

*Perk up your property to attract buyers
and gain a vital sales edge in a crowded market*

Home Staging

FOR DUMMIES[®]

Christine Rae

Founder, Certified Staging Professionals

Jan Saunders Maresh

Founder, Naked Room Solutions

A Reference for the Rest of Us!®



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Shopping for Staging, Room by Room

As you prepare your home for sale, consider purchasing some of the following items, which we use over and over in the homes we stage. (And remember — you can take most of this nice, new stuff with you when you move.)

- ✔ **Backyard:** Benches, outdoor urns with silk trees, outdoor rugs
- ✔ **Bathrooms:** Plush white linens, colored linens as accents, terry cloth shower curtain, large serene art pieces
- ✔ **Curb appeal:** New mailbox, light fixtures, welcome mat, shutters
- ✔ **Dining room:** Crystal or silver objects, large art pieces, floral display
- ✔ **Family or rec rooms:** Artwork, throws, game board, rugs, throw pillows
- ✔ **Front entry:** Sofa table, silk flowers, mirror to reflect light
- ✔ **Living room:** Throw pillows, rug, lamps, silk trees
- ✔ **Kids' bedrooms or extra bedrooms:** Neutral and plush bedding, two sleeping pillows in shams and one throw pillow, bed skirt, table lamps, artwork
- ✔ **Kitchen:** Cookbooks, silk flowers, light fixtures, serving dishes
- ✔ **Laundry room:** Wicker laundry basket, artwork, laundry tins with scoop
- ✔ **Master bedroom:** Six pillows (four sleeping pillows in shams and two throw pillows), bed skirt, white sheets, plush neutral bedding, silk flowers, table lamps, a throw, and art

Sizing Up the Situation

Remember these guidelines for measurements of common household elements to get your house into showing shape:

- ✔ **Area rugs:** Use an area rug to ground furniture or delineate a sitting area. Steer clear of buying a too-small rug. A typical sofa-love seat configuration works best with a 5-foot by 8-foot rug. Don't try anything smaller than a 4-foot by 6-foot size.

If you have nice hardwood flooring in your dining room, we recommend showing it off instead of buying an area rug. But if you decide to use a rug under a table and chairs, look for one that's 24 to 30 inches wider than the table and chairs.

When you're putting one big rug in a room to cover most of the floor, remember to leave 20 to 36 inches between the edges of the rug and the walls.
- ✔ **Artwork and photographs:** When hanging art above furniture, place the bottom edge of the artwork 4 to 6 inches above the surface or back of the furniture. If the art is alone on the wall, place it 54 inches from the floor to the center of the art piece. Chapter 8 tells you more about the finer points of hanging art.
- ✔ **Chandeliers:** To hang a chandelier in the foyer, measure the height of the foyer. The chandelier should hang down 3 inches per foot of the height of the foyer. For example, if the foyer is 9 feet high, the bottom of the chandelier should hang down approximately 27 inches from the ceiling. Install a chandelier in a dining room so that its bottom is 30 to 42 inches above the table top.
- ✔ **Dining room tables:** Remove a leaf and use fewer chairs to make the dining room look more spacious. Avoid using tablecloths because they make the dining room look smaller. If you're renting or buying, choose a dining room table in proportion to the room. If traffic flows around the table, be sure you leave at least 48 inches between the edge of the table and other furniture or walls.

5 Steps to a Successful Open House

- 1. Complete all staging techniques before taking the photographs for your online listing and flyers.**

Professional photographs of a beautifully staged property can increase the number of potential buyers who come to your open house because they see an intriguing, warm, inviting property when they see great pictures of your property online, in the sales flyers, and in print advertising.

- 2. Set the price accordingly.**

Do your homework and shop similar homes on the market, and then price your property accordingly. If your property is priced right to begin with, staging discourages price reductions later on. When you stage your house and price it right, you get the most bang for your buck by bringing in the most traffic within the first few weeks that your house is on the market.

- 3. Curb appeal is your 24/7 storefront.**

Curb appeal (the condition of your house from the outside) is not just important on the day of an open house but every day. You never know when potential buyers might be driving by to decide whether your house is worth touring.

- 4. Create a shuffle-duffle bag for the main rooms in your house.**

This handy bag contains quick cleaning supplies and is a great place for you to throw unopened mail and the kids' toys before a showing. Doing the "shuffle duffle" keeps the showcase appearance throughout the selling process. (Chapter 5 gives you the scoop on the shuffle duffle.)

- 5. Get out.**

All household members need to leave the premises before an open house — including your pets and all signs of them.

Open House Checklist

Before any potential buyer steps foot in your house, make sure you do the following so that your house is looking its sellable best:

- If the views are good open all drapes and blinds.
- Turn on all lamps; agents will turn on the overhead lights.
- Make all the beds.
- Empty all the garbage and waste paper baskets.
- If you have a good sound system, play music.
- Pick up and put away things that should be out of sight.
- Remove pets.
- Shake out the front welcome mat and sweep away any dust, debris, and spider webs.
- Add fresh flowers to any room in the house and fruit to your kitchen.
- Wipe the sinks after doing dishes or washing your hands.
- Clean the stove top and counters.
- Sweep the floors.
- Mop the floor if you haven't done so in the past two days.
- Clean toilet seat, rim, and lid. Leave toilet lid down.
- Swoosh toilet bowl with brush.
- Wipe off mirrors and faucets.
- Squeegee shower doors.
- Spray entire shower and curtain liner with shower cleaner after every use.

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Introduction

A complete and proper home staging takes an occupied house from *okay* to *wow*, and it elevates a vacant property from cold and empty to warm and welcoming. It gives home sellers an opportunity to secure more equity and to sell their properties faster.

