

Staging Your Home: How to Make Buyers Fall in Love

With these tips and tricks, your house will be swoon-worthy in no time.

All the world is a stage, said the Composer. That includes your house. Which is for sale. And thus, needs to look bee-yoo-tee-ful.

Staging may entails hiring experts with a flair for interior design. They reimagine your living space and give your house makeover (with temporary décor and furnishing) so that it gets “oohs” and “aahs” from the buying masses.

Great staging isn't an insurance policy – there's no guarantee it will bring in more money when you sell your home – but it's an important marketing tool. It presents your house in a flattering manner and helps you compete at a favorable price. (In that sense, staging is like dressing your house for the price you want, and not the price you have.)

Staging also leads to eye-catching listing photos, which are especially valuable given that most home buyers begin their search by scrolling through listings online. So, are you thinking about hiring stagers for your home? Here's what to consider.

Staging Really Does Help. Like, a Lot.

But you don't have to take our word for it. A recent [survey from the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®](#) revealed that:

- 77% of buyers' agents said staging makes it easier for their buyer to visualize the property as their future home. It's like helping the buyer dream it so they can achieve it - and so you and your agent can make the sale.
- 39% of sellers' agents said staging a home greatly decreases the amount of time a house is on the market. For you, time saved could mean moving into your new house even sooner.
- 21% of sellers' agents said staging a home increases its dollar value between 6% and 10%. Simply put, that may lead to more money in your pocket.

Before You Stage, Budget Accordingly

Many listings agents offer staging services to clients as part of their services. If you want to use someone you find yourself, you typically will have to pay out of pocket.

Staging costs vary depending on where you live and how many rooms you're staging. On average, home sellers pay between \$302 and \$1,358 for staging, [according to Home Advisor.com](#). If your house is empty because you've already moved, you might also have additional expenses for renting furniture and other homey decorations to make it look lived-in.

Many stagers offer consultations for as low as \$150, [Fixr.com reports](#). Using the advice, you learn during the consultation to try DIY staging may be your best option if you're on a tight budget. Listen for tips on how to use the furniture and decor you already have to show off your home's best assets.

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For the Best Results, Declutter

Spoiler alert: No buyer wants to walk into a messy house.

So, take time to clean and declutter your home. Organize everyday household items into crates and

keep them out of sight. Stow away seasonal decorations (that means no Christmas in July). Make time for - or invest in - a whole-house cleaning, including carpet shampooing. Change lightbulbs, finally make those minor repairs, and add a fresh coat of paint to any room that needs it. Clean out closet spaces- because buyers will want to check out the closets.

Also, worth considering? Removing personal items from view, such as copious family photos, artwork, or religious keepsakes. The concern is not that home buyers will be offended by you or your lifestyle. The goal is to neutralize the space and help home buyers imagine themselves living there. (But don't go overboard. You don't want rooms to feel sterile, either.)

Yes, we did just tell you to clean out your closets. So where are you supposed to put all this stuff? If you don't have a discrete place to tuck things away, consider renting a storage unit.

To Find the Right Stager for Your Home, Ask Questions

If your agent doesn't offer staging services, he or she can likely recommend local stagers for you to work with. Before you hire a stager, it's best to interview at least three candidates in person. You'll want to get a sense of how much they charge - and whether they have good taste.

To do your due diligence, here are 10 questions to ask prospective stagers:

1. **On average, how many days were your staged homes on the market last year?** Experience is important, but it's not the only factor to consider when vetting stagers. You want someone who stages homes that sell - ideally within 30 days, because that's when agents often recommend making a price reduction if your house is still on the market.
2. **What price range do you typically work in?** Staging luxury homes is a totally different ball game than staging starter homes. Find someone who specializes in homes near your listing price.
3. **What styles of homes do you usually stage?** Staging different types of homes also requires different skill sets (think of a penthouse versus a bungalow, for instance). Look for someone with experience working in homes similar to yours.
4. **What formal training have you received?** Staging organizations, such as the Real Estate Staging Association (RESA) and the International Association of Home Staging Professionals (IAHSP), offer certification or accreditation. Training from these associations can distinguish professional stagers from beginners.
5. **Do you have insurance?** Your home could get damaged when the stager moves furniture in and out. Find someone with business insurance so that you're protected.
6. **Can I see your portfolio?** One of the best ways to judge a stager's skills is to look at their work. Ask to see photos from the person's three most recently staged homes.
7. **Do you select the accessories, furniture, and paint for the homes you stage, or do you collaborate with other experts?** Some stagers work independently, while others collaborate with other vendors. Make sure you know everyone who will be involved in staging your home, so you don't have surprise guests rearranging your living room.
8. **What are your rates?** Some stagers charge a fee for decorating services, plus a monthly fee for renting furniture, while others charge a flat fee per room for the duration of the listing. Ask about how a stager determines costs before you commit to working with him or her.
9. **What's your availability?** If you're on a tight timetable, make sure the stager can get your house ready by the date you want to put your house on the market.
10. **Can you provide contacts for past clients?** Get in touch with two or three people who have worked with the stager before. Ask how the stager's services helped with the sale of their homes, and what they might have done differently.

Focus on the Rooms that Count the Most

You don't have to stage your whole house to make buyers swoon. Staging the rooms where people tend to spend the most time usually makes the biggest impression on buyers. Start with the living room. Followed by the master bedroom and the kitchen.

Keep in mind that you're not going for an HGTV-worthy overhaul: Even small touches, like putting fluffy towels in the bathroom or replacing shabby throw pillows in the family room, can make your home that much more attractive.

Oh, and BTW: Stage Your Yard, Too

Your house has to look its best - inside and outside. After all, buyers form their first impression when they pull up in front of your home. It's no surprise, then, that curb appeal - how your home looks from the exterior - can increase your home's sales value up to 17%, a [Texas Tech University study](#) found. If you've never had your yard professionally landscaped, now may be the time to do it. Landscaped homes have a sales price advantage ranging from 5.5% to 12.7%, according to [research by Alex Niemiera](#), a horticulturist at Virginia Tech. That would mean an extra \$16,500 to \$38,100 in value on a \$300,000 home.

Professional landscaping, however, can cost a lot. You're aiming for polish, not a new garden of Versailles. **If budget is a concern, start with these DIY improvements:**

- Plant blooming flowers and fresh greenery. Even if it's winter, you can add colorful winter blooms and seasonal touches such as garland or lights.
- Mow the grass.
- Reseed bare patches of lawn and add fresh sod, as needed.

Then move on to these easy upgrades to your home's exterior:

- Wash the front windows.
- Power wash siding and walkways.
- Repaint or stain porches and stairs, as needed.
- Make sure house numbers are easy to see, visible, and pretty.
- Make sure important outdoor features such as the front door, porch, and sidewalks and paths are well lit. (If not, install new fixtures or lighting.)

Even basic upgrades - like laying fresh mulch, changing porch lights, or installing a new mailbox - can help a buyer fall in love at first sight. Just wait 'til they come inside and see what else you've done with the place.

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