

Focus: Staging

Home Staging Comes Of Age: Helps Owners Sell High And Fast In Any Market

By Starr Osborne

A property has only one chance to enter the market looking its very best. Luckily, staging a home is an exciting tool in a broker or agent's toolbox. Suggesting the use of a home stager may make the difference between a home languishing in the market or selling high and fast.

Staging is transforming the real estate industry the way the Internet did in the last decade. In some areas like San Francisco, home staging is already a well developed industry. In many areas of the country, home staging is only just entering the market.

The Realtors® that are early adapters to this growing industry are using it to their advantage. In markets where staging is the norm, an unstaged house is handicapped. In markets where staging is only beginning, a staged house has a huge advantage over comparables. Home stagers and moving managers are the broker and agent's ace in the hole.

Simply put: Staging makes selling houses a whole lot easier, at no cost to the broker or agent. A good staging job can transform a property from "as is" to "move in." The client generally pays the stager a flat fee, which is almost always recouped, if not redoubled, in the sales price. Clients see stagers and moving managers as part of the broker's and agent's team. Their help and input accentuate the broker's and agent's contacts and abilities as a strategic "rainmaker."

WHAT "STAGING" IS

Home staging is a quick, intensive house make-over that creates a theater for potential buyers. Home staging is a hybrid of marketing and design, which carefully crafts the house to appeal to the statistically probable buyer. Stagers craft a property to appeal not to how a potential buyer lives, but to how they *aspire* to live. Homes that have been staged get on the market faster, sell rapidly for a higher price, are more organized and make the moving process less stressful for the seller.

As everyone is well aware, in many

areas throughout the country, the real estate market has shifted from a seller's to a buyer's market. In recent months the demand for houses has gone down. According to the National Association of Realtors®, buyers have never had more homes to choose from. Currently, there are 3.75 million homes for sale in the United States; this is up a nervous-making 41 percent over the past year.

REMEMBER THE GLORY DAYS

Unfortunately, this correction — which many argue is not unhealthy economically — is exacerbated for broker/agents by the sellers still remembering the glory days of the market of two years ago. Realtors® are faced not only with longer market life of houses, decreasing selling prices, but also with the unrealistic expectations of sellers. With so many more homes to choose from, a house in need of minor improvements can make or break the buyer's decision. Stagers successfully showcase a home and generate curb appeal. Good stagers will team with the brokers and agents to help manage the seller's expectations.

Good stagers are half marketers and half designers. They should rely on the broker or agent for a demographic profile of the probable buyer and then market to that profile. Stagers will stage empty properties and furnished homes. Whether bringing in inventory for the duration of their contract, or sorting and prc-packing a seller's clutter, the goal



About the Author

Starr Osborne is President and Founder of Tailored Transitions. In addition to leading her team of professional home stagers to successfully stage, sell and move her clients, she also teaches home staging courses in the Philadelphia area and has a background in arts, public relations and marketing. Before forming Tailored Transitions, Starr founded and managed Collins Communications, a public relations firm specializing in promotion of high-end products, designers and artists. For advice on staging or to locate a stager in your area, contact Tailored Transitions: www.tailoredtransitions.com or e-mail Starr@tailoredtransitions.com.

"Find a stager in your area and add their business card to your rolodex. Staging is here to stay. Savvy brokers and agents are reaping the benefits."

is the same: To appeal to the property's target market. Realtors® should suggest staging to any client it might help. Good stagers will meet with a client gratis initially. Usually this meeting combined with the recommendation of the broker or agent gets the stager hired.

WHEN TO STAGE

Ideally, home stagers should be hired before the house goes on the market. Properties have only one chance to enter the market fresh. It is foolish not to enter strong. Good stagers strategize with the brokers and agents to determine the main selling points of the property and then work with the seller to stage their home and make sure those features are accentuated for the potential buyer. Having a third party mediate these improvements assures the home enters the market at the strongest point it can while maintaining a trusting relationship between the broker/agent and seller. By letting the stager mediate fresh paint and window washing, the agent is free to lobby for what really matters: price point.