If you have a house that's just sitting on the market drawing no offers, or if you're getting ready to list a property for sale — as a real estate professional or as a homeowner — staging the property gives you a marketing edge. Your staged property stands out from the competition in the neighborhood and from the unstaged houses in your price range — and did we mention that staged properties sell faster?

In a soft market and with foreclosures on the rise, home sales are slowing all over North America, so staging your property has gone from a nice thing to do to a necessity.

About This Book

Whether you're interested in home staging for personal or professional reasons, you can get what you need from this book. The basic truth is that staged properties sell faster than those that are unstaged. And a staged vacant house sells faster than an empty property. In a hot market, a property that has been staged sells for more money, and in a slow market, staged properties sell faster than those that aren't. So why isn't everyone staging their properties? We'd like to know.

We wrote this book to show you how to prepare a house for sale so it sells faster and secures more equity. We know that reading this book and doing what we suggest gets you closer to a sale, so we've done our professional best to share what we know about preparing a property for sale so it can be as trouble-free an experience as possible. Yes, it's a lot of work, but it's well worth doing.

Conventions Used in This Book

To assist your navigation of this book, we've established the following conventions:

- ✓ We use *italic* for emphasis and to highlight new words or terms that we define.
- ✓ We use `monospace` for Web addresses.
- ✓ Sidebars, which are shaded boxes of text, consist of information that's interesting but not necessarily critical to your understanding of the topic.

Foolish Assumptions

As we wrote this book, we made some assumptions about you and your needs. We assume that you might be

- ✓ A homeowner getting ready to list a house with a real estate professional and wanting to know what to do to get top dollar
- ✓ A real estate professional or property stager who wants to use this book to help clients ready their houses before you list or showcase them
- ✓ A real estate professional who wants to know more about the ins and outs of staging to gain a marketing edge
- ✓ A homeowner looking for information that will sell her already-listed house faster
- ✓ Interested in finding out more about staging as a career
- ✓ Rehabbing or flipping properties and interested in how staging helps properties sell faster
- ✓ A builder who wants to know how best to sell a vacant new property

If any of these sound like you, you've come to the right book!

How This Book Is Organized

Unless you've been through a recent move, you may not know how the market has changed and what the home seller and real estate professional do to ready a property for sale. But you're in luck because you have this book.

The following sections give you a rundown of where you can find what, so you can use this guide to your best advantage.

Part I: Preparing Your Property for Sale

In this part, we tell you what buyers are looking for in a new property and help you identify what you're selling, so you can go into the selling process with your eyes wide open. We give you some of the basic principles of staging and show you how to start putting those principles into action, starting with color, light, and furniture placement.

Part II: Three Staging Steps Toward Hitting a Home Run

Property staging is *not* decorating! Our three-step staging process helps you look at your property through the eyes of the buyer — warts and all — and then tells you what to do to get your property sold. In this part, you find out what to expect from a staging consultation, the kinds of things you're going to need to do to get your property in shape, and how to show off your work through photographs and to real estate agents.

Part III: Working Through Your House, Room by Room

What you do in a bedroom isn't necessarily what you do in a dining room — staging-wise or otherwise. In this part, we give you the goods you need to get each room into showing shape by taking into account its purpose, its architectural features, and the things buyers are going to want from it. We take you through the front door and out the back with stops at every room (and closet) along the way.

Part IV: Addressing Special Staging Considerations

Sensitive issues can get between you and a sale. In this part we tell you how to deal with your mother-in-law's teacup collection, your affinity for sports paraphernalia, or your kid's pets. We give you the ins and outs of staging when you're flipping or rehabbing a property.

You find in this part an introduction to the Feng Shui practices that can help direct energy (and buyers) through your house, and we wrap things up by giving you eco-friendly staging ideas.

Part V: The Part of Tens

In this part, we share ways to avoid common mistakes home sellers and real estate professionals make when it comes to staging properties. We run you through reasons to bring in a professional stager and show you our favorite staging products, tools, and ways to get your house (and yourself) ready for the sale.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, we guide you toward important points by using the following icons:



Next to this icon, you find information that you should keep in the back of your mind as you prepare your house for sale. These points are key to efficient property staging.



This icon highlights information, techniques, or products that professional stagers use to get a space ready for the sale.



Anything that saves you time, energy, or money gets special treatment with this icon.



The home selling process is stressful enough without putting yourself, your home, or your sale in danger. The information you find next to this icon can help you avoid frustration.

Where to Go from Here

Most *For Dummies* books are set up so that you can flip to the section of the book that meets your present needs. You can do that in this book, too. We tell you where to find the information you may need when we refer to a concept, and we define terms as they arise to enable you to feel at home no matter where you open the book.

Does your living room need special attention? Head straight for Chapter 12. Want to find out what you can expect from a consultation with a professional stager? Chapter 6 has what you need. If you're an overachiever or want to ensure that you find out everything you need to know to get your house in tip-top shape before you put it on the market — well, then turn the page and keep on reading until you hit the index.

Part V

The Part of Tens

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"I like the marble vanity and the wall sconces, but I think the Eurostyle features on the whirlpool take away some of its simple country charm."

In this part . . .

This part of the book is shorter than the others, but it's long on useful information. These chapters include information our clients, agent friends, and colleagues have found most helpful when deciding to stage a property. We steer you away from common mistakes and toward products that can make your staging life easier. We tell you about important ways to get your house (and your head) ready for the sale and run down some of the reasons staging helps sellers get the most money fastest when they put their properties on the market.

