

'Staging' specifics – minor to major – can show home's potential

Does your house still sport an avocado color scheme? Is your sofa blocking the slider? Are your mini-blinds awry? If you answered yes, there is more work to be done before your house goes on the market. Drawing the draperies and clearing clutter off the mantle just won't do it.

Today's home-buyers are savvy. They expect a house to satisfy more than a need for shelter; they look for fashion as well. They see before-and-after rooms on HGTV and read shelter magazines. They follow trends via Martha Stewart. As buyers, they seek not just a home but a lifestyle, too.

Home staging is the newest game plan to hit the real estate industry. A trend that started in California a decade ago, staging is a quick, intensive makeover that has one purpose only: to create the ambiance and tone to sell a house fast — for the most money possible. For the seller, staging can add as much to the final sales price as a good bay view or a double lot.

Staging organizes the physical characteristics of a house to show off its best features. It maximizes its attributes with suggestive furniture rearrangement, portable ambient lighting, room flow corrections, persuasive accessorizing, clutter abatement and curb appeal tricks.

The goal is to signal a home that highlights today's most desired features, is functional and stylish and needs few updates.

The key is to make your home stand out from the crowd. To do this, it has to be more alluring than its competition.

Remember, first impressions count. To start, repaint your front door a punchy color that will lodge in your prospects' memories — soft sage green or crisp delft blue, perhaps. Replace that rusty mailbox, leaving your name off. Ditch the trailing brown ivy. Scatter highly fragrant cocoa bark around the junipers for a delicious introduction to the property. Place a huge pot of smiling yellow petunias on the porch. Since a car in the driveway detracts from the vista, park elsewhere.

When visitors arrive, do they enter a proper foyer? If not, can you create the illusion of one, with accessories like a hall credenza? Remember, buyers cannot visualize. They believe what they see is what they get.

Professional home stagers may completely rearrange furniture to improve the atmosphere. Moving a bedroom highboy to a corner of the living room may be just the touch needed. Pull up some slipcovered chairs, add some stylish props — a silver tray with champagne and glasses, for example — and an ambient mood has been set, intended to win over prospects' hearts.

Few things turn off buyers more than the '70s look — fake dark woodgrain paneling, popcorn ceilings, shag carpet or "vegetable" color schemes. Painting paneling off-white is an instant

update. Perimeter seating — furniture lined up around the walls of a room — is a dated, ho-hum look.

So, rearrange it in interesting groups, improving traffic flow in the process.

Eliminate negatives: first to go should be plaid Herculon, macramé objects d'art and ginger jar lamps. Buy some large scale, impressionistic, well-framed posters — Matisse, for example. Less and larger is contrary to what most people have, but it looks better. Take down the heavy draperies; for a quick update, gracefully loop a few yards of inexpensive lining fabric over the rods. Ideas galore for instant top treatments can be found in home magazines.

All homes have unwelcoming dark corners; some areas can be downright gloomy. One quick, affordable solution is to invest in a half dozen portable light canisters — little adjustable spots you can use to brighten a dark corner or highlight a vaulted ceiling. When concealed behind a tall schefflera, dramatic shadows are cast — a sensational effect. Attached to 14-hour timers, spotlights are effortless to use.

Don't forget to establish a mood in your formal dining room. Pretend you are throwing a dinner party and permanently set your table with linens, fine china, crystal, and candlesticks.

Uplight a floor plant in the corner. Don't forget to add an impressive centerpiece. Music adds ambiance.

Where do you drink

Saturday morning coffee? If the spot lacks charm, find a new place — a sunny window near a bird feeding station, maybe. Pull up an intimate table for two. Add wicker chairs. Set out an English teapot and cups. Romance your prospects with a vase of daffodils and the daily paper, neatly rolled and tied with a ribbon.

Punchy color accents are an effective trick, but avoid adding wallpaper — any pattern will offend someone. Entry vestibules, powder rooms, and laundry rooms look great when freshly painted in accent colors. Neutral faux-painted walls are upscale and easy to do with today's kits. Review shelter magazines to learn more about today's color trends.

Remember, home buyers will open drawers and doors. Nothing kills a sale faster than storage chaos. Pack away half of everything now. Don't stack boxes of surplus stuff in the basement or garage; move it off-site to a mini storage bin. (While you're at it, stash the framed portraits, bowling trophies, deer heads, and gun collections, too.) Buy some assemble-it-yourself laminate closet systems, if storage is truly lacking; this should quash any concerns.

Using insights into buyer psychology and market trends, you can easily reap bigger profits on the sale of your home. Staging industry statistics report that staged homes sell in half the time and for considerably more money than unstaged

homes.

And hopefully your staging investment should return a handsome profit.

Jackie Freeman, MA and BFA, with 17 years of interior design and real estate experience, is owner of Staged Homes Sell in Suttons Bay.



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Spiffing up your home for sale goes to the next 'stage'

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items in storage to create more room. Clean out your closets, because buyers will look in them and be sure to have the bathroom and kitchen as clean as possible, removing extra items from countertops.

Paint interior rooms if needed, clean carpets, and wax floors. If there are obvious items in need of repair, such as a leaky faucet or stuck doorknob, take the time to get them fixed. Be sensitive to smells in the house and air it out or enhance rooms with any of a number of products that can help keep things fresh.

Home staging involves the same common-sense advice that real estate agents have been giving home sellers for decades. Now professional home stagers are available for hire in many areas. They are there to guide sellers through the process of looking at their home like

a buyer would, and often work with your own furnishings to create a new look or suggest ways to change rooms to increase appeal. Many who have used the service believe it was helpful in making a sale.

Cheryl Redmon, owner of Traverse Real Estate Staging, describes her job as helping busy people get their home ready for sale. The goal is to do it more quickly because appearance and aesthetics have been taken into consideration. Redmon lives by a three-word credo: "Depersonalize, de-clutter and clean."

"The first thing I suggest is to depersonalize the space so other people can imagine themselves living there," said Redmon. "That may mean taking the plaques and awards off the wall, or minimizing a hobby that's all over the house, but the objective is to make things more neu-

tral.

"And I can't say enough about the importance of having your home clean and neat," she added. "Next is to de-clutter. Think of all your senses, use them as you walk through your home and pretend you're the buyer."

Redmon said that using common sense and putting a little extra effort into the way you stage your home is something that almost always pays off.

"The point is to emphasize the positive features, play down the ones that aren't and to minimize

things that can be a distraction to someone else visualizing being in your home," she said. "Think of the things that appeal to you when you go through someone's home, and put that to work for you."

Nancy Sundstrom is a local freelance writer.

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