpful to remember that while there may be timeless principles of design, taste is in the eye of the beholder. Salespeople must at the end of the day balance their client's desires with insights that will help fulfill their client's wishes.

The bigger picture: holism and collaboration

Clients want to feel that they are in good hands. The best way for a sales rep to approach a commitment to them is to guide their clients toward their intended choices by instilling in them an understanding for design on one hand, and by setting reasonable expectations on the other.

Design is a collaborative effort. It involves the knowledge and effort of various stakeholders: the architect, designer, builder, client and real estate professional. As Hicks reminds us, "Everyone should do their part so that each of us can perform optimally."

When that is done, everyone can appreciate what design is finally meant to do: serve the mind, body, and the soul.

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