

LISTING LANGUAGE

STAGING-101 FOR EVERY LISTING



Owning an Interior Design business is what ultimately led me to Real Estate. It was a natural progression into real estate because I spent my entire design career working alongside builders on a national level - merchandising their model homes, working hand in hand with their buyers, and of course I thought, well, how hard could real estate be?! (-;

Merchandising a model home isn't different than staging a home for resale, meaning you are using the same approach for both. Yes, model homes are fancier, the furniture is all brand new, but the concept is the same.

I'm going to give you some important tips around merchandising aka staging a property.

When working with builders, our first action item was to study the demographics and have a clear vision of "who" exactly was going to be purchasing the property. We developed our target market from there.

Make sure to do the same thing when staging a home. *WHO* is going to be the next buyer for this property and what are they like? Take your cue from the community. Is this community geared towards families with young children, singles that travel for business, perhaps it's an active adult community or are you in a secondary home market? Knowing your target market is exceptionally important.

For the purpose of this conversation, I am going to break this down into two sections. **General** and **Specific**. The general is the foundation of all Staging, things you do for every property. The Specific is when you are dealing with the properties that definitely do not represent a model home and the tough conversations have to happen.

Some people get funky about moving their stuff around and changing things up. However, I am finding that more and more people are grasping the concept of staging and its purpose. I always tell the sellers that they need to start packing eventually, they may as well start now! And as we mention in the Listing Presentation. We are no longer referring to this as their "home" and staging and decluttering is a perfect way for them to start detaching themselves from the "home."

General:

Step 1: As mentioned above. Know your Target Market. Who will be purchasing this home? This will tell you what lifestyle to present to the potential buyers.

Step 2: One of the goals of staging/merchandising a home is to make sure the traffic flows easily from room to room. Make sure all architectural features either stand out on their own or are enhanced with the furniture layout. Make the house look like a comfortable home. Make sure it appears well maintained. We want potential buyers to envision themselves relaxing with their feet up and feeling at home.

Step 3: When meeting with the client, you are going to explain that it's never too early to start packing and that by packing away their personal collections and opening up space now, will not only enhance the features of the property, it will also start getting them excited about moving. They will most definitely thank you later because they probably had no idea how much they had to pack! Explain why they need to open up space and how the clients would much rather look at the beautiful fireplace or the exposed beams that look at their collection of beer steins hanging from those beams (true story).

Step 4: Traffic Flow. Most people have too much furniture in their rooms and not only that, it is usually not placed properly. You don't need a design degree to figure out how it needs to be rearranged.

Remember that when showing the property, there needs to be room for at least 3 people walking through each space at a time. Realtor and usually 2 clients. If it's a family situation, make sure there is room for the kids! If it's a 1st time homebuyer situation, make room for mom and dad to be walking through with the new couple! This will help the house feel more spacious.

Step 5: Aside from making room for everyone, the furniture placement should coincide with any Architectural features that may be going on in each room. When merchandising a model home, I always looked at the furniture as secondary. My goal as a designer was to always have the room stand on its own, without the furniture. The furniture was just an enhancement. You can take this concept to staging also. **Example:** You walk into the front door and all the way at the other side of the house is a direct view of the backyard garden, pool, lake, etc. You *do not* want a ton of distractions getting in your way at the front door or on the walk to the view. Let the view be the star. So, if they have too much going on at the entry, or too much furniture in the way, which slows down the walk to the view, REMOVE the stuff.

Step 6: The Smells! We cannot forget the SMELLS! Getting rid of the area rugs will help eliminate a ton of existing smells. ALWAYS insist on a Deep Cleaning prior to listing the property. It's much better that the house smells clean instead of too many air fresheners. Too many air fresheners makes the buyers feel as if you are trying to hide something! Make sure the kitchen is scrubbed; the exhaust filter is scrubbed. The range and oven are scrubbed.

Eliminate all kitchen odor! Once the deep clean and polish is done then general maintenance is a must. Just mopping the floors every couple of days and sanitizing the countertops often, should do the trick. Be sure to have the sellers keep this up even after going under contract because the buyers need to return for Home Inspections, etc.

Step 7: Things to look for. Here's a couple of examples of dilemmas and how to handle them.

