

HOME STAGING

THE POWER THAT SELLS REAL ESTATE

Home Staging

The Power That Sells Real Estate

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INTRODUCTION

Home staging is a very detailed procedure where a property is prepared for sale. There are many reports providing examples and statistics proving that a property is far more likely to sell faster, and for more money, than one that is not. The origins of home staging can be traced back to the mid 1970s. Over the decades the art has been refined through education and experience. As in any business, there are some who rise to the top and become widely accepted as experts in their field.

Home Staging, The Power That Sells Real Estate brings together 15 home staging specialists. Each will reveal a facet of the business in which they have achieved renown.

Please keep in mind this is not an instruction manual. The publisher's intention was to provide some insight for real estate sales persons and homeowners. Hopefully the book clears away particular misconceptions, and demonstrates that home staging is a structured and complex strategy with well-defined results. Those who are home staging professionals, or considering venturing into this challenging and rewarding career, will find inspiration and further their understanding of refining the art of home staging.

In closing, I'd like to say that together we work not only to advance our own careers, but to advance our chosen profession as a whole. Thereby enhancing the exchange of real estate and consequently improving our entire economy.

Angela Brooks

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HOME STAGING

CHAPTER TEN

Staging For Living

Staging for living

Imagine you finally purchased your dream home – perfect location, good school district, great curb appeal – yes, everything you and your family will need to start a new chapter in your lives. It is closing day, you can hardly contain your excitement. You drive up to “home sweet home”, open the door and it is not quite the way you remembered. It is void of any warmth or personality, no longer staged. You are having difficulty envisioning your processions in this space. You ask yourself: “What are we going to do now?” Don’t worry, staging for living is your answer.

Staging for living, like staging to sell, is a term used in the real estate industry. An easy definition is “the staging of a newly purchased home that best represents the new buyers and their family’s personality, lifestyle and desires”. Staging for living is usually introduced by a home stager who offers decor services and has decorating experience. That is right, staging for living is also known as interior decorating. For the purpose of this chapter, we will continue to refer to our process as “staging for living”.

You may be wondering why a book about home staging has a chapter dedicated to staging for living. The answer is simple. Home stagers are often approached by both sellers and buyers to create the beautiful look used when marketing the property that they purchased or sold.

This chapter will show the similarities and differences between staging for living and staging to sell. I will offer my expertise in what is involved with the staging for living process, plus what savvy homeowners should consider before moving forward with a renovation/redesign project, big or small. Things such as budget, time constraints and evaluating whether you may be over-improving as it pertains to resale value. Last but not least, what to look for when choosing a home stager to bring your vision to fruition.

Let's start with the similarities and differences between staging for living and staging to sell.

Staging to Sell	Staging for Living
Stager comes in and accesses your house	Stager comes in and accesses your personal needs and style
Completed in a quick timeline, sometimes within days	The time line for staging for living is typically a much longer process, usually stretching weeks into months, depending on the budget and scope of the project

Similarities

- **Create flow**

In both staging for living and staging to sell, creating flow is extremely important. Having a well-thought-out floor plan

will allow guests or buyers to come into a space without any obstructions, making the room feel spacious and open.

- **Create balance**

So many times I have entered a home whether for sale or for a design consultation and the balance is all wrong. The major fault is often size and proportion. For example, art above the sofa is not only hung too high, but it's way too small, they have a tiny lamp beside an oversized chair, just to name a few. Balance will give the room a cohesive look.

- **Create light**

Lighting is crucial. Lighting should be natural, functional and directional, this is known as the "Rule of 3".

- **Organization**

Everyone needs organization whether you have lived in your space for years or preparing your home for market. Organized rooms, closets or any space gives any home a clean and more spacious feel.

- **Declutter**

Keep, toss, donate and sell. This is a great way to keep your home clutter free. Purge items that you haven't used in at least two years. Remember these items are taking up valuable real estate in your home and purging is so freeing.

- **Colour**

When I speak of the similarities in colour in staging to sell versus staging for living, it is in regards to flooring and walls. If you have a warm floor colour, then a warm wall colour needs to be used and the same applies with cool colours. Warm and cool colours only compete with each other and throws off the vibe in the room.

