

## Successfully Staging Your Home to Sell

By GERRY GWINN

In any real estate market, the goal is to sell your home at the highest price and in the shortest time possible.

According to HGTV, “Failing to showcase your home and make small cosmetic changes” is the primary mistake of home sellers. The staged home is not even the way you ordinarily live, and it’s certainly not about personal taste; it’s about presentation marketing. Of course, the homebuyer is looking for specifics, like location, amount of bedrooms and baths, price range, and style. Your home may meet their criteria along with 10 other homes and needs to outshine the competition.

After deciding to sell your home, the first step is to emotionally move out. Remove those items that personalize your space: family photos, collectibles, as well as religious and political items. Remember, the potential buyer should envision living here himself. In many cases, you’ll need to remove some furniture. Think of creating a “model home” look, with just enough furniture and accessories to look cozy and inviting.

There should be plenty of room for the potential homebuyer to move around and see the architectural features. Visually enlarging a space can be done with lighter colors, fewer furnishings, and plenty of natural and artificial light. Generally, it’s best to keep window treatments minimal, allowing for more natural daylight.

Now it’s time to tackle the garage, attic, basement, and closets, where even the neatest among us have hidden all our stuff. Have a garage sale or give away unwanted items.

After the purge, box up remaining articles—even clothes that are out of season—except items you’ll need in the next few months. These can be stacked neatly in a roomy basement or attic, but offsite storage in a rental unit is generally preferred. Careful labeling of boxes will make your future move go smoothly.

Now that there is much less in your home to distract, take a critical look at the condition of your home. Scrub off grease spots on the garage floor, re-grout tile where it’s chipped off, and fix nail pops in the drywall. Paint scuffed baseboard and worn spots around doorknobs, as well as touching up or repainting walls. Remember, lighter walls will make your room appear larger and warm colors, like a pale yellow, are inviting. If you’ve gone daring in your interior design, perhaps with a deep pomegranate master bedroom, it’s best to repaint. You don’t want your design savvy to offend the more conservative buyer.

If you’ve not made any changes in your home in the past 30 years, it needs some updating. Take a close look at the kitchen, bathrooms, and flooring; what about old wallpaper and outdated color



Right, kitchen before: This builder’s kitchen in Wildflower Ridge is nice, but not memorable.

Above, after: A few finishing touches add warmth and personality.



schemes? Careful evaluation is needed to make the correct changes that will be a good financial decision and reap the reward of a “sold” house. Be sure it’s completely clean, not forgetting mirror and stove splatters, soap scum in the shower, and corners by the baseboard.

Closets now seem more spacious. Organize clothes, making them look like a store, with like colors together and all facing the same direction. Likewise, the pantry should be arranged in neat rows, with

labels facing forward, similar to the grocery store.

The same principles apply to a new builder’s home. Be sure all mistakes are corrected. If the electrician has installed the dining room chandelier at the wrong location, don’t just tell a visitor it will be changed. Correct the mistake immediately or the potential homebuyer will have a negative impression of your workmanship. Evaluate all construction, being sure mitered joints are a perfect fit, all paint scuffs are touched up, and it is always clean.

Consider your home's furnishings and be sure they are placed to the best advantage, thinking about the impression your home's personality will make to a visitor. Create emotional connections that will actively engage a buyer to imagine how life would be if they lived in this home. Place settings at the kitchen table might cause the young family to envision starting their day here, enjoying breakfast together. The family room might have a book open by a comfortable chair with a coffee cup and glasses close by, allowing the homebuyer to imagine relaxing here after a busy day's work. Maybe the comforter is folded down and the bed is stacked with numerous plump pillows, like the presentation in a fine hotel. Think of your target market—a young professional, a family with kids, or maybe a senior couple—and stage accordingly.

Impressive curb appeal will set the tone for a favorable interior showing. Sufficient exterior lighting, a neatly mowed lawn, all weeds pulled, and uncluttered grounds are all necessary for that initial first look. Large potted flowers in the summer or a tasteful wreath in winter can give the entry a welcoming touch.

Preparing your home to sell takes effort and sometimes it takes a monetary investment, but the cost will likely be far less than a markdown in price. The old adage is certainly true that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Your home is the stage and you need to make it a memorable performance. **BV**

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Right, living room before:  
The living room in this Timson Hill Development is crowded and a bit messy.



Above, after: Shades were removed, chairs rearranged, the room generally tidied up, and a few finishing touches added for a striking improvement.