THE GREAT DIVIDE

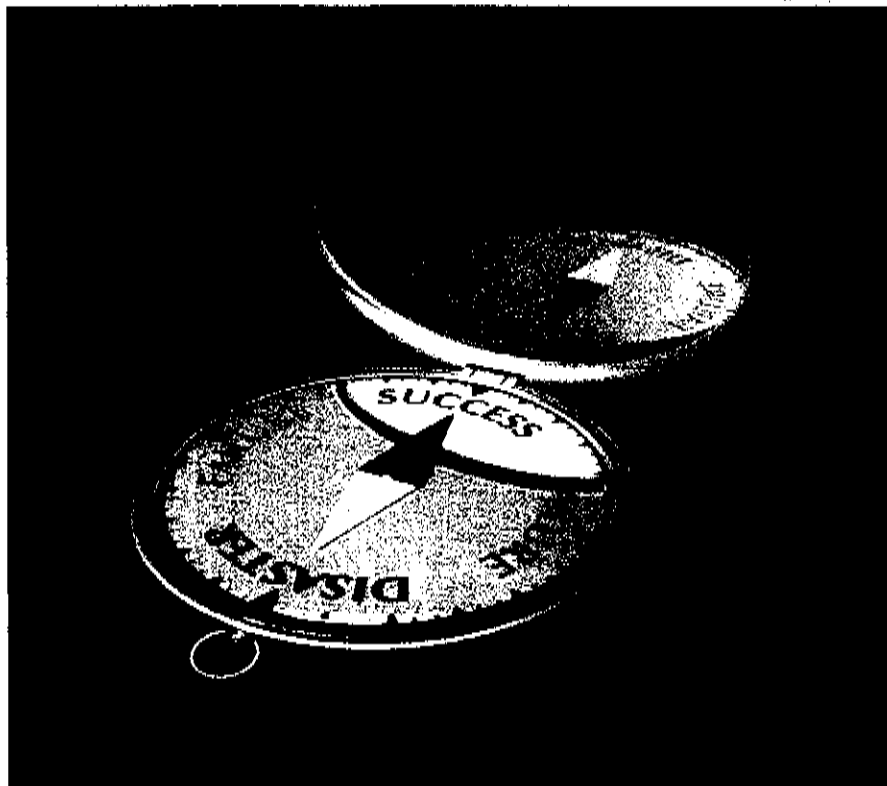
In addition to an overall market shift from buyers to sellers, there is also a demographical change within the industry. The growing number of 20 and 30 year olds are greatly influencing the dynamics of the real estate market. According to the Federal Reserve, 41 percent of the home owners in America are under the age of 35. A survey conducted by the National Association of Realtors® showed that the average age of a first time home buyer last year was 32. This generation expects to be marketed to. They grew up on cable TV and computers. Savvy marketers have trained them to be sensitive to trends and style as no other generation has been. Even though there is this new age demographic in the buyer's market, the sellers are of all ages. The average seller is 57.

Staging is based on the premise that if this new average buyer is vulnerable to trends and style, we should give them what they want. Young buyers have been marketed to throughout their life — to buy what is "in" and what is "hot"

in everything they own: cars, clothes, hair styles and even what to eat. It is only logical to take the same approach when selling them a home.

With a home stager, a house can be transformed from a more traditional or conventional style to a home with a more modern, contemporary appeal. A home stager has the resources to incor-

porate the season's latest colors and trends to any room, with warehouses full of unique pieces that can help appeal to the young buyer and at the same time showcase the home. Very few buyers can see past the outdated belongings and imagine themselves in the space. Most people can only see what is right in front of them.



