

Experts agree: Staging sells

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Special to Residences

If you're trying to sell a home in this competitive market, it is important to ensure that your home has been "staged." If you want your residence to shine on the market (surveys show that staged homes sell seven times faster than unstaged ones), heed the following advice.

"Staging is a widely used real estate and design technique that grows in popularity each year," said Ron Hammond, a designer for Robb & Stucky Interiors in Boca Raton.

In fact, real estate agents in metropolitan areas are reporting that one in five homes on the market is being staged. These experts also note that staged homes sell more often at their asking price.

Why does staging make such a huge difference? "Because an empty home lacks imagination, and a cluttered home lessens appeal," Hammond said.

"In real estate, there are few second chances. The goal is to make a great first impression by engaging the buyers. The best way to do that is through visual aids," he added.

The typical buyer cannot accurately judge dimension in either a blank or a jumbled space. When the overall goal is to get prospects to picture themselves living in the home, it is important for them to be able to visualize their furnishings and other personal belongings in place.

An empty home makes this a guessing game; an overly personalized space is distracting.

"If your home is up for sale, start with 'room editing,'" Hammond advised. "Hiring a designer can help, as this is the hardest part of staging for most people. Go room to room to clear clutter that can make rooms appear smaller, and pack away all personal items such as photos and children's artwork."

The goal is to create a welcoming environment, much like a model home or spaces in a swanky resort. Notice that these places are decorated, but they are not personalized or filled with unnecessary items.

Advice while de-cluttering: Stick to leaving the basics, with a few attractive accents.

"Put all packed items in the garage, crawl space, storage shed or in a rented storage unit," said Hammond. "Do not fill up your closets. The closets have to be cleaned out so that prospective buyers will see adequate space; it tends to be on every buyer's wish list."

Too many items on bookshelves, tabletops, in corners, etc. — as well as bulging closets — give buyers the impression that there is not sufficient storage in the home.

"After that, make all necessary home repairs. Remember that all it takes is one or two unpleasanties to encourage



Brown's Interiors in Boca Raton decorated this townhome in Ocean Ridge Yacht Club (above). The townhome sold furnished.

a buyer to look for, and to see, only the negative," warned Hammond.

As for colors: Earth tones are a safe bet. For example, tone down dark-colored walls or heavily patterned wallpaper with neutral paint or some other wall covering in eggshell, beige or tan. Instead of bold furnishings and accessories, display only those with simpler, cleaner lines.

The next step is to rearrange furniture, if needed. Again, a designer can be a big help. The home should appear as large as possible, and foot traffic should be able to breeze easily through each room. Allow the items in your home to accentuate, not hamper, the space.

Correctly positioned furnishings make potential buyers feel more at home. Just ask Ernie Varvarikos of V & O Island Properties, developer of the Estates section of Ocean Ridge Yacht Club in central Palm Beach County.

"We built six Mediterranean-style townhomes along the Intracoastal Waterway," Varvarikos explained. "They are all in a great neighborhood, within minutes of the beach, and several have personal docks. But it was still the model that sold first — fully furnished."

Don't overlook the obvious, Hammond advised: "Clean your home. Consider bringing in a cleaning company to do a

thorough job and to help eliminate odors."

If you smoke or have pets, this is especially important. Do not try to mask bad scents by using chemicals; this will not work. A thorough cleaning is best.

Finally before buyers come through, make sure that window treatments are open — to showcase views and to allow for as much natural light as possible. Also, if weather permits, open a few windows to allow fresh air in.

Turn on all the lights in the home, and strategically place candles and fresh flowers for a finished touch.

In the end, you too will find staging worth the investment.