- **Create a focal point**

Every room needs a focal point! Focal points give a place for the eye to rest when entering a room. This is an important function in any design or staging project.

Differences

- **Favorite colours**

This is all about your personal taste, unlike staging to sell where colours are a neutral palette allowing the potential buyer to envision their family living there. Go crazy, maybe paint your ceiling purple!

- **Room functions**

You purchased a three-bedroom home, but you're wanting to set up one of those bedrooms as a home office. It's your house, go for it! Always remember should you want to sell your home someday, so that office will need to function as a bedroom once again.

- **Letting your personality shine**

Maybe you love the Victorian style or it's all about country. It is ok, you don't have to worry about appealing to any demographic, it's all about you.

- **Personal collections**

When staging to sell, all your personal collections need to be packed away. Now, you can showcase them!

As you can see, there are more similarities than differences when comparing staging for living and staging to sell. The key when deciding to move forward with staging for living is you want to choose a home stager/decorator who understands these differences and can deliver your personal style.

The process

We talked about the similarities and differences, lets now focus on “the process”. Like staging to sell, staging for living has a process to follow. It begins with a design consultation and these key points should be covered by the stager/decorator:

- Before the stager/decorator arrives at your home, they should have an idea of the scope of the project and what you hope to achieve during this consultation;
- The stager/decorator should begin your design consultation with a walk through of the space(s) needing their expertise. Taking photos and measurements helps them when developing a design plan;
- After taking a few minutes to explore the space, it’s time to sit down with you (the homeowner) to understand what your vision is for this space;
- Probing questions are key to determine how to move forward with the makeover/renovation;
- An experienced stager/decorator should ask the following questions and I’ve explained the reasons they need to be answered:
- What is the scope of the project?

The scope needs to be determined for a couple of different reasons. Firstly, the stager/decorator needs to decide if the size of work is within their skill sets. Secondly, the scope of the project also determines what a realistic budget will be.

- **What is your personal style preference?**

This is extremely important to creating a space that best reflects you and your family’s lifestyle. If your style is traditional, you don’t want your home to be contemporary because the stager/decorator prefers that style.

- **What colours do you like and dislike?**

The last thing you want is a space that is painted in dark colours when you prefer colours that are light and bright. Your stager/decorator needs to understand your preference.

- **What is the purpose of the space being renovated?**

Some spaces are obvious but others may not be. You may be converting a bedroom into a home office or a child's playroom. The stager/decorator must have a clear picture of your vision for this space.

- **Any special requirements needed in this space?**

You have decided to convert your lower level into a comfortable space for your ailing in-laws. Attention is needed in the bathroom as currently there is a bathtub/shower combo. You know they will need an easily accessible shower. This is just one of the many special requirements for this space. A list of needed requirements and equipment will need to be discussed during the initial consultation.

- **What existing furniture will be staying?**

You have some family heirlooms that you want to be incorporated into your new design, but everything else can be replaced. The stager/decorator needs to create a design plan that will include these pieces, plus purchasing other items that compliment the existing furniture.

- **Will you be replacing flooring, window covers, doors etc?**

This is important to know what is staying, not only for creating a design plan but determining the budget.

- **What is the budget?**

You've decided to update/renovate your space. Given the scope of the project you need to realistically look at the cost

to complete. A contingency fund should always be factored into any budget for unexpected surprises that could happen during your project.

- **What is the timeline to completion?**

Keeping to your timeline is not only important because it marks the completion of your project, but it means you are keeping within your budget. Each additional day you extend the completion date costs money and effects your bottom line. Your stager/decorator should be very cognizant of your timeline, making sure that trades, supplies, etc, have been scheduled in a timely manner.

- **Who will be using this room?**

It is important to know who will be using this space. Will it be your young children, teenagers, your in-laws or will it be your husband's man cave? Depending on who is using could dictate the finishes, colour palette, and furniture.

- **Will the homeowner need trades to complete the recommendations?**

Your stager/decorator could help with a list of trades and suppliers to move your project forward. You may have someone to help with the painting, but need a carpenter to help with the finish work. They are a great source you can use.