Chapter 22

(Almost) Ten Mistakes Sellers Often Make

In This Chapter

- ▶ Avoiding the pitfalls that keep your house from selling
 - ▶ Taking the right steps before your house goes on the market
 - ▶ Making sure your path to the sale is clear
-

The goal of listing your house for sale is to sell it, still many sellers step on their own toes, inhibit the sale of their houses by making mistakes that push buyers away. Throughout this book, we show you ways to make your house as attractive as possible to buyers, and in this short chapter, we run down ten (okay, nine) common errors we wish would go away forever.

Overpricing the Property

Agents the world over tell us that overpricing a property is the single most frequent mistake sellers make.



When pricing your house for sale don't fall into the trap of thinking, "the house down the street sold for \$X last year. Mine is the same house, plus we added a pool, and a gazebo, so ours should be worth even more."

Market conditions change from year to year — often from month to month. So as tough as it may be, you need to understand and acknowledge that your house is worth only as much as a buyer is willing to pay for it. An agent friend of ours says it best when she tells her clients, "Your house needs to be the shiniest apple in the barrel and at the best price."

Pricing a property too high starts a downward spiral. Too high a listing price results in fewer showings. Fewer showings equal no offers. No offers results in drastic price reductions. Price reductions send the message to agents and buyers that something must be wrong with the property. So save yourself time, money, and frustration by pricing your house right in the first place.

Choosing the Wrong Professional

Selecting the right someone to represent you is crucial to getting your house sold. Whether you're choosing a staging professional, real estate agent, or home inspector, you want someone who's credible and who you like, a professional who understands you, the property, the market, and the potential buyer for the property.

Do your homework before you hire anyone. Interview several candidates, ask for testimonials, and ask to see proof of their success. Make a decision partly with your head, and then listen to your gut. If there's any doubt that the person is right for the job, move on.

Going It Alone: For Sale by Owner

We know what you're thinking: "If we sell the house ourselves, we can save the 6 percent commission." Although "For Sale by Owner" may be a growing trend, it's one likely to do more harm than good for the seller's interests.

Studies show that sellers who work without a real estate agent accept 15.4 percent less than they would have if they had worked with a reputable agent. More worrisome, much of the general public is more reluctant to approach a FSBO because they don't perceive the seller as credible.

Credible agents are worth their weight in gold. They can save you from costly errors and are motivated more than anyone to sell your house faster and for more money. They don't get paid until the house sells, after all. Selling the house yourself involves much more than just putting a sign on the lawn. Good agents understand the market better than you do. They have access to marketing trends and — most importantly — have the tools and resources to generate interest in seeing your property. They know all the legal pitfalls because their job is to protect you.

We know an experienced real estate agent who shows her sellers a list of almost 160 tasks that a good agent completes when they sell a house. Do you want to add another 160 tasks to your "to do" list? If not, then consider hiring a real estate professional.

A good agent will:

- ✓ Hold your hand throughout the selling process
- ✓ Provide advice to help you make decisions and avoid costly mistakes
- ✓ Determine fair market value for your property

- ✓ Advertise to make sure the most qualified, interested people see your property
- ✓ Negotiate the best sale price as an advocate for you
- ✓ Provide a network of trusted professionals to help bring your house to the market at optimum condition

Listing Your House Before You Stage It

Listing the house before staging is like driving a car without putting gas in the tank.

In a rush to market the house, sellers miss their biggest selling opportunity: The first five to ten days a house is on the market are the period during which the most people — buyers, agents, and brokers — will tour the property. Ever. Why not show the property at its very best?

But don't take our word for it. Gary Keller, owner and founder of the fastest-growing real estate company in North America and author of *The Millionaire Real Estate Agent* (McGraw Hill, 2004), named the first step in the “Basic Fourteen-Step Marketing Plan for Listings” as *staging and pricing strategies*.

If you wait 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, or more, staging will help market the house (and we're happy to help), but the house is no longer a fresh listing. A house for sale draws most of its potential buyers during the first ten days it's on the market. Why would you gamble with your results by not making a great first impression?

Not Doing Your Homework

Sellers are always *thrilled* when we tell them they need to work to get their houses sold — as thrilled as middle school students are to hear their parents push them to do their homework.

We get paid to be the bad guy. We're okay with it, especially because we do it for good reason.

So why do we recommend you do your homework before you list your house? Because it works. Any repair left undone tells the buyer “you have work to do here.” The psychological effect of that message goes a long way toward preventing a sale. As a buyer tours a property (usually in less than six minutes), his mind racks up each little thing left incomplete or that's less than desirable — unfinished repairs, anything dirty, outdated flooring and light fixtures, smelly corners, and so on. If the property interests the buyer, expect a lower offer.

Dated light fixtures, faucets, and door knobs also tell buyers that the house holds work, making them notice its age and wonder about the wiring and plumbing and other big issues. Add replacing these items to your homework list.

When sellers balk at their homework and the money we ask them to spend, we try to frame the situation for them: “If we paid you \$50,000, would you spend \$300 and a few days to do your homework?” The work you do before you list your house pays off in the selling price you get. So get busy.

Failing to Target the Right Buyer

Did you know that the average home seller is 57 years old and the average buyer is 32? We are definitely talking about two different generations here. So besides pricing your property right, the condition of the house and the decorating style might make a difference in how quickly the house sells.



