

## Do-It-Yourself Staging Tips for Home Sellers



**by Mark Nash**

The buzzword today with residential real estate agents is staging. Staging a home can change a home's atmosphere that appeals to homebuyers and which may bring a higher price and accelerate market time. By adding small decorative touches, rearranging or deleting furniture or creating vignettes a home can look like a professional stager was hired. Mark Nash author of *1001 Tips for Buying and Selling a Home* has seen the best and worst in home staging as a real estate broker in Chicago and he shares some do's and don'ts for home sellers that want to try to stage their home.

### **Do's**

Pick-up recent home decorating magazines. If you're not up to speed on current decorating trends it will help familiarize yourself with how interior design is being marketed. Tab pages with low-cost ideas that which will make your home say today.

Invite a friend or real estate agent over. A second or third pair of eyes will help you accent the best and edit the worst in your home. Be prepared for some constructive criticism. You want to hear it before you put your home on market, not as feedback from prospective buyers. Go room-by-room with a worksheet so you can take notes. Depending on how much time you have available for an update or a makeover, you will need to prioritize and figure out what will give you the biggest return. Do this at least two months before you put your house on market.

Stage a home office if you don't have one. They're not a trend; they're required for homebuyers in 2006. Many homebuyers today work from home part or full-time or want a space where they can organize their life and park a computer. Find an extra bedroom, walk-in closet or an unused corner and convert into a home office. Make sure there is a convenient electric, telephone and cable supply.

Focus on living spaces. These areas are where the majority of homebuyers will spend their time. Place a side table and a floor lamp next to a comfortable chair as a reading corner. Float sofas and coffee tables away from walls for a designer look. Use area rugs to anchor furniture groupings on bare tile and wood floors. Living spaces must have matching table lamps. Streamline family photos and place green plants in room. Fireplaces should always be operable and on in season. Place groupings of candles and clear glass bowls filled with natural potpourri on side and coffee tables. Substantial wicker baskets can organize magazines, remote controls and toys. Limit knick-knacks to make room for staging materials.

Give attention to Kitchens. Put away in a handy drawer all dish towels and rags. Reduce recipe boxes, barrels of cooking utensils, excess-cooking machines, and cookbooks by two-thirds to open up counter spaces. For a quick update put new hardware on cabinets. Find an out-of-the-way place for a portable dishwasher. Clean off everything on the refrigerator door. Omit throw rugs scattered around the kitchen.

Clean off windowsills to open up exterior views. Organize cabinets with clear containers. If you can't see the back wall of a cabinet, buyers will think you don't have enough storage space. Ditto closets. Budget to keep a variety of fresh fruit in a glass bowl on the counter. Edit family bulletin boards. Remove old curtains and install new wood blinds on windows.

Spend time on sleeping and bathing spaces. Often overlooked in the frenzy to get a home on market, these spaces can make or break a home. Buy a set that consists of a matching bed skirt, bed spread, pillow covers and blinds to match. Buy a new shower curtain and separate liner. Wash the liner often if mold develops. Add complete sets of towels that coordinate with your new shower curtain. Clear all cosmetics off vanity. If you have an over-the-toilet cabinet consider removing and place a piece of artwork in its place. Remember to keep items in the "too much information" category, out of view. If you have a king-size bed in a small room, you'll pay to have buyers overcome this negative, so get rid of it now. Clear off dresser and nightstands of excess. Make sure the bedroom receives the maximum natural light. Install closet organizers in closets. Eliminate wall and door hooks for clothes. People might look under your bed, no surprises please.

Remember first impressions in entries. A simple console table with mirror over makes a nice entranceway. Make sure this space is well lit day or night. Place adhesive under rugs so buyers don't trip or slide.

## **Don'ts**

Use inexpensive silk flowers. Nothing distracts buyers more than silk flowers that are past their time, inappropriate for the season or thrown together. Throw them out, now.

Forget to upgrade Fido's bowl. I've experienced more unhealthy pet food bowls, watering stations and litter boxes than I care to remember. We know you love your pet, but prove it to homebuyers.

Overlook window coverings. Buyers today think less is more in window fashion. They want the most light and the least embellishment on windows. And no layered treatments with sheer panels please.

Use low wattage light bulbs. Dark, dim rooms are unappealing to homebuyers. They want to see what they might buy. Replace bulbs with manufacturer recommended wattages and especially the burned out ones. The newer low-energy bulbs don't cast home or people in flattering light.

Think that everyone loves wallpaper. No two people have the same taste in this instant decorator finishes. If it's more than three years old, take it down and paint in a neutral color. And wallpaper borders are out.

Paint with commitment colors. If you've determined that you need to paint, stay away from bold or as I call them commitment colors. Commitment colors are those buyers either love or hate. It can be difficult for buyers to overlay their style on them. As one client said to me "I don't live in a magazine."

Think cleaning is a part of staging. Cleaning is what you do before staging. Everything should shimmer and shine. Don't forget the windows.