

Successful Staging

Spruce Up and Clean Out
to Turn On Prospective Home Buyers

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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Selling your existing home? With prospective buyers walking through every room, peering inside your closets and cupboards, you'll want to make the best impressions possible. Interior design professional Adrienne van Dooren offers several practical, do-able tips that will help you stage your humble abode for a top dollar sale. - The Editor

When staging your home to sell, please remember...

■ 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. This is a recurring homeowner error pointed out on the hit HGTV show-"Designed to Sell." In the show, designers have a \$2000 budget to completely update and stage a home. They use what the owners have and add accents, but also paint, re-tile, etc to update kitchens and baths. Homeowners often use their dining room as an office, the basement rec room for storage etc. The show's designers ensure that every room is staged to

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represent the room's proper function. For example, they may add a table, chairs and chandelier to define the dining room or add perhaps place a small table and stools in the kitchen to highlight the fact that the home has an “eat in” kitchen. Another favorite tactic is to ensure the deck or terrace has good-looking patio furniture and flowers.

■ While staging often includes adding items such as a vase of flowers, a table etc, the pre-staging, de-cluttering phase is the most critical part of the process. Homeowners often ignore this advice from sales agents because they don't recognize the importance or don't wish to pay for a storage unit. What they don't understand is the conscious use and subconscious psychological impact of clutter on buyers. This inexpensive project can make all the difference in purchase price and time on the market - often equating to thousands of dollars. Step 1 is to put everything you will not need or use prior to the move into storage (small appliances, seasonal clothing, toys, videos, extra toiletries, etc.) or donate/throw away as appropriate. This is also a great way to get a head start on packing. Clear as much as you can from cupboards and closets as well. Buyers almost always check out closet space and open the cabinets. A bulging closet sends a “not enough storage space” message at the conscious level and “chaos, stressful” message on the subconscious level. Conversely a neatly organized, half empty storage area sends the “spacious, calm” message.

■ The next step is to put away items you would normally leave out on the counters for convenience sake. (e.g. coffee maker, mixer, electric can opener, bread box in the kitchen and hair brush, hairspray,

shampoo, toothpaste etc., in the bathroom). It may be an inconvenience for a short time but this step does make a big difference. On the conscious level, cleared kitchen counters appear to be larger. On the subconscious level, the message is “clean, calm, organized, ready for entertaining.”

■ Put away your paperwork. Stacks of mail and paperwork add clutter to a space. Neatly stack these items in baskets when you are not working on them.

■ Engage all the buyer's senses. Leave on soft background music, bake chocolate chip cookies or simmer cinnamon and spices in a croc pot, etc. Scent can be a powerful reminder of happy times. The transference effect means the association of those pleasant memories and good feelings with your home. Leave a plate of cookies for them to eat with a little note saying, “help yourself.” This is a common tactic of sales agents because it not only triggers association but also elicits a subconscious reciprocity response. Simply stated, reciprocity is the feeling that if someone gives you something, you owe them something in return. This is often used by car dealerships that offer you a free radio or other gift for taking a test drive. Of course no one consciously thinks: “They gave me a \$20 radio so I should buy a \$20,000 car.” however, on the subconscious level the reciprocity response is quite strong.

■ Update the space. For example, you may need to paint your kitchen cabinets, plaster or veneer over unsightly countertops, replace really



aged appliances with stainless steel, change out linoleum for tile in the bath, etc. Do you have pink tile in the bath? New products and sealers allow DIYers to paint and plaster right over existing floor or shower tile, countertops, even plastic lawn chairs. See a bath-tile makeover at www.fauxhouse.com.

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■ Pay attention to the bathrooms. Kitchens and baths are the number one focus for homebuyers. Kitchen and bath remodeling often pays for itself. However there are many new cutting edge products that allow you to update a bath without a messy and expensive remodel. For example, in the new book, **The House that Faux Built: Transform Your Home with Paint, Plaster and Creativity**, chapter six shows the complete transformation of a dated, white tiled bathroom into a Moroccan retreat. The transformation was completed without ripping out the floor tile, shower surround or toilet. Volunteers plastered right over the cracked tile floor for a slate effect and used a stone look plaster on the shower surround. Will it hold up? It will with proper preparation, priming and nautical sealer. The Fauxhouse was rented for a year to a woman with two children and later opened to the public for three months. Everything held up beautifully.

■ The single area that dates a bath more than any other is the

sink/mirror/light area. Does your sink look dated? You may consider replacing it. Have an old medicine cabinet mirror? Replace it with a framed oval or rectangular mirror. Sink cabinets can be painted, or, if quite unattractive, replaced with a newer one. It may be worth adding a pedestal sink or a furniture /bowl style cabinet in the powder room. Potential buyers think- "This is the bath my guests will see - I want to impress them."

■ Is your tub an awful color or badly worn? No need to replace it. A tub epoxy paint kit is available at home stores or you can hire a professional to either paint it or add a shell system that fits right over your old tub and surround. Once you are happy with the big things such wall color, floor, tub, tile and sink, look and see if a new faucet would make a difference. Replace a mildewed or loud patterned shower curtain with something neutral. Be sure to use a fabric shower curtain with a plastic liner. Plastic alone screams "cheap." Next, set the stage. Purchase some beautiful hand-towels to hang in the bathroom. Hide the real bar of soap and put out a fresh one. Fold the toilet paper flap into a point like they do in a hotel, place some rolled towels, a candle, a bottle of champagne, strawberries and 2 glasses near a soaking tub to show the romantic, spa side of the bath.



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.

“Sell the lifestyle. Help buyers imagine the lifestyle they will enjoy in this home...an overturned book and reading glasses next to the lounge chair... all enable the buyer to imagine themselves enjoying the home.”

■ Bedrooms. Are they neutral or do they scream “girly” or “flowers?” Consider new bedding in a neutral color. Emulate the peaceful calm of a 4-star hotel room.

■ 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 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. ■

Adrienne van Dooren is National Marketing Director for MyGreenCottage and author of **The House that Faux Built: Transform Your Home with Paint, Plaster and Creativity**. Order this fascinating book at www.familyhomeplans.com. You can also learn more about building green and creating beautiful interiors at www.fauxhouse.com and www.mygreencottage.com.