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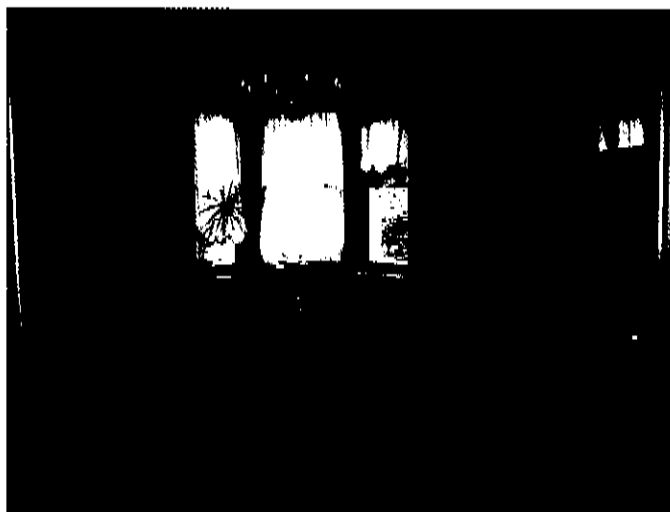
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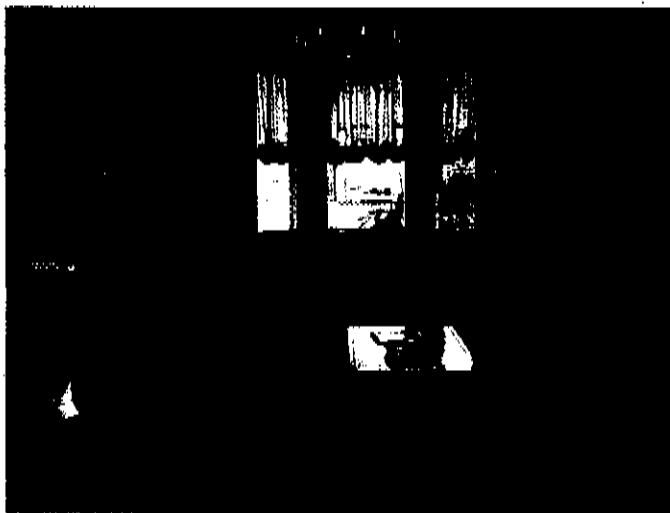
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Staging FOCUS



Before and After Staging



For example, above is a picture of a living room filled with older furniture. The house is a splendid seven bedroom Victorian with important stained glass and lovingly-restored woodwork, a *This Old House* kind of dream house.

However, much of the furniture moved into the house when the sellers did 40 years before — and it wasn't that good even then. The arca rug was left in the house by the prior sellers. Even though this is all ostensibly leaving with the sellers, it is difficult for the MTV generation buyer to see themselves living here. Good luck to the broker or agent trying to emphasize the importance of looking beyond the tan velour

a room they can actually imagine themselves living in.

A home that is successfully staged will have one third of the owner's original belongings remaining in the house, the rest of the belongings are packed away and ready to be moved.

Today, moving accompanies death and divorce as the top three stresses in someone's life. Having two thirds of packing already done makes everyone's role in selling and moving easier. Bringing a home stager into a move allows the seller to effortlessly control and manage their time despite the fact that they are making a life-changing decision.

couch and the stained baby blue rug.

Luckily, prior to going to market, Tailored Transitions was hired to stage this room in order to magnify the window and hardwood floors, using bright colored pillows, more up-to-date furniture and an artistic oriental rug.

To the left you can see what these simple changes can do to a room. By hiring a staging company, the broker/agent and seller have eliminated the fear that the young, hip buyer can't see past their outdated or unfinished rooms and show them

THE CULTURE GAP

A change perhaps even more difficult to accommodate than a generation gap is the cultural gap. The real estate industry is also seeing a growing number of immigrants in America — one in every ten households is owned by someone who was not born in the United States. According to the Joint Center for Housing at Harvard University, immigrants have accounted for more than one-third of household growth since the 1990s. Preparing a home that may be bought by someone from any culture is a challenge that should not be faced alone.

The object to successfully appealing to buyers from different cultures is to neutralize the house and transform rooms to allow space available for buyers to incorporate their culture into the home with little or no imagination. When put to work, a home stager will first pack all personal collections — pictures, holiday decorations, religious belongings, even any sports memorabilia. The house transforms to a blank canvas ready to be painted with the buyer's way of life.

The track records of staged properties speak for themselves. Staging a home increases its sale price. On average, a staged home sells for 18 percent more than a non-staged home. Staging will also decrease the amount of time a home is on the market. On average, a staged home sells 50 percent faster than a non-staged home. Staging will also make the entire move more organized and efficient.

A VERY USEFUL TOOL

Staging is the new tool of the era for brokers and agents. Like the Internet, it makes the job easier. Unlike learning the ins and outs of loading a virtual tour onto a Web site, taking advantage of staging is easy to do.

Start now to find a home stager in your area and add his or her business card to your rolodex. Staging is here to stay. Savvy brokers and agents are reaping the benefits. ■

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