Targeting the right buyer is essential for selling any property, so you want to be sure your house appeals to the buyer who is most likely to make an offer. Know who is looking at houses like yours:

- ✓ First-time home buyers look for things to feel brand new and special, and so you will want to be sure you upgrade any areas or items which may detract from that feeling.
- ✓ Couples with young children look for a house in a cul-de-sac, a large back yard, and bedrooms for each child. Maximize interior space and highlight family gathering places.
- ✓ Empty nesters look for a great place to entertain and usually steer clear of any house that needs work. Be sure that everything is well-maintained inside and out; you want your property to look as if the yard and house take care of themselves.



Check out the competition. Find out what nearby houses in the same price range offer as well as which amenities are featured in new houses in your area. Doing so helps you understand the sought-after selling features and where to invest your money when readying the property for sale.

Undervaluing the Power of Curb Appeal

If your home’s exterior and your lawn don’t invite buyers inside, no amount of interior staging is going to sell your house. Even granite countertops and spa updates in the bathroom won’t weave any magic if you can’t get buyers inside to see them.



Buyers love a well-maintained yard, sure, but the flip side of that coin is more daunting: Buyers simply won't look past a weedy yard with overgrown trees that hide half the house. And because so many buyers drive by a house to determine whether making an appointment to see the inside is worth their time, you're turning away potential sales when you neglect to light your house, paint the peeling trim, or fix the front stairs. The first impression is a lasting one; make sure it's positive.

Chapter 10 gives you the details about maximizing your house's curb appeal.

Neglecting the Floors

What would you rather do — spend \$2,000 to have new carpet installed or give a \$5,000 (or more) carpet allowance? Only a foolish person would pick the latter, and research drives home the point: A recent Maritz Research survey of homebuyers showed that 33 percent of buyers cite new flooring as crucial in their buying decision.

Today's buyer wants a move-in ready property. Buyers don't have the inclination or cash flow to fix things after the move-in date. So the more move-in ready you make the house, the closer you are to selling it. If you figure that you're going to pay for new flooring anyway — either up front before putting the house on the market or by giving a flooring allowance (which cuts into your equity) — isn't it better for you, not the buyer, to be in control of the budget?

Not Washing the Windows

One of the reasons to stage your property is to lighten and brighten the house. You can outfit your light fixtures and lamps with the highest-wattage light bulbs recommended by the manufacturers. You can remove heavy window treatments to let in more light. But a critical and often overlooked task is making sure that all the windows are sparkling clean. Clean windows not only let in more light, they let buyers know that the house has been well cared for.

You can clean the windows yourself, but a professional window washer usually is worth the investment. A professional knows how to get the job done well without making a mess or harming your home or the things in it. Our window washer even cleans and lubricates the window tracks, checks for window repairs you may not know about, and removes and washes the screens.

Chapter 23

Ten Reasons to Hire a Staging Professional

In This Chapter

- ▶ Running down the special skills of staging professionals
 - ▶ Looking into the benefits of working with a stager
 - ▶ Getting more money and saving time
-

Many people have the talent to help you get your property ready for sale. And many of these people haven't completed any training at all. Some have migrated from the decorating industry, and others have read books or have taken training from a distance educator; some have natural talent.

Any one of these people might be well-skilled, but when you're hiring a staging professional to ready your most valuable asset — your home — we say, "Let the buyer beware."

Utilizing the Skills of a Certified Staging Professional

Home staging is a relatively new industry and isn't regulated; very few places truly teach the staging-specific décor skills and the crucial real estate communication component. As is the case with any growing and developing industry, a time will come when the buying public demands certification credentials.

Having worked in the industry for the past seven years and having the privilege to work with people from all across North America, Christine is proud to say the Certified Staging Professional program is ever evolving and ever new; the information changes as the economy changes and as the industry becomes more sophisticated.

Rigorous training and testing

As we tell you elsewhere in this book, staging is not just moving the furniture around. A Certified Staging Professional (CSP) understands the nuances of real estate and how those nuances affect the buyer. This crucial knowledge helps you target the buyer who is most likely to make an offer on your property. CSPs learn about the pertinent staging décor skills and study vital real estate industry-specific data to help sell your property.

To become a Certified Staging Professional, students complete 30 intensive hours of rigorous instruction, and pass two exams on which they must score a minimum of 75 percent or higher in order to attain their first certification. (It's not uncommon for students to take the test a couple of times before passing it for their certification.) CSPs sign and promise to uphold a strict code of conduct, and they have the option to continue to build on their skills, knowledge, and ability by earning continuing education credits once they enter the field work.

Training is provided in a number of locations across North America every month. To find out more visit www.stagingtraining.com.

Continuous training about market conditions

CSPs are taught and then encouraged to maintain current trend information about the condition of the market, new construction, and any age-related trends that affect the targeted buyers' expectations. Knowing these things is one thing, but transferring that knowledge to reflect the needs of the buyer of your house is another.

Finally, all graduates of the CSP program can return to class as many times as they want or need (at no additional charge) and have access to a 24-hour online resource center where they can find out about new products and information.

Important connections

When you're selling a property, a staging professional can introduce you to real estate agents who include staging in their marketing plans. CSPs also have access to a plethora of preferred pricing partnerships that help reduce your costs for products and services necessary to the move — lighting, paint, carpet, junk removal, moving services, mortgages, and so on. Graduates know how to connect locally to a variety of vendors who can do everything from simple cleaning and repairs to new carpet installation. An apprenticeship program is available to new CSP graduates, who also have access to work teams to respond quickly to your staging needs.

Seeing What the Buyer Sees

Staging professionals have the skills, knowledge, and experience to know what the buyer needs to see when viewing your property. Buying decisions are made in a blink of an eye, so sellers need to address all aspects of the buyer's experience using eyes that have been trained not only to see the obvious but to anticipate unseen forces. Staging professionals are well aware of the subliminal effects of a fresh-smelling house, on-trend flooring, the effects of natural and artificial lighting, and so on.

