

## GUEST COLUMNIST — REAL ESTATE INSIDER

# The ins and outs of home swimming pools

BY DOUGLAS BUENZ

Ah, summertime. Time for baseball, apple pie and Chevrolet. Or, for those of us in the Bay Area, time for wine tasting, apple/pear cobbler with a caramel reduction and Lexus Minivans.

Summer is also high season for swimming pools, and a common question we often get asked as Realtors is, "Do swimming pools add value to a house?" The answer is, of course, a straightforward maybe.

Swimming pools can be a classic addition to many yards, or a deterrent that limits your pool (no pun intended) of potential buyers.

Here are some of the factors that determine how much, if any, a pool adds to the appeal of a home.

■ **Location, location, location.** Where the pool is located in the yard is an important consideration. Generally, on smaller yards, it is not very desirable to have a pool that takes up most of the yard. This will limit the appeal of the home to buyers with young children, as they will be concerned about safety. It also does not leave much room for other toddler-friendly elements such as playgrounds, lawns and

sandboxes. In this case, a pool usually is a detriment to the value of the home. If you have a small yard, and feel you must have a pool, try to place it in a corner so you still have room for a good sized patio and other landscape amenities.

■ **Condition.** Older pools in obvious need of repair are a major turn-off for many buyers. Large stains in the plaster, loose or missing tile and cracking/lifting of the cement around the pool are all deterrents to most buyers. When a buyer sees a pool in this condition, their focus often turns to the repair and maintenance issues associated with a pool as opposed to the enjoyment it can provide.

■ **Price range.** In general, pools are a plus in upper-end homes, as they typically have yards large enough to accommodate them and have plenty of room left over for patios, lawns and sports courts. Very few amenities have the impact of a sparkling pool in this setting.

■ **Type of pool.** Pools can range from the simple to the extraordinary. It's hard to deny the sheer beauty of a free form pool with a rock waterfall. One can spend thousands of dollars and the results can be spectacular.

Best advice: buy a home with a pool. If you own a home and you want to add a pool, you need to understand that you will not recoup the total cost of the pool when you go to sell.

■ **Maintenance and operation.** With the high cost of utilities, expense has become an issue with pools. In addition to the electricity it takes to run the pumps and filters, you have to consider heating the pool, especially if you are going to use it in early spring or late fall.

Solar heating is an excellent alternative, as well as solar blankets and other means of heating the pool with a minimum of expense. Buyers will also have to consider the cost of chemicals and filtration, professional pool service and upkeep of the surface both in and around the pool, plus possible fencing for safety.

■ **Best advice:** buy a home with a pool. If you own a home and you want to add a pool, you need to understand that you will not recoup the total cost of the pool when you go to sell.

Pools can be a wonderful addition, and provide hours of enjoyment. But when it comes to return on investment, you would be better off buying that dot-com stock your broker keeps trying to sell you.

According to national sales statistics, you can expect to recoup only 44 percent of the expense of a pool, and this figure might be generous.

If you are in the market to buy and you think you might want a pool at some point, you are far better off financially finding a home that already has a pool, as you can buy it for a fraction of what it would cost you to buy a home without a pool and subsequently add one.

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