



HOUSE DRESS

These days, prepping your home for sale means clearing it out and then decking it out **BY LIZ GALLAGHER**

SELLING A HOME is an emotional undertaking. You love everything in it—even the finger-paint handprint on the kitchen wall is an important memory. But the buyers considering your home will want to envision how they'll create memories of their own. So as tough as it may be, part of your job as a seller is to make room for the buyer to picture a new life in the space. Enter home staging.

Staging is a way to answer questions cluttering the buyer's mind: Will my bed fit in this room? How will my pictures of my kids look on these walls? Will this home's layout work for me?

"You want the home to look like someone could move right in and live there," says Mary Granen, who owns the staging company, Dwellings, and is also a real estate agent with Windermere. Seattle-based stager Debbie Davis of Reveal, adds,

"Agents have always been staging—removing clutter and family photos. We come in and support that and take it to another level."

Today, those in the business estimate between 40 to 50 percent of all homes are staged, regardless of price range, and it's rare to walk into a completely vacant house or condo. And while stagers and agents recommend staging in any housing climate, Seattle's current real estate market—with inventory up over the past year and homes spending more time on the market—makes it even more important to stage your home in a style that lets it stand out. Staging can help a property sell more quickly and for more money, says long-time agent and associate broker, Sally Gregg of John L. Scott, who rarely lists a house without



In this Bellevue condominium living room, stager Debbie Davis chose furniture in warm colors and arranged it to open up the room

hiring a home stager. She's given new life to homes that have sat dormant on the market for three or four months by having them staged, adding that once outfitted, they then often sell within a week.

The staging trend has been influenced by the beautiful homes and environments consumers see in Pottery Barn, on HGTV and in publications such as *Martha Stewart Living*, says Granen. "I think they like to see that someone's gone that extra mile to stage a home," she says. And because so many homes today are advertised online, good photos are criti-



With a new color and a few simple accessories, home stager Mary Granen brightened up this cabinet—and the house it was in



cal—something that staging also helps with. “You get that one chance to make a first impression,” says Davis.

So how does a stager work?

Some stock a warehouse with furniture and decorative elements that they constantly update and use, as appropriate, when staging a home. Vacant houses get the ultimate treatment, with attention paid to every detail from furniture and décor to wall color, floor coverings and lighting. All of the main living spaces and a master suite are completely decked out and the home’s exterior may be painted or relandscaped.

For occupied homes, Davis performs what she calls a “quick stage” in about two hours. She does a walk-through with the owners, telling them how each room should look, and giving honest feedback on the home’s shortcomings. She pulls clutter into piles for the owners to deal with after she leaves, rearranges furniture and finds areas that need further action, such as buying new towels. “The ultimate goal is to create a clean, spare look,” she says.

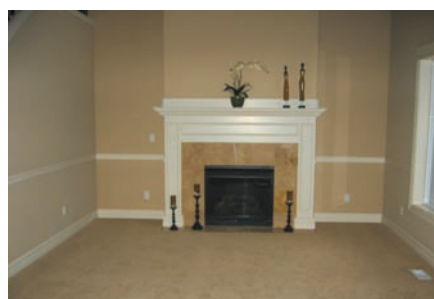
Decluttering is the number one technique of Davis’s quick stage. Other hints? Take magnets off of the refrigerator, turn on all the lights, beware of scented candles (often a turn-off for male buyers), buy odor-neutralizing products if you have pets, take shampoo and other bottles out of the shower, display live plants, and get rid of bathmats and toilet brushes.

How much does all this cost? It depends on the size of the home and how much attention it needs but can range from \$1,000–\$7,000. Davis says her average is about \$2,500. The price buys you the stager’s expertise and time, the rental of warehouse goods, and moving those goods in and out. A quick stage, where the stager works with a homeowner’s existing belongings, is from \$150–\$500, says Davis.

When it comes time to sell, the work of a professional stager might transform your home from the one still on the market into the one on the block with a sold sign. **S**



An empty room (left) is cold and uninviting. Stager Debbie Davis used furniture and artwork in neutral colors that have universal appeal—and a few well-chosen accessories



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