A staging professional treats each property as an individual project. The professional stager works with the seller's existing decorating choices and furnishings and is trained to work with what the seller owns to make sure the property resonates with potential buyers. Stagers accomplish this mission by:

- ✓ Maximizing space
- ✓ Showcasing the architectural features of the house
- ✓ Minimizing attention on less-desirable factors
- ✓ Selecting accessories for each room that capture the buyer's interest

Selling the Property to All Five Senses

Staging professionals understand how to connect the buyer to the seller's property and engage the senses using special selling techniques. When a professional stages a house, he prepares it to appeal to all five of the buyers' senses by

- ✓ Clearing away clutter and positioning the furnishings and artwork to draw the buyer toward a view or a focal point in the room
- ✓ Opening the windows and letting in fresh air
- ✓ Making sure the banister is clean and smooth
- ✓ Playing pleasant music in the background during showings or an open house
- ✓ Having tasty treats available for buyers to munch on while they tour your house

Saving You and Your Agent Time and Money

Too many people think of staging as a process that costs money. Consider the money you spend to ready a property for sale a necessary investment.

Hiring a staging professional saves you money by

- ✓ Connecting you to services at preferred pricing
- ✓ Maximizing the return on your investment by ensuring that your house is ready to appeal to buyers
- ✓ Minimizing the time your house spends on the market by showcasing the house to appeal to the broadest range of buyers
- ✓ Making decisions quickly and knowing where to source what you need to sell a space, a view, a focal point, and so on

Because a professional stager keeps you on track doing your homework, your agent can spend more time finding buyers for your house.

Stagers Play the Bad Guy So Agents Don't Have To

Because we work with real estate professionals, we know how tough it is to tell a seller that his house smells like wet dog. Worse yet, agents risk losing the listing when they share this news.

Enter professional stagers. We're trained to communicate with the seller to explain the *why* behind what we're doing so they won't be offended. The work we do is sometime hampered by less-than-willing home sellers who just can't see the value in the staging process until they experience it. But after a stager takes a room from ho-hum to wow, sellers see their belongings showcased in a new light and understand the value of working with a professional.

Highlighting Your House with Great Photographs

Properties are sold on the Internet: Most buyers search for properties online before making the effort to check out a house in person, so showing your house to its best advantage through photos is essential. Staging professionals are taught how important really great photographs are to securing a sale and how to take them. They provide photos to the agent or seller so a great first impression can be made on the Internet, sales flyers, and feature sheets.

Selling Your Property Faster

The talents of a professional amplify the features and benefits of the property so it sells faster and for more money than it would if it weren't staged. Many individual staging professionals can provide you with statistics of their own work, and those statistics speak well of the benefits of staging. For example, California broker Joy Valentine evaluated 2,776 properties and found that those that had been staged sold in less than 13.8 days; unstaged properties averaged 30.9 days. The most eye-popping result: Staged houses netted on average 6.4 percent over list price.

Relying on the Stager's Toolkit

Staging professionals bring an arsenal of tools, products (see Chapter 24), and services you and your agent can use to expose the property to more interested buyers. These unique marketing tools are designed to complement and support the agent's marketing plan for the property and include

- ✓ Specialized music to use at open houses and during showings.
- ✓ Sign riders (specially made signs that sit on top of or hang below the For Sale sign) that let buyers know the property has been staged.

Staging encourages agents to bring more buyers to your property because they know it will show well. The sign rider also brings you curious buyers who might have passed by it otherwise.

- ✓ Web site prominence where staged listings are cross-linked with agent and broker sites.
- ✓ DVDs that help sellers and agents to better understand the market, and a host of other tools.

Chapter 24

Ten Tricks of the Trade That Help You Sell Your House

In This Chapter

- ▶ Creating ambiance and fresh air
 - ▶ Moving furniture effortlessly
 - ▶ Repairing nail holes in one step
 - ▶ Using the right tools for picture-hanging
-

Staging is a hands-on profession. We just love rolling our fully-equipped tool boxes to a job, knowing that we have everything we need to help us work efficiently and without hurting ourselves or the house. In this chapter, we tell you about our favorite tools and techniques so that prepping a house for sale is as pleasant as possible.

Bringing Fresh Air In

The best scent in a house is clean, fresh air, so opening windows whenever and wherever possible is very important for creating a pleasant ambiance in the house.

Letting fresh air in is especially important in winter when we tend to keep windows closed because of the cold. Opening windows, even a little at the front and back of the house so air can travel through the rooms to replenish any stale air, helps most houses feel fresh and clean.

Running a Fresh Air Machine

Clean, fresh air gets complicated during the allergy season and even more so when you throw into the equation allergies to dust, mold, pet dander, and mildew. Potpourri, chemical plug-ins, or spray fragrances not only exacerbate

the allergy problem but send a subliminal message to buyers that you're trying to cover up something more objectionable, like cat urine or mildew.

You can rent or buy a Fresh Air machine that completely changes the air in a house in 24 hours. The EcoQuest Fresh Air Machine is the best machine we've found. It cleans and sanitizes the air, removing dust, mold, pollens, and allergens. It eliminates odors caused by smoke, food, or just plain living, and it's safe and effective enough to run while sellers are home or away.

Choosing Eco-Friendly Cleaning Products

Across borders and even households, you find various interpretations of what clean means. When you're selling a house clean *always* means spotless, sparkling, and meticulous in every detail — cleaner than the house has ever been. But you don't want the house to smell like pine cleaner. What to do? Go green.