- **Are you over-improving your new home with this renovation?**

If this is your forever home, then this doesn't really need to be considered. If these renovations are on your wish list and your intentions are to stay to raise your young family and eventually become empty nesters, then do consider this. If you believe there is another home in your distant future,

then this question definitely needs to be considered, you don't want to over-improve. You need to be aware of housing prices in your neighborhood. Have a realistic budget and renovation plan which you will see a financial return on once you sell and move on.

- As the last step of the consultation, the stager/decorator should recap everything with you, the homeowner. Making sure the stager/decorator has a full understanding of your vision is essential.

The next step in the process would be the planning and/or sourcing. This is where the stager/decorator takes all the information gathered from the consultation and creates your plan!

Given the scope of the project the stager/decorator may present a mood/inspiration board. The board could include recommended colour palettes, flooring finishes, furniture, lighting, fabrics for window coverings, with a floor plan. This will be your opportunity to see the created vision and, more importantly, that it meets with your approval. This is your chance, as a homeowner, to tweak the plans, adding to, taking away or changing items. Along with the mood/inspiration board, the stager/decorator should be able to provide a list of recommended trades and suppliers to help with the project.

Your plan may be on a much simpler scale, choosing a colour palette, going out with the stager/decorator to help with some personal decor shopping. It could be because you are having a problem with creating good flow. This in fact was a call I recently received from a design client.

My client had moved from a large Century home into a charming bungalow built in the 50s, with great character. She had kept some of her family heirlooms and was having a difficult time with a floor

plan. Although her furniture was in the space, given the size of some of her pieces there was no flow. The bungalow had an L-shaped living room/dining room combination with an off-centered fireplace, thus adding to her dilemma. When I entered her home, I could see how she was struggling with the space immediately. There was an antique settee blocking the entrance, a large server in the living room. My recommendations started with moving the large server from the living room back into the dining room. This meant we needed to relocate the dining room ceiling light about 18" from its current location. We could now turn the dining table, with all chairs tucked around the table nicely. Now for the living room we needed to warm and define this space. With the off-centered fireplace, a square carpet wouldn't work, too many harsh angles. The decision was to purchase a custom round 8x8 area rug along with two new occasional chairs, keeping in mind the chairs had to complement her existing antique settee. My client is thrilled, we created a warm conversation area which she and her husband will enjoy for years to come.

The final step is getting the job done! You have signed off on the stager/decorator's recommendations. You are counting on their expertise to help you with completing your vision. The work can now begin.

Choosing the right home stager/decorator

Throughout this chapter I have been speaking about how a stager/decorator can help with your staging for living project. This is all good, but what if you have never had the experience of dealing with a home stager? Home stager/decorators have a wide range of skills, qualifications and business models. Many thoughts could be going through your mind. How will you select the best one? Should you base your decision on price alone? If your search for a home stager/decorator is based solely on price, you can expect to get what you

pay for? The most expensive stager/decorator is not necessarily the best one and neither is the least expensive one. When you obtain prices for a home renovation, you usually don't go with the highest or lowest-priced contractor. It is no different when choosing a home stager/decorator. Price is certainly a consideration, but there are many other factors to take into account.

What should really count most is quality! Choosing the most qualified person that you think will work best with you is important. The ideal home stager/decorator should be a reputable, experienced professional who is creative, ethical and answers all of your questions in a timely manner. They should address and listen to your concerns throughout the entire process. You should investigate, make inquiries and interview several home staging companies. Once you find a few staging companies that you are interested in, take a look at their websites first. There you can find out more about their background, business style and expertise.

Looking at the home stager/decorators' websites will certainly help when deciding who to interview for your future project. Remember, knowledge is power. Here are some questions to consider will selecting a home stager/decorator who is right for you:

- What are your credentials?
- Are you and your employees trained? What staging/decorating courses have you completed?
- Are you and your employees insured?
- Is your home staging business full time or part time?
- Are you able to provide credible references?
- What is included and/or excluded in your prices? Are there any hidden costs?
- What is involved in a consultation? What type of report is included with a consultation (eg, verbal, written)?

- Do you have a website and portfolio?
- Are you a member of an affiliated home staging trade association and/or decorating association?

