

WHAT IS STAGING?

Over 30 years ago some clever real estate agents put their heads together and decided that homeowners needed help in preparing their homes for resale. Knowing that their expertise was in selling real estate, they knew exactly what factors sell a home. They were admittedly not experts in interior design, but saw that homes that were easiest to show were always "on stage," and had been designed by professional designers or very talented homeowners. In the early 1990's staging became a real estate trend in big cities and higher end real estate markets. Some of the first design professionals who staged homes were model home designers. In the late 70's when many apartment homes were transformed into condominium projects, model home designers were brought in to turn those tiny 500 square foot apartments into palazzos - you've got to love those mirrors!

In a recent interview with Becky Adams of Coldwell Banker, her recollection of the onset of staging was somewhere in the late 80's, when Coldwell Banker started the Seller Services Guarantee, which gave their clients access to many home selling services, one of which was professional home staging. According to US Research, "home staging can reduce a listing's time on the market by half and could fetch as much as 10-15% more versus an empty home or a home not properly staged."

Today everyone knows that HGTV, with its latest iteration of "Let's stage this house for \$2,000, and remodel the kitchen and bath with new cabinets and tile and, oh let's also buy new bedding and furniture!" has really brought home staging into main stream America. Although most people realize that there are 25 people behind the scenes manufacturing all the parts and pieces of this \$2,000 spruce-up, in real life those 25 people can add up to \$30,000 to the real cost of the job. In real life, professional staging will cost about \$5,000 or more, depending

on the size, condition and value of the home.

Staging is pretty simple to explain, but harder to actually implement. A home buyer usually decides if they are attracted to a home or not in the first few seconds of seeing it; therefore, curb appeal is generally viewed as a vital first step of the staging process. Inside the home, contents have to be seriously edited. Editing means all personal items must be stored away, excess furniture removed and cleanliness examined with a very critical eye, like you're getting ready for the biggest party of your life; however, it's not your party; it's some else's.

Anything in the home, including window and floor coverings, paint, lighting, furnishings, plastering, the junk under the sink - the whole nine yards, must be critiqued, knowing you are not going to live here anymore. Someone else is, and they want a clean slate. Selling a home is about appealing to the broadest spectrum of buyer as possible. A home stager should give you a report card that details everything. Then a budget is prepared with a variety of recommended fixes and enhancements to make the house show its best features and minimize its least desirable ones.

In addition to all the basic clean up and organizing chores, existing furnishings that are on the shabby side are covered, removed or replaced. Accessories might be moved from one room to another for a fresh look; and sometimes new furnishings and accessories are brought in. Lighting is usually a big factor in staging. Homes are frequently under lit, and occasionally harshly lit.

Regarding empty homes, it has been shown that homes containing furniture and accessories sell more quickly than vacant homes. With furniture, the potential buyers can see themselves living there. The home feels larger, warmer, and welcoming with furnishings, and they are essential when selling

brand new properties that have never been occupied, or those where homeowners have already vacated the property.

The last finishing touches are where the real "staging" is the most noticeable. The home should be on stage every moment it is viewed by a potential buyer, and this means lights, camera, action. The towels & other textiles are fluffed, every accessory is in place, every light is appropriately lit or dimmed, the music is softly playing in the background, and EVERYTHING is put away. When your buyers walk in, they should swoon, like walking into a luxurious resort where they never want to leave!

Living in a home like this while it is for sale is sometimes a daunting task, but with a little practice, you will get used to rising a half hour earlier & putting on your home's best face. This small effort will cut the listing time in half, and you can move on that much sooner to your new home.