Going green (using environmentally safe products) not only saves you money, it keeps you healthier and helps save the planet, too. Incorporate green cleaning products into your house preparation. For products that work for everyone in the family including pets, look at the myriad suppliers in your local grocery store, health food store, or check out www.shoppureessentials.com, www.pureessentials.ca, www.simplegreen.com, or www.soapfactory.com.

Hanging Art with Heavy Duty Wall Hangers

Heavy duty wall hangers are clever hooks (they look like big fishing hooks) for hanging art and mirrors. They make a very small hole in the drywall, and the best part is that they hold up to 150 pounds. They're quick to install, easy to use, incredibly strong, and reusable. You don't need tools to use them; just push the heavy-gauge wire through the drywall until all you see is the hook end, and then hang your picture — no need for molly bolts or wall anchors.

You can find them at www.stagingmall.com or your local home improvement center.

Professional Art Hanging with a Level and Hanging Tool

We hang a lot of picture groupings both vertically and horizontally. Getting everything to be level is tricky and time-consuming when you're hanging a group of pictures. Things got a lot easier when we discovered Hang and Level. This brilliant tool marks exactly where the nail or hook goes, making it quick and easy to hang any picture or group of pictures. You can find them in your local home improvement center or hardware store for around \$25.

Saving Your Walls with Wall Respecters

The Wall Respector is a reusable picture or décor hanger designed to be used on drywall surfaces and guaranteed to support up to 20 pounds. It consists of a plastic gadget that looks like a coat hook and is held onto the wall with straight pins. Wall Respecters are perfect for freshly painted walls or new construction because they leave only a pinhole.

Adding a Citrus Scent

The most natural way to enhance clean air is to use fresh lemons, limes, or oranges in a bowl. They add color and naturally emit a fresh clean fragrance — to a kitchen and dining room.

Don't get too crazy with the fruit, though. It's not a good idea in your bathroom, for example, and just one bowl per kitchen or dining room is plenty.

Saving Your Back with Furniture Sliders

Every time we put these babies under a piece of heavy furniture and move it effortlessly we thank the inventor of these products. If you need help moving heavy furniture, furniture sliders are your solution. Just put one slider under each table or sofa leg and push. These clever movers make moving even the heaviest furniture easy. (One exception is moving a piano; leave that to the piano-moving pros.) The hard sliders work great on carpet and tile flooring. The felt sliders work great on hard-surface flooring. Look for EZ Moves or Move-Alls at your local home improvement store.

Filling Cracks and Holes Easily

Have you noticed when you take down a picture that there may be other holes behind it — even bigger and uglier holes? Then you trudge down to the garage and get the plastic can of spackle and open it just to find it's hardened into a rock? Here's a great solution to this problem and we carry it in the top of the tool box. Erase-A-Hole (www.erase-a-hole.com) looks like a stick of deodorant and is a breeze to use. You don't need a spackling knife; the clever dispenser helps you fill the hole and level the spackle on the wall at the same time. It works to fill cracks and holes on drywall, wood, or stucco, and as soon as it's dry you're ready to paint. Erase-A-Hole won't shrink, is non-toxic, and cleans up with water.

Misting Naturalaire Home Cleansing Spray

We know human nature sometimes overrides common-sense practical advice; Christine found that even though she recommended to sellers that they not put synthetic air fresheners into the house, many people just couldn't stop themselves.

Fortunately, certain essential oils (oil extracted from plants and herbs) stimulate personal well-being with their pleasant scents. Christine worked with an expert to create a unique blend suitable for use when selling a house. CSP Natural Aire is not an odor eliminator; it just has a clean, fresh scent. The fragrance is not heavy, and it disperses in the air using a very fine hand-pump mister. Blended with distilled water, the essential oils create a fragrance that refreshes any room with a special blend of bergamot, lemongrass, sage, and sweet orange. You can find them at www.stagingmall.com.

Chapter 25

Ten Ways to Prepare Your House (And Yourself) for the Sale

In This Chapter

- ▶ Getting ready to let go
 - ▶ Finding and fixing trouble spots
 - ▶ Adding polish — literally and figuratively
-

Into every move some inconvenience inevitably falls. Who are we kidding? *Inconvenience?* Moving turns your life upside down. We hear from almost every home seller during the staging process that getting a house into sale-ready shape is a lot of work. After that work is done, we hear sellers say, “This doesn’t seem like my house any more,” and “Now that everything’s done, are we allowed to take showers?”

Moving is inconvenient, and the sooner you recognize this and get busy readying your home for sale, the sooner you can move on to your new life in your new home. This chapter shows you how to do just that.

Emotionally Disconnect from the House

If you want to sell your house we suggest you emotionally disconnect from it. This is the first and most important task to put on your “to do” list.



You may have put loving care into every inch of your house, but potential buyers just don’t care. You want buyers to make an emotional connection to the house, to envision their own furniture in place, so they can start creating their own memories in the space.

To start disconnecting from the house, take out those items that make your house a home. To do this, we often recommend color changes to your rooms or storing the Beanie Babies and Grandma’s heirloom tea cup collection. When these things are out of sight, you give buyers a chance to make the all-important

emotional connection to your house. It's not that we don't like those things; it's that we want potential buyers to focus on the house, the bones, the architecture, the beautiful flooring or the updated kitchen — not your stuff. As difficult as it may be, depersonalizing and emotionally disconnecting gets your house sold faster and for more money.

Make Room for the Buyer's Vision

Start by removing personal photos, posters, or artwork. Pack away religious pictures, artifacts, dishes, and statues.



