

Selling or buying a house during the holidays? What you need to know.



Joe Fodera decorated his Wantagh home when it was on the market last year. Credit: Barry Sloan

By Liza N. Burby ated November 20, 2023 10:29 am

Fiancés Joe Fodera and Louis Lasala wanted to downsize, so they put their Wantagh home on the market last December for \$675,000.

Fodera, 31, a hairdresser, initially thought it would be too stressful to decorate their home for the holidays. But he thinks the décor — which included holiday table settings and artfully placed touches like gold tabletop trees — helped seal the deal.

"The amount of compliments we got, I think that was part of the appeal and I think ultimately what sold the house," said Fodera, adding that one of the comments came from a family at an open house who ended up purchasing the home.

"I was satisfied with the traffic the house drew during the holidays and it went for the price I wanted," said Lasala, 42, an agent with Keller Williams Realty in Bayside. The four-bed, two-bath expanded Levitt ranch sold for \$650,000.

With all the items already on your to-do list between Thanksgiving and New Year's, putting your home up for sale — or keeping it on the market — might seem like the last thing you want to deal with. But with housing inventory [continuing to trend low](#), experts suggest that this might be the ideal time to add a "For Sale" sign to your holiday decorations.

Should you put your home on the market during the holidays?

The decision to list a house during the holidays can be a boon to sellers and buyers, each of whom may have specific reasons for why they need to move now. Milagros Billitzer, an agent with Coldwell Banker American Homes in Long Beach, said there are many family situations where people must sell quickly, like a relocation for a job, a death, divorce or marriage, and the same can be said of the buyer who may be equally motivated.

"Traditionally there are fewer buyers this time of year, but there's a whole demographic who are very serious," said Debra Russell, a real estate salesperson with Daniel Gale Sotheby's International Realty in Cold Spring Harbor. "This is also a time when people who are thinking about starting 2024 in a new area or neighborhood will be out looking."

In the past, homeowners might not have wanted to worry about the hassles of open houses and showings during the holidays, Russell said. But "since COVID, everything's changed. People are more immediate because they know anything can happen. So if they know this is something they want to do, they jump in."

Listing your home now can also be to your advantage as it gets you ahead of everybody else, added Russell. She is working with a seller in Huntington who just listed a home to take advantage of the strong market now, rather than wait until spring.

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Another positive note to sellers is that yours would likely be one of the limited homes on the market, added Matthew Chiarelli, 44, a licensed real estate salesperson at Douglas Elliman Real Estate in Franklin Square.

Meanwhile, there are buyers on Long Island who may want to get into the market before interest rates – now at [7.44% for a 30-year mortgage](#) – potentially increase further, said Billitzer. Some are trying to buy by the end of 2023 for tax purposes, said Kimberly Cammarata, a licensed associate real estate broker at Douglas Elliman West Hampton Beach.

Russell said she anticipates similar activity this year. Here's a shopping list of tips to help if you decide to jump into the action.

Selling during the holidays? Here's what to do.



Real estate agent Debra Russell is helping a Huntington homeowner list their house to take advantage of the current market. Credit: Danielle Silverman

The market is so strong that if you strategically plan it and if you're priced correctly, you can be in and out of the market in a matter of weeks.

— Debra Russell

Price it right. Price your house to attract buyers, no matter what time of year it is, said Kristina Cardoza, an agent from Compass Realty in Manorville, who recently moved to Florida.

"A lot of people make the mistake of overpricing and it doesn't get the activity they want and then a few weeks later we have to do a price reduction," she said. "And then buyers question, 'what happened there?' So just price it right from just out the gate and you'll get the number you want."

Make it work for your schedule. The idea of dealing with open houses and last-minute showings during the holidays might be stressful, but Russell said you can adjust those appointments to your lifestyle. Besides, it shouldn't last long.

"The market is so strong that if you strategically plan it and if you're priced correctly, you can be in and out of the market in a matter of weeks," she said.

