

## Stage your home to sell

You don't have to spend hundreds of dollars to "stage" your house. But it'll take some smarts and some sweat:

Consider "pre-moving." Take half or more of the furniture in your home and the out-of-season items in your closets, basement and attic, and put them in storage before you put your home on the market. Does your house feel empty? Do your footsteps echo? That's what you want.

Start with the basement. If you clear out the basement, you'll have a place to stash stuff (boxed neatly) from the upper floors.

Curb appeal. Is the lawn mowed? Are the bushes trimmed and freshly mulched? Is the entry neat, clean and welcoming, with perhaps pots of flowers by the front door? And don't forget to hide your garbage cans.

Foyer. When you stand at the front door, what do you see? Does any item of furniture or art stand out like a sore thumb? Do you get a sense of space or blockage?

Walls, windows, floors. Have the windows been washed? Are the window treatments minimal? Has the wallpaper been removed? Are the walls painted in neutral colors? Has the wall-to-wall carpeting been taken up to show the hardwood floors, punctuated perhaps by a couple of area rugs?

The great room, family room, living room. Have you pulled the furniture away from the walls and floated it around a focal point (such as a fireplace)? Does the furniture arrangement make the room seem spacious or cramped? Does the furniture seem dated? Go with a classic sofa and a couple of chairs, a few tables and lamps. And take half the books and knickknacks from the bookshelves, and rearrange things to leave spaces.

The dining room. Set the table, as though you're expecting guests. (You are, and you hope they'll buy.)

The kitchen. Remove just about everything from the countertops. (You might leave the coffeepot and a bin of utensils.) Take the magnets and the notes off the refrigerator. Go through your cabinets and cupboards, and straighten and remove things. Potential buyers snoop through cabinets. You want them to see there's plenty of space.

Closets. Are they so precariously stuffed that things fall on your head when you open the door? You know the drill: Clean them out so that only a limited number of coats and clothes remain, letting buyers see how much room they'll have for their clothes.

The bedrooms. "Tired" bedding is the bane of stagers. Consider buying some fluffy down duvets and pillows with shams in neutral colors that you can throw over your faded comforters and deflated pillows every morning. You want the bed to look like one in an upscale hotel room.

The garage. Nothing shows a home's age more than a garage floor. Clean off the grease stains and paint it. Organize the gear you have in there. And a key question: Can you actually pull your car(s) into the garage?

Toy control. Corral the toys in a chest or armoire in the family room. Or put them in the kids' bedrooms.

Pet control/odor control. Vacuum away pet hair daily. Hide the kitty litter box, and clean it daily. Use air fresheners in every room.

Park your point of view in storage. Remove all religious symbols, political posters, artful nudes and indications of alternative lifestyles.