

Staged to Sell By Sheila Selby

Home & Garden

It's almost summer, a popular time to put houses on the market. Whether or not the housing market is soft, it's important to differentiate your house from others that are on sale. One way to do that is to "stage" your house. Staging may reduce the length of time your house is on the market and may result in a higher sales price.

If you've read my earlier columns, you know I'm a strong believer in designing and decorating your house to make it *your home*. However, when your house is on the market, you need to appeal to the greatest number of potential buyers by neutralizing the décor. In that respect, staging a house is somewhat the opposite of designing a home.

Buying a home is an emotional experience for buyers. You want them to be able to visualize your house as *their* home. Although buyers typically are not buying your furnishings and accessories along with the house, the décor creates the all-important first impression.

Staging can be done in steps, and your first steps, which cost little or no money, could make a major difference in the way your home presents itself. Here are my "6-D Staging Tips" to help stage your home:

D-clutter

Clutter makes spaces look smaller. And it gives the appearance that there isn't enough storage space in your home. Having a lot of stuff D-tracks when a house is being shown. People will notice the stuff, not the house.

Left: A kitchen before the staging process.

Right: The same kitchen after it has been "D-cluttered" and "D-personalized."

Put toys in toy chests. Minimize your *toothicks* on display. Clear the kitchen counters of small appliances, soda bottles, and food boxes. Cleared counters look more spacious and indicate that you have plenty of kitchen storage space.

Put miscellaneous objects away in closets, cabinets, or storage areas. But remember to keep your closets organized. Buyers want to know there's sufficient storage. In my February 2007 column, I presented ways to organize closets to make them more efficient. If you don't have that article handy, you can find it on my website, www.otminteriors.com.

Too much furniture makes a space look cramped. Remove some pieces. If your furniture doesn't already allow for an easy flow, rearrange it. Rent a storage unit to hold your clutter and excess furniture, if necessary.

D-personalize

Put away your family photos, diplomas, and children's artwork. With these personal items in view, it's hard for buyers to imagine themselves living there.

D-fine

If you use a particular room for multiple purposes, it creates ambiguity and confusion for buyers. Is it a dining room or an office? A bedroom or a playroom? Create a well-defined use for each room.

D-sign

You don't want your house to look tired or dated. Add some new decorative elements. Get new hardware for your kitchen cabinets. Buy a new shower curtain. Add inexpensive sheers to unadorned windows. Update lighting fixtures.

D-ferred Maintenance

Buyers respond positively to houses that are well-maintained and look and smell fresh. Fix the issues that need attention. Replace broken tiles. Paint the ceiling that was water-stained during last winter's storm. Fix that leaky faucet. Scrub your kitchen and bathrooms. Get rid of mold.

D-lete Color

I'm a strong advocate for painting walls exciting colors. But there are many buyers who are afraid of color, or have an intense dislike for a particular color. I find it interesting, when watching the house-hunting shows on TV, the most frequent comment uttered by buyers is "I don't like the color of this room." Wall color is an easy thing to change, and it should not influence a buyer's decision, but it often does.

If you have rooms painted colors that may offend prospective buyers, repaint them a neutral color. Neutral doesn't necessarily mean white or off-white. Consider a warm, pale yellow or a mellow blue.

That said, some color is necessary. Use colorful throw pillows, accessories, or artwork. You want the house to have some personality and create excitement!

Be D-lighted!

Staging can be difficult to do to your own house because your home is so personal that it's often hard to be objective. Often, you overlook the problems. For best results, consider hiring a professional designer experienced in staging. However, if you're up for the challenge of neutralizing your home, and you follow these ideas on staging, you will be D-lighted with the results!

One caveat: Once you've staged your house, you may fall in love with it all over again and decide to stay!

Sheila R. Selby, a 17-year Brookline resident, is a professional interior designer with extensive experience in both residential and commercial interior design projects. Sheila's firm, On The Move Interiors, provides interior design services for commercial and residential clients. Services include staging for real estate sales, providing furniture planning for clients who are moving, furniture and finishes selection, room arranging, color consulting, and styling. You can learn more about On The Move Interiors by visiting the website at www.otminteriors.com.



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