- a) If the fireplace is the attraction and there is a huge painting or family portrait that takes away from the fireplace, REMOVE it. Let the fireplace stand on its own if it can. If it cannot, then replace the distraction with something super neutral.
- b) **Plants!** Some people are a collector of plants, and rarely are they all beautiful and thriving. Usually they are all bunched up in one area of the house. In this case you will need to "spread the love" so to speak. Strategically place them throughout the house so they don't look so messy.
- c) **Area rugs:** Many area rugs can be a tripping hazard but mostly they are just too busy and distracting. Not only that, they are dirty and hold pet smells. Roll them up and get rid of them! Let the hardwood floors shine through. However, should you really need an area rug, have the seller replace the dirty, smelly, existing rug with a neutral colored one that they can buy online, for a fraction of what they probably paid for the dirty one they have.
- d) **PHOTOS:** This one is interesting to me, because somewhere along the way *SOMEONE* said to depersonalize the home, take down your family pictures. Where this came from, I have no idea! I think it's an absurd idea! Mind you if there is a giant portrait taking away from the fireplace or larger than life wedding portraits everywhere (you know the ones I'm talking about), then they need to go. *But you are selling a "Home Concept" it IS important to have lifestyle photos around.* Should your sellers not want to have their family photos on display, EVEN BETTER! We used to spend hours filling picture frames with life like photos, travel photos, lifestyle photos from magazines. Remember, you are selling a lifestyle. *Photos help instill this lifestyle.* Framed kids' artwork is a must if the market requires it!

Do you see where I'm going here?! *LESS IS MORE.* Neutralize the surroundings. Once the place is basically "stripped down" **now** you can add the coziness. A few ways to achieve this is with strategically placed chunky throws – draped over the corner of a chair or a sofa. Cocktail table with books, a tray and candles (you can search how to achieve this on Pinterest). Strategically placed greenery aka plants (there are some nice artificial plants out there these days).

Each home will present its own challenge, but you can normally make everything come together with what they have. Tell them you will be giving them a make over like they see on tv! Get them excited about it. Explain that they may have to spend some money on a few chosen accessories, but that the money will go a long way.

****If you know of a Stager/Designer and want to bring them onboard, and you offer to pay for this service, my suggestion is to **always** have the seller pay for their services upfront and you can reimburse them at settlement. This protects you from losing money should a closing not take place.

Specific:

We've all had that house!! You know, the one where you walk in and it feels like a flashback to another time. How do you handle that?

As I stated earlier, some folks get protective of their terrible design decisions, or possibly they don't even understand how it's not 1982 anymore!

In these situations, there are only a few choices.

- a) Explain to the client that they are hiring you, *as the professional*, to get the most money you can for their house. In order to do so, it will be important that you are all on the same page and that you may need to have some difficult conversations. Explain that the money they spend to paint the walls a neutral color, they will get back. Explain that the reason for the neutral walls is to let the spaciousness of the rooms show, or the exterior views or the architectural features or whatever it may be. If there are hardwood floors underneath the mauve wall to wall carpeting, explain the dollar value it will bring to remove the carpeting. Make sure you are speaking to them in a sympathetic tone as if you understand how difficult it is to part with decisions, they made oh so long ago!
- b) If they are unwilling to release themselves from the past, then you will have to explain how it will cost less to neutralize the space as opposed to pricing it away. Not only will the property need to be priced lower than the competition, Buyers will take 10's of thousands of dollars off their offer because of the labor and expense they will need to incur not to mention they most likely will not move into the house immediately.
- c) Finally, should the seller's balk at the first two options, then it's your right to walk away and not take the listing. N.E.X.T.!

Sometimes it does happen that you have an uncooperating seller. They want to get the highest dollar possible and do the least amount of work possible. Remind yourself, if they are this difficult now, how will they be come home inspection? In the long run you are doing yourself and your business a favor by walking away.

Even as a designer, I couldn't turn everyone around. I once had a seller and I was able to have them remove the 100+ teal and mauve silk flower arrangements from the house, plus get them to remove the matching teal and mauve window treatments, yet it didn't completely do the trick. This house was a complete time warp and the seller did not see it! The seller kept wanting to put granite countertops in. I kept telling him they would not get their ROI back on this (kitchen needed to be gutted) but they went ahead and did it. Honestly, I was shocked the cabinets didn't crumble underneath the weight. The property was located on a beautiful lake

and was on an extra-large lot, so it did have a lot going for it, on the outside. We received a cash offer, super low in the seller's opinion. They refused it. They couldn't understand. So, I eventually made the decision to let the listing go because it was killing my Days on Market average. Three agents and almost 4 years later, they sold the property for the exact price of our cash offer. They could have saved themselves 4 years of frustration, 4 years of mortgage payments and 4 years of property taxes!

Unfortunately, Sellers can easily get in their own way, so its important to know when to walk away.

You do not want a reputation of not being able to sell a property. Besides, who wants to deal with an unhappy seller?

This quick Staging Lesson is a general guideline for you, I hope it helps when you are walking into your next Listing Appointment. As always, stay strong!

*** NEVER start staging the property prior to having a signed Listing Agreement. Do not give yourself away!

Fondly,

Your Team at Listing Language.



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