Another critical consideration is their ability to work well with people and build relationships. When you contact their references you should ask about the staging company's written and verbal communications. Are they clear and concise? Do they return phone calls and emails in a timely manner? Do they communicate frequently and manage client expectations professionally and appropriately?

To avoid unanticipated misunderstandings and conflicts, always ask the right questions before choosing a home stager.

When choosing a qualified, professional home stager/decorator, shop around and investigate. This is old-fashioned advice, but so worth doing!

It would be remiss of me if I didn't address the difference between a home stager/decorator and an interior designer.

An interior designer has completed a three-year design program. This includes both residential and commercial space design, learning building codes, furniture design, mechanical and safety systems, just to name a few courses. While an interior decorator is a two-year program, it does exclude furniture design, building codes or any mechanical and safety systems.

Given the more extensive schooling to become an interior designer, they often attract more money to manage a project than an interior decorator. A homeowner needs to be aware of the professional fees when starting a project to make sure those fees are also in the budget. It is essential the homeowner finds the best professional for their project.

Although staging and decorating share some distinct similarities – such as lighting placement, colour, line, shape, scale, space, and texture – there truly is a difference. The main distinction is that decorating reflects a homeowner's personal tastes whereas staging appeals to a broader spectrum, with particular emphasis on the buyer's perspective.

Decorating is for personal enjoyment. It is a reflection of personal taste and style. It is a luxury which generally involves a large budget, and is realized over a long time frame. Home stagers/decorators acquire inspiration from bold and beautiful colours that homeowners love. Personal collections, collectibles, photographs, favorite art works and treasures are incorporated into the personal design. Decorating is all about the beautiful things that an individual loves!



Lynn MacMillan is a **certified interior decorator** and home stager whose passion for design inspires her to see opportunity and potential in every home. She combines a keen eye for detail, observant nature and strong knowledge of decorating and architectural design to create beautifully staged living spaces where buyers can imagine building their new lives.

As a lifelong resident of St. Catharines, MacMillan has a deep understanding of Niagara's communities and demographics, which allows her to stage functional, rejuvenated spaces that land on buyers' must-see lists.

MacMillan grew up among seven siblings in a family who were always building and creating, and she began to explore her own creativity early. Though MacMillan would spend a secure 30-year career in the banking industry, she continued to harbour a love for decorating and design. She would often help family and friends renovate their kitchens and solve their home decorating conundrums. When she retired, MacMillan finally had the time and experience to fulfill her dream and launch her own interior design and decorating business in 2012. She specialized in working with homeowners to create beautiful, affordable interiors for selling and living. Four years later, she partnered with certified professional home stager Colleen Donovan to establish Gem Home Staging & Designs.

Together, they provide unparalleled staging and decorating talent to help savvy homeowners, REALTORS® and investors prepare properties for market.

For more information about Lynn or her company visit
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NORTH CAROLINA, USA RESOURCES

Judi Margulies/Allen Tate Realtors

As a Residential Real Estate Specialist since 1987, I have had the pleasure of listing and successfully selling hundreds of homes. Over time, I have come to appreciate the value of TEAM WORK throughout the process, including the invaluable expertise of Bobbie McGrath of Successful Staging. For OUTSTANDING RESULTS in the SALE of YOUR home, visit us at www.TheMarguliesTeam.com.

Contact Judi Margulies of The Margulies Team at 919.880.2813 or judi.margulies@allentate.com

Laura Moody/Front Porch Realty

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Ann Cavallito/Peak, Swirles & Cavallito

As an owner of a boutique real estate firm handling a spectrum of properties for over 30 years, I've found that the single most important aspect of selling a home, besides location, is pricing and staging. Presenting a staged home with professional photography helps

clients sell their homes faster, often with multiple offers, for more money. The results are simply astounding. On staging, I'm SOLD!

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TRADE ASSOCIATIONS

Real Estate Staging Association® (RESA®) is the trade association for professional real estate stagers. RESA is to advancing professionalism and excellence in real estate staging. For more information on real estate staging statistics, consumer reports and how to find a stager near you, visit RealEstateStagingAssociation.com

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