When in doubt, take it out. If, for example, you have a nude painting or sculpture in the master bath — even one that's tasteful — take it down so you don't risk alienating potential buyers who find it objectionable.

Pack Up and Store Half of Your Stuff

Equity gets eaten up daily by piles of clutter. Our recommendation? Pack, store, sell, or donate anything smaller than your fist. You're going to have to weed out your stuff before you move anyway, so why not start on this task as soon as you decide you're going to list the house? Doing so enables you to spread out the packing so it's not so overwhelming right before the move.

Hang onto the stuff you're going to want in your next house by renting a storage unit or portable pod. You can have a clean, dry, portable container delivered right to your driveway. These containers are available in several sizes, and some of them even have skylights so you can see well during the daytime when you're packing. After the pod is full, you just call and have it picked up. The container people store it safe and sound and then deliver it to your new home when you're ready to move in.



Pack and safely store any gun or knife collections, including your kitchen knives. You never know who may attend an open house or will want to see a property. Removing these items is a must for keeping yourself and real estate professionals safe.

Organize Closets, Cupboards, and Drawers

The closer a buyer gets to making an offer, the closer they look at the house — and that means that your closets, drawers, and cupboards are open for

inspection. Because adequate storage is tops on the list of what buyers look for in a new home, your closets need to look organized and things need to be off the floor. (Find more closet staging know-how in Chapter 17.)

Refresh the Exterior

You want the house to look as fresh and new as possible so buyers are motivated to see what's inside. Either power wash or paint the exterior. Chapter 10 tells you more about maximizing curb appeal.

Inspect Your House Before the Buyer Does

Most houses go through a rigorous home inspection before the sale closing, so be proactive: Have your house inspected before you list it. Sure, the buyer will want to have his own inspection, but that doesn't preclude you from getting one. You're better off addressing the things the inspector uncovers and recommends before you negotiate with a buyer. Waiting for the buyer's inspection gives the buyer an opening for reducing his offer or making the offer conditional upon your making his inspector's changes.

One more thing: The halo effect happens in home inspections, too. When your home inspection starts out strong, the inspector gets a subliminal message that the rest of the house has been maintained, as well.

Invite the Buyer In

Has anyone said they'll "leave the front porch light on for you"? Doesn't it make you feel invited in, welcome, and cared about? Buyers want to feel the same way.

Do whatever you can to make sure your front door sends a welcoming message. Chapter 10 tells you how to make your entrance and exterior look inviting.

Buy New House Numbers

You're inviting trouble if your house number isn't clear and easy to see. Imagine buyers who see the house on the Internet and are excited enough for

a drive-by viewing but then can't see your house numbers. They may drive right on to the next house on their list.

If the house numbers are faded or outdated, buy and install new ones so buyers can see them from the curb, and be sure the porch light illuminates them well. Get in your car and drive by your house at night to make sure your house numbers are easy to see.

Make Every Surface Shine

Buyers want to close the sale on Friday, move and unpack on Saturday, meet the neighbors on Sunday, and then go to work and get the kids off to school on Monday. The more move-in ready you make the house, the faster and easier it will be to sell. Kitchens must sparkle, and bathrooms must look like they've never been used. Scrub every inch of the house from ceiling fans to baseboards, and don't forget mirrors and floors. Take a broom, mop, dust rag, or scrub brush to every last surface.



Buy some new, never-used thick towels to display only for open houses and showings. When you move, take them with you to use in your new home.

Seek Professional Showcasing Help

In this book, we share our professional advice on how to get more equity out of your house when you're ready to sell it, telling you about hundreds of techniques and products that will help get your house sold faster and preserve your well-earned equity.

Showcasing the house — the part of staging that you see on TV where professional stagers relocate furniture, hang art, and adjust lighting — is both a science and an art. Professional stagers are sensitive to the seller's budget and have become very resourceful in getting the selling message across to the buyers creatively. What we hear from sellers and agents alike after showcasing a house is, "I never would have thought of that."

Showcasing is a very important component in prepping the house for sale and also the most physically exhausting. It can take two people with excellent skills up to two hours to showcase one room; multiply that by the number of rooms you have and the workload selling your house brings. Sellers in many cases become too overwhelmed to complete the process. Showcasing is crucial to selling success, so if you doubt your abilities, lose interest, or just don't have the time, hire someone to help you.

Chapter 26

Ten Reasons Sellers Don't Stage Their Properties (But Should)

In This Chapter

- ▶ Fighting misguided notions about home staging
 - ▶ Bringing in the biggest bucks when selling your house
 - ▶ Cutting down on the time between listing and sale
-

A business owner and very good friend of Jan's lives by the "Five P Principle" — "Prior planning prevents poor performance." Never is the principle more apt than when you're selling a property, so we came up with our own version — "Prior planning prevents property price reduction."

In this chapter, we shine light on the most common objections home sellers give for not staging their properties. If any of these thoughts have come to your mind, we hope you remember our five P's (and, technically, one *R*).

We Don't Have Time for Home Staging

If you have time to sell your house, you have time to stage it for sale.

Don't undervalue the staging process unless you are prepared to accept less than your property is worth. Statistics show unstaged properties usually realize a lower return on investment than properties that have had a big dose of TLC before they made it onto market. A ton of statistics support this claim, and so do real estate agents, who point out that homeowners who stage are more likely to get back the money that they put into staging their house — and more.

No one can guarantee your result, but we can tell you this with complete confidence: Fail to stage your home, and you're less likely to get the price you're asking, and your house might end up staying on the market longer than you want. Better not to gamble with your equity.

