

STAGING

The art of selling visually and emotionally

Clean, clean, then clean some more. Paint helps, too

BY SHANE INMAN
Special to the Record-Eagle

Are you a property owner with plans to sell your home in the near future? If so, you should know that there is much more to it than just calling up a real estate agent or slapping a "For Sale" sign in your front yard. Knowing how to accentuate your home's interior and exterior — and camouflage any flaws — can be invaluable when it comes to impressing potential buyers.

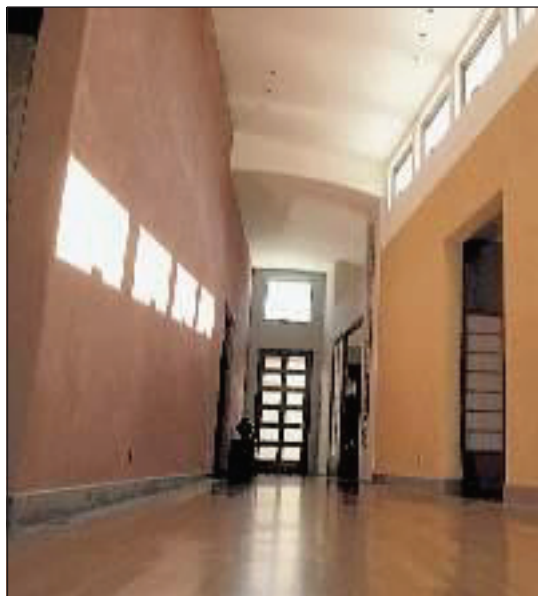
Real estate staging is a way to maximize your asking price or even gain a premium dollar amount over the listing price by marketing your home as a product that others can relate to, instead of simply a house. To do this properly, the average amount you should expect to invest is about one percent of the home's appraised value. In other words, if your home is worth \$200,000, you should be willing to spend \$2,000 on staging to get it ready to sell.

"Staging is developing into a whole new area of expertise when marketing a property," says Kimberly Pontius, Traverse Area Association of Realtors executive vice president. "The effort is designed to create emotion — to differentiate a house — which translates into more offers and more money. Sellers shouldn't look at staging in terms of how much it will cost, but rather how much difference it could ultimately make in the sale price. And staging isn't just for those with substantial financial resources — anyone can find ways to use a stager's expertise."

Some tips from the real estate staging pros:

- Clean up the outside of your home for good curb appeal. Potential buyers will determine whether they are attracted to your home within eight seconds of arriving in your driveway.

- Rent a storage unit.



A clean, uncluttered home lets would-be buyers imagine themselves living there.

Uncluttered rooms and accessories will allow potential buyers to view the actual home rather than its contents.

- Clear countertops. More linear feet of visible counter space will make your kitchen appear larger than it actually may be.

- Remove all personal pictures and memorabilia. Potential buyers need to be able to imagine themselves living in your home, which is hard to do when all of your personal items are competing for their attention.

- Clean, clean and clean some more. Every room of your home should sparkle. The message you are sending is: "If we take such good care of

the things you can easily see, imagine how we take care of the things you don't see, like maintaining the furnace, water heater and roof." If your place is not immaculate, you are still sending the same message — but in a negative context.

- Put away all children's toys. Some home buyers don't have children and cannot relate to the busy lifestyle of working parents.

- Relocate pets and remove things like their litter boxes, food dishes and beds for all showings. Remember, not everyone is an animal lover, and some people have allergies.

- Repaint. Paint is the least

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expensive way that you can make the biggest change. Repaint the entire home if you can, but if you cannot, just focus on any rooms that have "loud," personalized color. You want everything to blend and not stand out.

- Don't smoke in your home. The smell of lingering tobacco and dirty ashtrays will be a turn-off to people who are trying to picture their family in your space.

- Have carpets professionally cleaned. Although this will probably be your biggest investment, percentage-wise, you may be surprised at how inexpensive it is — and the

investment will pay off.

- Clean closets. All potential home buyers are going to open cabinets and closets, so make sure what's behind those doors is something you aren't ashamed to make public.

- Purge. Get rid of everything in your home that you are storing that you haven't used in one year. Not only will that help your house look more uncluttered, but you will have fewer things to move when you sell your house — which, if you follow all of the above suggestions, you will do!

Shane Inman is president of The Inman Company, a Traverse City interior design firm.

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