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9 Tips For Staging Your Home

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By Abigail Green

Baking cookies just doesn't cut it any more. In today's competitive housing market, sellers have to set their homes apart from all the other "For Sale" signs on the block. And while the smell of fresh-baked cookies is a start, home staging turns that concept up a notch. Some of the area's top stagers offer tips on prepping your home for a fast and profitable sale.

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Furnishing an empty house will help prospective buyers imagine living in the home. Courtesy Simply Put Interiors

1 You can't sell what you can't see. Yes, a home's interior is important. But no matter how impressive the inside, you won't get potential buyers through the door if the exterior has been neglected or worse, isn't visible. If the front of your house is blocked by overgrown shrubs or trees, boost curb appeal by pruning or removing obtrusive foliage, painting the front door, cleaning the windows, and fixing any cracks in the walkways. "The more flaws people notice, the more they're going to look for," says accredited staging specialist and realtor Bernie Livingston of BStaged to Sell in Baltimore.

Proper lighting also falls into this category. "The lights should all be on when showing a home," says JoAnn Pagliero, accredited staging specialist and Coldwell Banker realtor. Natural light is ideal, but

lights or uplights can be placed in dark corners to illuminate the walls.



HSR Certified Professional, Robin Rosen of Stageeffect adds warmth and character to the stylish but stark interiors of this empty home. Photos Courtesy Of Home Staging Resource



2 Cut the clutter. You're moving any way, so you might as well pack up excess clutter and furnishings now. Less stuff makes rooms look larger. Paula Henry of real estate staging company Simply Put Interiors, Inc. in Baltimore tells her clients to stop thinking of their house as home and start thinking of it as merchandise. If you were selling your car, you'd get it cleaned, detailed, and get all your junk out, right? Same goes for houses.

3 Go with the flow. Beware of large furniture that blocks traffic patterns, says Henry. Furniture placement is crucial to the flow of a home and to creating the illusion of space. If people have to walk around a huge recliner in the living room, for example, move it or get rid of it.

Do not, however, relegate all furniture to the perimeter of a room. "'Floating' the furniture is nice since

it creates intimate spaces for conversations," says Pagliero. "When it's all up against the wall it becomes a walk-through room."

4 Don't get personal. Stagers emphasize that any house on the market should have a "model home feel." What that means is, the fewer family photos and personal items, the better. "You want a buyer to see themselves in your house, so if they come in and every wall is plastered with family photos, they're going to see your family, not theirs," says Henry.

5 Neutralize your decor. Are you an avid sports fan? A big game hunter? A collector of Hummel figurines? Your home shouldn't reflect that when it comes time to sell. "You want to create an environment that's pleasing to everyone," says Livingston. "Some people are into sports, some people aren't. You need to neutralize your home to make it appealing to a lot of people."



Stylish new furnishings, updated fixtures, and foliage help define the spaces while smart furniture placement encourages flow throughout the home. Courtesy Simply Put Interiors

6 Update and modernize. Buyers love to see renovated kitchens and stainless steel appliances. Not in your budget? Update your decor with a few new accessories, like new hardware on outdated cabinets or throw pillows in a current color. Paint is another inexpensive way to update a house. "Neutrals are good," says Pagliero. "Not necessarily off-white, but taupe, latte, a variation of the new,

beautiful colors."

7 Create a distraction. If you can't replace, distract. "Maybe the cabinets in a kitchen aren't so great, but a homeowner doesn't want to replace them," says Henry. Place some attractive accessories on the countertops like a large wooden bowl filled with fruit to take the attention off the cabinets.

8 Empty houses don't sell. Stagers and realtors agree: vacant houses tend to sit on the market longer. "Buyers have a difficult time envisioning how it will look with furniture, how certain rooms will be used," or whether their furniture will fit, says Henry. Most home stagers have an inventory of their own furniture and accessories that they bring in to stage clients' homes. Or, they may rent furniture. If you can't furnish the whole house, focus on the kitchen, family room, and master bedroom.

9 Hire a professional. Rates vary for home stagers, many of whom are also realtors. They may charge by the hour, by the room, or by a percentage of the square footage of the house. Many stagers will do an assessment of the property and provide homeowners with a checklist of suggested improvements to do on their own. Remember: if you stage your home after it's been on the market for a while, don't forget to update the photos on Internet listings.

In this market, says Henry, staging pays off. "You may not get a higher price, but you're more likely to get a better and faster sale. Staging costs a lot less than price reduction or extra mortgage payments."

Livingston adds, "Statistics show that staged homes sell for more money and in less time. Personally, I have staged three homes within the past six months that have sold for the asking price to the first person who walked in the door."

Abigail Green is a Baltimore-based freelance writer.

RESOURCES:

BStaged to Sell (Bernie Livingston): bstagedtosell.com or 410-916-4663

Coldwell Banker (JoAnn Pagliero): cbmove.com or 410-515-2000

Home Staging Resource: homestagingresource.com or 888-563-9271

Simply Put Interiors, Inc. (Paula A. Henry): simplyputinteriors.com or 410-252-9911

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