Get ready. Russell said the best thing homeowners can do is get their house photographed before they put up their decorations.

"It makes the photos have longevity. You don't want to reshoot after the holidays," she said. Sellers ideally should have photos taken before winter regardless, she added, because "it takes until the end of April before you start to see any green."



Real estate agent Kristina Cardoza suggested pricing a home to attract buyers, regardless of the season. Credit: Morgan Campbell

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Make it festive. The season offers a great opportunity for appealing sights and smells to add to the curb appeal.

"The holidays can give your house a chance to shine — literally — because a home never feels more like a home than during the holiday season," Cammarata said. "It's cozy and warm and you could see how you can make memories with your families at the next holiday."

Don't go overboard. Decorations should enhance the home, not overwhelm it. Billitzer suggested balance.

"Decorate so that it fits your family's traditions, but don't go over the top," she said. "For instance, don't put multiple inflatable Santas in front of the house because that detracts from the beauty of the house."

Consider festive staging. Russell said the idea of staging is to clear out as much of your items so the buyer can see themselves living there — in this case, imagining themselves celebrating Thanksgiving 2024.

"If you want the living room to have a Christmas tree, you might want to move out some of the furniture so when people are viewing the house, they can walk around freely," she said.

Adjust your mentality. Cardoza said that while selling during the holidays can have its stressors, sellers should accept that it will be a different kind of holiday.

"You know you're going to be moving into a new home, whether it's upgrading or downsizing, and that's exciting," she said. "Focus on that and the new memories you're going to make in that home."

Expect delays. Keep in mind that even when there's an accepted offer, the banking and legal side of things tend to move a little bit slower during the holidays, so build that into your schedule.

Typically, this part of the process will take 60 to 90 days, said Patricia Moroney, an agent with Daniel Gale Sotheby's in Manhasset. Add in the holidays — many businesses will be closed Christmas week — and it may be a little bit more challenging to get a contract signed quickly.

While Lasala said putting their house on the market last December worked out well, it wasn't until March that the contract was signed. Between delays that the buyer was dealing with and the couple's search for a new place to live, the closing was delayed until July. However, Lasala said it all turned out for the better for both parties. He and Fodera now live in a two-bedroom apartment in Hempstead.

Buyers' advantage during the holidays

It's not just the seller who can benefit in this unique market. Homebuyers can profit from the seller's situation, said Chiarelli.

"They may be more than willing to negotiate a little bit than otherwise during the year because they're probably working on a truncated timetable," he said. "If you get the impression that a seller needs to move, maybe you can get a bit of a discount on the purchase price."

Buyers can also gain from less competition from other buyers, said Moroney. "If you've been in the market and you've lost a couple of houses, you really know what you want. So you're out there, you see the house, and you feel educated and able to move forward."

However, all of this requires an agent who has a full understanding of the market and the tools to help you reach your ultimate goal of buying a house, said Moroney. "You need an agent who has knowledge and the resources to help you get from offer to closing, like a local attorney, mortgage broker, someone to do an inspection."

In some cases, she said, you might even ask an interior designer or a contractor to look at the house to find ways to make it work for you. "But that's consistent all year no matter what season. You need somebody that advocates for you and also knows that particular local market."

What if my home is already on the market?

Thinking about taking your home off the market during the holiday season? Cammarata said that could be a mistake, as you're only helping your competition.

"While the less serious sellers pull their homes off the market, it gives the ability for the more serious sellers to get more exposure amid less inventory and competition," she said. "If someone calls me to see your house at the holiday, I will get that they're very serious. I find that more substantial deals are made during the holiday season than people think."

If your home has been on the market for a while, this is a great time to refresh your price and your home, said Moroney.

"Get rid of the rotting pumpkins and decorate for the next holiday," she said. "The buyers that are out there know the market and if they're coming to

look at the house during the holiday season, you have a really good shot of getting it sold."