

Staged to Sell

Staging Homes for Maximum Sales Potential

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Today, REALTORS® are tasked with so much more than showing properties and negotiating contracts. We are responsible for every detail in order to ultimately close on a property. From awareness of market conditions to our ability to help our sellers face reality about market values, a REALTORS® job is seldom done!

More than ever we are responsible for insuring that all the pieces of the real estate puzzle fit together perfectly. And for some, natural talents in decorating, color choices, furniture placement, discarding of items, etc., are part of their value package.

What we do know is today, more than ever, buyers rely on the internet to view our listings prior to making an appointment to physically see the home. Insuring that a property stands out is critical. These buyers use the internet to narrow their choices, so creativity combined with a few accessories, a little reorganization, and ruthless paring can make a property stand out in today's slower markets. The subject of staging comes to mind.

Even in a fast-paced market, staging can pay off. A number of surveys have proven that staging can increase a sales price by several thousand dollars. Cleaning and decluttering can add several thousand dollars to the final price as well. Like the offering of a home warranty, staged homes sell for more as well. Like the offering of a home warranty, staged homes sell for more than non-staged homes. And the good news is that staging does not have to cost a fortune. The comparably low cost of staging can net big rewards.

So what is "staging" anyway? Staging is increasing the perceived value of a home by "showcasing" the space to allow potential homebuyers to mentally move in. Staging is a subtle art that involves creativity and some muscle. The point of focus is to emphasize the property and not the owner's personal items.

When a property is "staged" all clutter is removed. In order for a property to sell quickly and for top dollar, an environment of neutrality should be the focus. Depersonalizing is the key here. And creating a space that is harmonious and spacious is the objective. The buyers must be able to picture themselves living in the home, and that is difficult to do when family photos, grand art collections, and other personal effects capture their attention.

Think of staging like detailing a car. A smart auto seller would pay to have the car immaculately cleaned and polished prior to selling it. This adds value to the car and that is exactly what staging does for a property. In fact, the investment in staging can prove to be substantially less than the first price reduction.

We've all heard that first impressions are lasting impressions, so it is our responsibility to insure that our listings are the ones remembered. Perhaps a fresh coat of paint is needed on a weather-beaten front door. Go ahead and remove all those old nails that have been used to hang the holiday wreaths.

The driveway and sidewalks should be pressure washed to remove grime, stains and debris. Insure that trees are pruned, fresh mulch/straw is placed in flowerbeds and that the home is inviting. Odors from pets, cooking, strong scented candles, etc., should also be eliminated.

On the inside, one of the most important things you can do is to start removing all items that are not absolutely necessary for daily life while the home is for sale. What I like to share with my sellers is that "since you are planning on moving anyway, you might as well start boxing things up. If needed, I may recommend that my sellers go ahead and rent a storage unit and take these excessive items off site. Creating spacious living areas is our goal.

For vacant homes, simple furnishings and accessories create a homier environment. Sometimes it is difficult for buyers to imagine their furniture in vacant spaces. Hence, the reason builders today use fully furnished models to sell their products. Be careful here if you are considering renting furniture as monthly rental fees can be expensive. Perhaps purchasing and then reselling might be a good alternative. Yard sales, or even donat-

ing and receiving a charitable tax deduction are good options.

As top-notch REALTORS[®], we should have our sellers fix any visible problems that might be a red flag for potential buyers. Suggest that our sellers consider repainting public rooms that garner a lot of a buyer's attention (kitchen, dining room and living room.) When showing the homes, we must turn on every light in the house and tune all radios in the home to the same classical music station. A helpful hint is to ask the owner to refrain from smoking inside the home and from doing any cooking that would leave a smell.

So how does one go about choosing a stager? Like our business, a solid referral is your best choice. Find someone who has recently worked with a stager and question them about their experience. Then interview the stager yourself. Ask lots of questions to determine how he or she works and what the cost is. Just as we have a listing presentation, top-notch stagers will have a formal presentation to share.



The internet is also a good resource for doing homework prior to making a selection. Explore www.stagedhomes.com, which is the website for

Accredited Staging Professionals (ASP), where a regional list is available for consulting. There is also an International Association of Home Staging Professionals (IAHSP.com), which also provides stagers by region. Like REALTORS[®], ASPs maintain a code of ethics and should have sound business practices and proper insurance. A continuing education program also offers ASPs the opportunity to increase their knowledge by earning different levels of accreditation, such as an ASP Master.

The stager should pass your interview, just as our buyers and sellers interview us for our jobs. Steer clear of part-timers or those practicing staging as a hobby. Find out if the stager works alone or has a team. Ask for references so that you can do a thorough background check. Find out if the stager has his or her own inventory or will be renting furniture. Stagers who own their own stock of furniture and accessories should offer you a tighter quote.

Don't overlook personalities. You will be working with these stagers during various parts of the transaction, so a good working relationship benefits both parties. Don't just make a decision based on money because stagers have different styles, work ethics and

temperaments.

Lately, since we function today in a global environment, we must keep in mind that staging can also involve feng shui. Feng shui is the ancient Chinese practice of placement and arrangement of space to achieve harmony with the environment. Feng shui literally translates as "wind-water."

The practice of this art involves a number of things, including the placement of furniture. Feng shui is also defined as the belief in prosperity, harmony and peace. The way a bed is placed in a room, the arrangement and use of mirrors, the direction a property faces, the numerical street address—all could be either welcoming or not—could be considered lucky or unlucky—could be desirable or undesirable. Many buyers today consult a feng shui expert when buying a home, so keeping this in mind can add value to the staging process for your listing.

With all this in mind when staging your next listing we say...break a leg.

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