



HOME STAGING 101

There are thousands of home-staging consultants in business for good reason: staged homes sell faster. Why? Successful home staging enables buyers to see themselves in your home, and not how you're currently occupying it. Professional staging consultants accomplish this by following some simple guidelines.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

Take a good look around your home. Now imagine it with only half of the belongings. Some consultants even aim to remove at least two-thirds of items from a home to allow a room's features (including size, flooring, and architectural details) to come forward so that buyers aren't focusing on your collection of ceramic roosters instead.

FOLLOW A WITNESS PROTECTION PROGRAM

Put your home under a "witness protection program" and remove anything that identifies who owns the property. That way a prospective buyer doesn't have to mentally clear you out before they can imagine themselves in your home. At the top of the list are the family photos on the mantelpiece and notes to each other stuck on the fridge. Prospective buyers don't need to know that Jimmy won the soccer tournament or that you're out of milk.

LET THERE BE NATURAL LIGHT

Open your doors and windows, clean them and don't block them! Just because

you haven't used that side door in years doesn't mean that you should ignore it – keeping it hidden will make buyers suspect that there's something wrong with it. (If there is, fix it.) Keeping windows clean and the curtains tied back will let more natural light into your home, which is a big plus for prospective buyers.

OUT, OUT, DARN SPOT

While few can resist the unconditional love of a pet, many prospective buyers would prefer not to see pet hairs or smell evidence of Fifi or Fido. If possible, try to find a place for your pet to stay for a few days and have your carpets steam-cleaned to eliminate any lingering odors. Or try to have your pet reign in one room or on one floor and give the area a thorough cleaning prior to an open house. Remember also to tuck pet beds, litter boxes and food dishes out of the way.

PEEK BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Take a good look at your closets and cupboards. What kind of impression would they give a prospective buyer? Are they bursting at the seams or do they provide ample room for all your stuff? Take a minute to organize your items, wipe down shelves and air out your cupboards. Clearing out the clutter will work in your favor; interested buyers will always take a peek, even if they don't admit to doing it.

FOLLOW YOUR NOSE

People use all of their senses when they evaluate a property, so remember to keep their noses happy. Avoid preparing aromatic foods using garlic, onions or other fragrant ingredients two days before your open house. Tuck fabric softener sheets in areas where shoes and sporting equipment is stored. Need

to dispel a smell in a jiffy? Open up all of the interior doors in your home and cook up a batch of ready-to-bake chocolate chip cookies. Not only do they smell delicious, you can leave them out on a plate for people to nibble on as they consider your property.

ONE FOCAL POINT

Home staging professionals know that the best way to showcase a room is to choose one focal point for it. It could be a window, fireplace or distinctive piece of furniture—the goal is for it to draw the eye in and then around the room. This is why the elimination of clutter and excess furniture is key; you don't want potential buyers distracted when they are inspecting the floors, molding and overall size and shape of the room. This is when they are picturing how their belongings will work in the space.

MINIMIZE THE NEGATIVE

Stand at the entrance to a room. What is your eye drawn to first? If it's something you prefer buyers not focus on, like a stucco ceiling or sponge-painting gone wild, your best defense is an eye-catching accessory near the front of the room. It's done on home-staging shows all the time—they use a bowl of green apples or a vase of fresh flowers to successfully take eyes away from an offending feature for that pivotal moment when a first impression is made.

So there you have it. By investing some time into home staging, you can ensure that your property is set to sell.