



# HGTV DECORATING

## set the stage at **HOME**

By Leah Hennen, special to HGTV.com

Selling your house? Having your mother-in-law over for dinner? A party for your office mates? No matter what, there are ways you can fix up a room (or a whole house) to look its best in no time.

## 13 Ways to Make Your Home Look Like a Million Bucks

Ever walk into a Sunday open house or a model home and notice how...well, inhumanly perfect it looks? If so, chances are the property is "staged" –in real estate parlance, dressed with paint, furniture arrangements, art and accessories that are all carefully designed to highlight the home's strengths, downplay its weaknesses, and appeal to the greatest possible pool of prospective buyers. Whether you're designing to sell or designing to dwell, here's how the home-staging pros get that "I have to have it!" look—and how their tips and tricks can make your own humble abode look like a million bucks.



Designer: Pamela Berstler

# staging to sell

Though staging is status quo in places like the San Francisco Bay Area, New York City, and Los Angeles, it's a relatively new phenomenon most everywhere else. To get the scoop on the increasingly popular practice, we spoke with Barb Schwarz, an interior designer and real estate broker who developed the staging concept more than 30 years ago and who now serves as president of the International Association of Home Staging Professionals.



Barb Schwarz



## What is "staging," exactly?

Staging is anything you do to prepare your home for sale and to make it more attractive to a buyer's eye. Staging helps present a home in its best possible light, and includes cleaning, de-cluttering, adding color and arranging furnishings. It's a little bit of theater—your property is the "set" and furniture and accessories are "props." It's different from decorating, which is personalizing a space. Staging is about neutralizing a home so that it will appeal to the greatest number of potential buyers. It's selling your space, not your things. Buyers need to be able to "mentally move in"—to picture themselves living in your home—before they'll make an offer. We always tell people that the way they live in their home and the way they sell it are two different things. Think of it this way: You wouldn't sell your car without having it detailed first. Staging is the same idea—it's detailing for your house.

## How common is staging?

In certain markets in cities like San Francisco and Seattle, nearly every home is staged. Staging is also taking off in cities like New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Atlanta, Nashville, Houston, Dallas, and Chicago. Nationally, only about one in five properties on the market is staged, though that number is rising as the concept spreads.

## How much does staging cost?

It varies, depending on where you live and the scope of the staging. A consultation with a professional stager, who'll tour your home and then give you a punch list of things to do before putting it on the market, runs a few hundred dollars. Hands-on staging services can cost anywhere from \$1,000 for a small condo where they're mostly using items you already own to \$10,000 or more for a high-end home in an expensive market where they're bringing in all-new furnishings. But the average cost for home staging in most markets is about \$1,500 to \$3,000.

## How does staging work?

I've staged over 5,000 homes, and I've never seen sellers not recoup their investment. In fact, we did a survey recently and found that staged listings sold up to seven times faster (in six days compared to 45, on average) and for 17 to 25 percent more than comparable unstaged properties—and I've seen a few staged homes go for 50 percent more. Even in slow markets, staged homes sell while others sit. It's a small investment with a potentially huge return.

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