Location and Price Will Do the Work

Why settle for less than you expect? Even if you have a great location and a good price, a house that's in lousy condition might languish on the market, convincing you to give up and sell for much less than your asking price.



Improve the condition of the house before you list it, and you can greatly impact the selling price. Take the time to invest in your equity and realize the highest return by staging the property before it hits the market.

I Get Compliments on My Home All the Time, So I Don't Need to Stage It

You're not selling to your friends and family. Staging a home for living and staging property for sale are two entirely different situations.

When you put your property on the market, you have to appeal to a wide audience in order to capture the interest of the one buyer who wants your house. Doing so involves totally unemotional, objective scrutiny. When we stage a property for selling, family photos, heirlooms, and personal belongings are the first things we pack up. Then we style the house to seduce the buyer.



Like it or not, selling your house isn't about you, your taste, or your decorating style. It's about what the buyer wants.

My Neighbor's House Sold Without Staging

Good for your neighbors! What you don't know is whether they made as much money on it as they could have. Why gamble with the equity in your house? You know the staging process is proven, and the results speak for themselves. A property that has been properly staged leaves a lasting impression and stimulates multiple offers.

My Agent Said I Don't Need to Stage My House to Sell It

We could say you don't need an agent to sell your property, either, but we won't; we do believe real estate professionals provide valuable guidance and help you avoid pitfalls in the house-selling process. We also believe an agent benefits you by hitting the widest audience in an effort to secure the one person who will love your property the way you do.

If you hear comments like this from your agent, know that they generally come from a lack of education about staging and from a lack of understanding about how staging impacts or fits into the real estate process. In our opinion, any agent or broker who gives this advice is not honoring his or her fiduciary responsibility to you, the seller. Staging will help secure more equity, so insist on the staging process before your agent starts marketing your house.

The key to understanding where the staging process fits is recognizing that staging is not about smoke and mirrors. It's about selling the features and benefits of living in the house.

Why should someone buy your property over another? Property staging has breached the last bastion of real estate marketing. It's one of the last industries to stop expecting top dollar from a product sold "as is." Marketing a property in its best light is now recognized as crucial to securing the most equity in the shortest amount of time.

Will your house sell without staging? Maybe. Will it sell at the price you want? Not as likely. Think about first impressions: a blind date, a job interview, a test-drive of a car. Each situation requires spit and polish. Staging helps you put your best foot forward. So unless you want to sell your property "as is," staging is now a vital part of the selling process.

If It's Good Enough for Me, It's Good Enough for Anyone

A statement like this is just an excuse, and it's convincing only if you really don't care how much money you make — or don't make — on the sale of your property.



While you were living comfortably in your home over the past few years, the way real estate gets sold has changed. The housing market is flooded with both new and existing houses, and so people have more choices. Buyers are more educated about what's acceptable and have busier lives than they have ever had before. Buyers are making a short list of houses to see from what they find on the Internet. Staging before marketing helps get your house on that short list. Buying a house that needs money poured into it is alluring to a buyer if the price is low. In short: If you can't be bothered to fix or change things, neither can the buyer.

Staging Is Just De-Cluttering and Cleaning, and I've Done That

Most certainly staging involves de-cluttering and cleaning — and this kind of straightforward sale preparation makes a huge difference but isn't the whole picture.

Your house is competing with others that have been fully staged, and in order to make a sale at a price you're happy with, you need to make sure your house looks the same as or better than its competition.

Full staging includes cleaning, repairing, reducing and refreshing, correct application of color, professionally placed furnishings, lighting, props, and art — all focused and targeted to the buyer most likely to purchase the property. It's just like the dress rehearsal for the biggest Hollywood production you can think of, only in this case you get to take home the box office receipts.

Homes Have Been Selling for Years Without Staging. Why Now?

You're so right. Houses sold without title insurance and home inspections, too, but times have changed. Interest rates have been low, and savvy consumers are watching decorating and real estate TV shows; these things are making the home-selling process more competitive, hence the emergence of and need for staging.

Today's buyers don't want to inherit your "honey do" list; they want to move in on Saturday and be happy living in the house by Sunday.

I Can't Afford It

Can you really afford not to? Hanging on to the money you'd spend to stage is a shortsighted savings. You most certainly want to get all that you can with the sale of your property and can't afford to leave money sitting on the closing table.

Before you say no to staging, consider whether you can afford to pay additional mortgage payments, property taxes, and household expenses while your house sits waiting for a buyer who can see past your life. You want to secure the most money on the sale of your home and to sell it in the shortest amount of time.

The longer a house sits on the market, the lower its sale price goes, according to numbers compiled by the National Association of Realtors. You have many options for securing the money you need to get the house ready to go on the market. Borrow the money from a friend, neighbor, or relative. Secure a home equity loan, use a credit card, have a garage sale, sell something on eBay. The world is full of money; you just have to find some. Where there's a will, there's a way.

It's a Hot Market — The House Will Sell Without Staging

Depending on where you live, you may not have heard this one in a while, but one thing we know is that what went down will come up. In case the market has turned around by the time you're reading this, we share what we know about a hot market.

A common cry from agents and brokers during a hot market is, "we don't have enough houses to sell, and the house will sell regardless of condition." It *will* sell but at what price? If you don't mind gambling with your equity, then go ahead and sell without staging. However, if you're a savvy investor and want to realize the most equity from the sale of the property, then stage it before it hits the market.

Staged properties bring exceptional return on investment. When the market is slower or softer, properties need staging even more to generate interested buyers. Staging your property gives a competitive edge regardless of market condition. Your property stands out from the crowd of properties that aren't staged. You might not be staging your property, but someone else who's competing for the same buyer is.



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