

# Staging Spec Homes

## for Top Dollar Sales

It's All About Selling "Homes" - Not Houses

BY ADRIENNE VAN DOOREN



Sometimes less is more. Had this tiny living room included a sofa, coffee table and chair, it would have appeared cramped, impeded traffic flow and hidden the beautifully hand stained parquet floor.

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### Why Bother to Stage a Spec Home?

1. Studies show that money spent in updating and staging a home properly for resale is usually returned at least 3-fold in a higher sales price. Staged homes also sell faster, decreasing holding costs.
2. Empty homes actually appear smaller than properly staged homes.
3. Potential buyers zip through empty rooms without pausing to really

imagine themselves in the room. Sales agents report that buyers spend twice as much time looking at a nicely staged home than an empty one and are four times more likely to return for a second look. Empty homes are often described as "cold" by buyers.

4. The psychology of staging takes full advantage of emotional transference. If the buyer loves the bedspread or bathroom towels, that feeling is also transferred to the home, even though those items may not be included in the purchase. Sales agents take advantage of

“Video or pod cast testimonials are particularly powerful website marketing tools. You could do a “before and after” scan of the room and then testify as to how much faster the home sold because of their staging.”

transference when they bake chocolate chip cookies for an open house. Buyers transfer the happy association of mom making cookies to the house. They can also better imagine themselves baking in that kitchen to create their own family memories.

5. Most buying decisions are made at the emotional level and then justified logically. Keep in mind: buyers equate the word “house” with “mortgages, maintenance and upkeep,” however, they equate the word “home” with “family, cozy, warm and inviting.” Staging and proper wall color choices help the buyer imagine this house as their home...or better yet, their dream home.

6. Staging helps the buyer understand the purpose of the room (e.g. bedroom, dining area, office) The area's purpose may seem obvious to the seller, but buyers often need it spelled out. One of the most common staging tactics used on the HGTV show “Designed to Sell” is to add a small table and chairs to highlight the fact that the home has an eat-in kitchen, or to add a dining room table and chandelier in the dining area.

### Hire Someone or Stage it Yourself?

Generally, it's a good idea to hire a professional. A really good staging professional understands design and marketing psychology. Anyone can call themselves a “stager,” so interview potential stagers and look at other work they have done, or their portfolio, and check their references.

Most stagers have their own furniture, towels and accessories that they provide on loan until the house is sold. This can save a lot of money over purchasing the items (Unless you plan to reuse items in several homes).

A few stagers will allow you to pay them from the proceeds at closing.

### Don't be afraid to work a trade.

Professional stagers, Faux Finishers, and other professionals will often work a trade, or offer a steep discount for a show home or model to help market their own business. Don't be afraid to ask. Sometimes you can even get stores to loan furniture, window treatments, rugs and accessories in return for a sign next to the item or offering the item for sale.

### Consider the following ideas for trade:

- Co-marketing: Flyers, ads signage in and outside the home, etc
- Getting a testimonial: Using you as a reference for his/her website or marketing materials will add credibility to the stagers attempting to break into the market. Video or pod cast testimonials are particularly powerful website marketing tools. You could do a “before and after” scan of the room and then testify as to how much faster the home sold because of their staging.
- A place to bring their clients: As a builder, you are more willing than an individual seller to allow a stager to bring in potential clients to see his or her work. Perhaps you can also offer the stager an office area or a spot to sit down with clients.
- Storage Space: Storage units are expensive. Do you have an area in one of your homes or warehouses where a stager can store his or her staging materials?



- A discount on purchasing a home.
- A trade for something you may have unrelated to the sale: an old car, appliance, fixtures, cabinets - you'll never know until you ask.
- Call stagers and suggest a trade or post an ad on Craig's list or similar outlet.

**If you decide to do it yourself, or get help from a friend**

This can be tricky because "there is no accounting for taste." Bad staging can be worse than no staging. However, if you feel that you, your significant other or friend has a talent for it, try it.

Educate Yourself. Trends change, colors change. For example, sales agents used to recommend houses be painted all in neutral white to sell. The opposite is now true. Remember when dark cabinets were popular, then everyone went to light or white? Now dark cabinets are becoming popular again.

**Here are some ideas on how to learn how to stage:**

- Subscribe to newsletters from websites such as [www.fauxhouse.com](http://www.fauxhouse.com). Each January, Fauxhouse.com announces the colors that designers choose

for the New Year. Why should you care? Because manufacturers agree to the pallet so that almost everything sold in the upcoming year in terms of sheets, accessories, and other home products fall with in those color schemes.

- Watch HGTV. Shows like "Flip that House" and "Designed to Sell" are great ways to learn the power and techniques of staging.
- Study the Pottery Barn® and Crate & Barrel catalogues. The looks shown there are looks that sell.

- Read books on home staging. A downloadable version is available at [YouPublish.com/doitbetterbooks](http://YouPublish.com/doitbetterbooks). Author Jeanette Fisher has several books on the subject on the Internet, or check out what's available at your local library.

**8 Tips for Successful Staging**

- Less is more. Rooms should be uncluttered. Not all rooms need to be fully furnished. Just give the overall impression as to what that room is for. A bedroom with a double bed, nightstands, wall art and a few accessories is all you need for smaller rooms. In a master you may wish to add a small sitting area or TV.
- Don't line furniture along the walls. Leave corners open. Pull



OPPOSITE PAGE: A table, old books, cigars and a chess game add to the cozy feel of this gentlemen's room.

THIS PAGE: A table, pictures, pillows, basket, and cream and sugar set were used to stage this kitchen.

furniture into seating groups, try different angles, etc. Ensure open flow between rooms.

- Use mirrors: Mirrors not only reflect light and make the room appear larger, they also enable people to “see” themselves on a psychological level as living in the house.

- Bathrooms matter: Select a great shower curtain, matching towels, soap and art to make the bathrooms stand out. Have a great soaking tub in the master? Add a bottle of wine or champagne, a couple of glasses and a candle.

- Let the light in. Great light is very important to selling a home. Open up or remove drapes, clean the windows, add extra lamps as well as accessories that reflect light. (Professionals often use floor level up-lighting around plants and art. Sconces that provide upward light make ceilings appear taller. Ceiling lights, especially “can” lights can make short ceilings appear shorter.

- Add a few upscale elements that “pop.” You can get away with lower and midrange items throughout most of the house if you choose just a few items or areas that “pop” or feel upscale. For example, use

builder-grade cabinets but position some higher and others lower, and add molding to them. Great countertops are key and small touches like cabinet knobs, upgraded faucets, and faux or decorative art accents can make all the difference.

- Sell the lifestyle. Help buyers imagine the lifestyle they will enjoy in this home (e.g., A rocking chair and a pitcher of lemonade on the porch, an overturned book and reading glasses next to the lounge chair, a party platter on the kitchen island, etc.) All of these enable the buyer to imagine themselves enjoying the home.

- Don't ignore the exterior. Today's buyer wants a great outdoor living space. Include a great deck or patio (or use mulch or stones to resemble one) Add great outdoor furniture, a fire pit or fire pit table, cooking area, etc. Add color with potted plants and hanging baskets. ■

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