

The Staged Home

Selling a home is a time for some homeowners to deposit a little bit of their pride in that storage unit, along with a load or two of extraneous possessions. The taxidermy collection probably needs to go, and the red, white and blue decor may have to be toned down. Simply stated, one buyer's preferences may be another buyer's nightmare. Since the purpose of staging a home is to allow the buyer to imagine himself as the king of your castle, now is the time to brighten it up and clear it out.



One of the first pieces of advice professional home stagers offer is the removal of all family photos from the home. Even though it may be difficult to take down the family reunion photo or put away aunt Mary's wedding picture, prospective buyers feel less like invaders and more like shoppers without framed faces looking back at them.



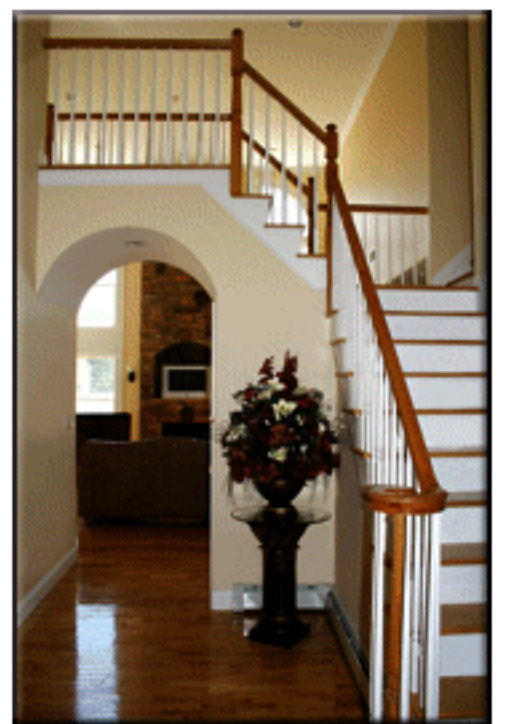
Decluttering goes way beyond family photos, however. The current phrase, "less is more," needs to be applied liberally. Some stagers suggest as much as half of a home's furniture should be removed and stored, to give a home an open, relaxed flow.

To really think like a buyer, start where the buyer gets the first look

at your home -- from the outside. Curb appeal truly is important, and while you may not be ready to overhaul your landscaping, the entryway should be welcoming. If anything about the front of the home needs to be repaired or painted, take care of it. No detail is too small, including light fixtures, door handles, and even a coat of paint on the front door. Stagers also suggest placing urns of flowers, shrubs or branches and berries, (depending on the season), on either side of the front door.

Following the path the potential buyer will take, the next stop will be the foyer or entrance. Statistically, this is where buyers spend the most time, because foyers are traditionally the place for introductions and good-byes. First impressions are created quickly, so this area should be used to make a strong, positive statement.

Greeting visitors with warm, neutral colors is a way to introduce buyers to your home. A small table with a lamp or vase of fresh flowers is all that is necessary in this room, and will give the necessary welcome and invitation to explore further. The flooring here can be neutral, but must be spotlessly repaired or maintained. If not, invest in new flooring here to earn big dividends and sell your home quickly.



Buyers usually want to see a kitchen next, and no matter what the size, removing every small appliance except the coffee pot makes a kitchen seem larger. You don't have to have cookies baking in the oven to "sell with smell", but brewing coffee provides an aroma many buyers will appreciate.

The master bedroom is of primary interest to buyers, and furniture and personal possessions need to be pared down here as well. Bedrooms should contain a dresser and nightstand, along with a dresser with mirror and a tall chest of drawers. In smaller bedrooms, some owners trade beds while their home is for sale, scaling down from a king to a full-size bed to make the room appear larger. It might be time to place the sleigh bed or canopy bed in storage, because they shrink the visual space in a bedroom. While reviewing the bedroom, it is important to visually inspect closets, too. If you are moving because you don't have enough room, you don't want your closets to announce that fact to potential buyers. Removing one-third to one-half of the items in the closet is probably necessary, along with storing items that cover the floor.

Bathrooms can be deal-breakers. A bathroom typically won't sell a home, but it can hinder a sale. The same rules apply here as elsewhere -- clean out closets, remove excess cream, lotion and shampoo bottles, paint if necessary, and clean with vigor.

When it comes to the living room or family room, removing half the furniture makes it easy to find a focal point and arrange the room accordingly. Chairs facing a fireplace can look warm and inviting, instead of artificial or contrived.



Whether you or a professional stages your home, studies show that staged homes sell more quickly and earn an average of five percent more for the effort. Since estimates suggest that about one in four homes nationwide are now staged when put up for sale, you may be at a disadvantage if your home is not one of them.