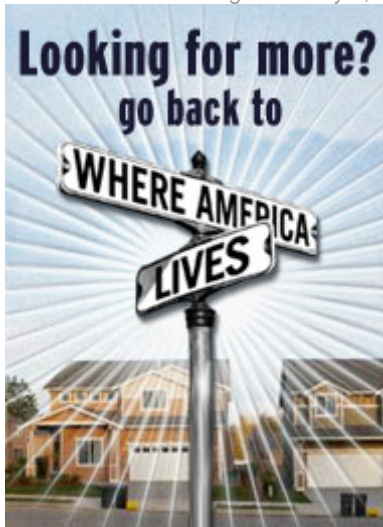


How To Make Your Home Sell Faster

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Putting your house on the market? A good real estate agent isn't all you need. Staging your house can be the difference between its sitting or selling. So what is "staging"? Small tweaks with paint, furniture placement and accessories that make your house look as desirable as possible. **A Coldwell Banker Real Estate Corp. survey found that staged homes spent half the time on the market and sold for more than 6% above the asking price.**

Here are some simple staging tricks to help you turn lookers into buyers at your next open house.

Scrub till it sparkles! It sounds obvious, but experts say sellers often overlook this easy fix. "You'd be shocked at the things I've seen," says Tanya Memme, host of *Sell This House* on A&E. Vacuum behind couches and under the bed. Scrub out stains in the carpet and wash all of the windows inside and out. Scour ceiling fans and polish doorknobs. When things sparkle, houses sell. Open windows to let in the fresh air. And have a friend perform the white glove—and sniff—tests. You may be so used to your cat's litter box that you don't even notice its smell.

Clobber the clutter. Go room by room and purge. The less stuff you have, the bigger the house will seem. Get rid of anything personal: Kids' trophies, wedding pictures and college banners make buyers feel like intruders. "You want people to feel like they're walking into a house that could be theirs," explains Memme.

If you truly can't part with your Elvis Presley collectibles, rent a storage space and visit the dolls there. Don't shove them in a cabinet—buyers will open overstuffed closets and scream, "This house lacks storage space!" Reserve the drawers for daily necessities like toothbrushes and glasses.

Pay attention to details.

Go through your entire to-do list, then do and redo. That means patching any holes in the walls, fixing leaky faucets and replacing burned-out light bulbs. Buy fresh towels and put all the toilet lids down. Hide wastebaskets. Play soft music (tuned to the same station) throughout the house. Alphabetize your spice jars and line up all the shoes in your closet. Play up the zones in your garage: Designate one area for sporting goods, one for lawn care, one for seasonal decorations, etc. “Organization helps sell a home,” says Lisa LaPorta, a designer on HGTV’s *Designed To Sell*.

Camouflage with paint. “It’s amazing what a fresh coat of paint can do,” says Memme. Paint not only makes a house look better, it also helps with odor. Pick neutrals. Sure, you love your orange walls, but a potential buyer might simply remember your house as the one with the awful orange bedroom. “Why push your luck?” asks LaPorta. Neutral doesn’t mean white. Try warm tans, honeys, taupes and sage.

Entice buyers to enter. Go across the street to get a good look. Your eye should be drawn to the door, not to the grass that needs mowing, the overgrown weeds or that old rain gutter that has been sitting in your driveway since 2005. “If people don’t like what they see on the outside, they may not come in,” says LaPorta. Doors are the one exception to the neutral-color rule. Rich colors say “welcome” and “come inside.” Some suggestions: red, black, charcoal and chocolate brown.

Create an inviting entry with colorful flowers—group pots in threes or stage them at varying levels, says LaPorta. Don’t overdo. “I’d rather see one really good-sized plant in a beefy pot than three wishy-washy plantings in mishmashed pots,” she adds.

Define each room. Don’t force buyers to guess a room’s purpose. Figure out its true intent and then furnish accordingly. If your living room doubles as an office, take out the desk.

Use furniture wisely. And sparingly. See if you can pare down a quarter to a half of the furniture in every room. Think about visual weight as well. Big furnishings make a room seem smaller. A glass-top table seems smaller than one that’s solid wood. Take a picture of each room to gain perspective.

Highlight key architectural elements. “The biggest mistake I’ve seen is wonderful features—m oldings, leaded glass, beautiful fireplaces—hidden by drapes, cabinets and clutter,” says LaPorta. Instead, direct the eye with drama. Use a contrast color on crown molding or use valances to showcase tall windows. And don’t push all the furniture up against a wall—that creates empty space in the middle of a room. “Instead, float it off the wall to help buyers

circulate around the room,” she adds.

Let there be light. Turn on every light in the house—even in the daytime. In general, use 100 watts per 50 square feet of floor space, says LaPorta. Use spotlights behind a couch, in a plant or on either side of a fireplace to add textured light and mood, suggests Memme. Unless a window looks onto a garbage dump, keep drapery open.

And remember: Once you put the For Sale sign on the lawn, you have to emotionally detach from your house. “It’s not about how you live or what your taste is,” says LaPorta. “It’s about appealing to a wide range of tastes.”

Inexpensive extras

Six props every house seller should have on hand:

- Bowl of lemons
- Fresh flowers
- Spotlights
- Candles
- Throw blankets
- Pillows