

# All the Home's a Stage

By Ginny Cooper

Property showings are the “meat and potatoes” of the real estate industry. Well-written advertisements, content- and image-rich Web sites, virtual tours and even carefully crafted social networking blurbs (Yes, you can describe a house in 140 characters!) all play a part in whetting buyers’ appetites. But it’s the real-time, real-life property showing that brings the customer to the closing table.

REALTORS around the country are getting creative when it comes to enhancing properties for showing

and employing tools that go far beyond the four-color flyer hanging on the mailbox. They are launching radio shows that broadcast from an open house and offering helicopter tours for multi-million dollar properties.

In fact an entire industry – staging – has grown up around the concept of presenting a home in the best possible light as it goes on the market. The idea is to help potential buyers envision themselves at home in the home. Doing so requires the right balance between too cold and too comfy.

You want to de-clutter the home, but not empty it; accessorize it, but not brand it.

## You Know the Saying About First Impressions...

First impressions being important, try a quart of glossy paint in a bold, cheerful color for the front door, new hardware (or just a little elbow grease to clean and polish the existing knocker, lockset, porch light, house numbers and mailbox); a fresh coir or sea grass mat; and a trio of seasonal potted plants on the landing to dramatically brighten and refresh the home’s entry.



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## De-Clutter

The most important thing to do according to industry experts is to de-clutter. A common decorating misconception is that a room will look larger if all the furniture is pushed up against the walls, creating an open space in the middle. Not so says Christopher Breining, owner of HomeStagers Inc. in San Francisco. "You really only need two pieces of furniture per wall: a bed and a nightstand, or a dresser and a chair," Breining advises. Lisa LaPorta, designer on HGTV's "Designed to Sell" and owner of Lisa LaPorta Design in L.A. suggests, "When you place furniture in a room, envision a figure-eight or the letter H in the middle, with clear pathways around it." Not only will this make the space more user-friendly, it will open up the room and make it seem larger.

## Repurpose the Space

Create a fantasy space out of an unused area. The simple addition of a comfortable armchair, a small table and a lamp in a stairwell nook will transform it into a cozy reading spot. Or drape fabric on the walls of an empty bedroom, lay inexpensive rubber padding on the floor and toss in a few cushy pillows. Voila! It's a new meditation room or yoga studio.

## Light it Right

Most homes are underlit so ensure the rooms have ample lighting. To remedy the problem and make the home more inviting, increase the wattage in lamps and fixtures. Aim for a total of 100 watts for every 50 square feet. At the same time, make sure you have a combination of the three types of lighting: ambient (general or overhead), task (pendant, under-cabinet or reading) and accent (table and wall) lighting. One quick trick is using uplighting to create drama. Uplights can be purchased for just a few dollars at home improvement stores. Try hiding one behind a potted plant. Another hint: place mirrors, silver or glass bowls or other reflective objects near lamps to bounce light around the room and make it glow even more.

## Hanging Together

Take another look at the artwork hanging in the room. Is it all hanging at one level? Break up that line and vary the patterning and grouping by hanging art in several ways. Hang the pieces diagonally, with each piece staggered a bit higher or lower than the next. This technique is great for directing the eye toward an architectural feature like a window or arched doorway. If you have three pieces, hang them

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triangularly, a nice accent for a table-and-chair vignette. Hanging art in a vertical line is perfect for accentuating a high ceiling. It causes the eye to move up and down as it travels around the room and creates interest. Or, try hanging things a bit lower than you're used to as well, so that wall art relates to furniture groupings rather than floating (and getting lost) in its own space.

### Odd Accessories

When it comes to eye-pleasing accessorizing, the experts at HGTV say odd numbers are preferable, especially threes. "Rather than setting your trio of accessories out in a row, imagine a triangle and place one object at each point. Scale is important, too, so in your group of three, be sure to vary items by height and width, with the largest at the back and the smallest in front. The eye naturally 'reads' the room from left to right, so putting a striking object in the far right corner will automatically draw your gaze there and make the room seem bigger."

### Bring the Outdoors In

Professionally staged homes are almost always graced with fresh flowers, often in pricey arrangements. Get a similar effect simply by raiding the yard, taking clippings of branches or twigs and putting them in a large vase.

### Help Buyers Visualize

Take advantage of new technologies to help potential buyers envision themselves "at home" in the property, such as loading a digital photo frame with photos taken of the home throughout the year. While Southwest Florida does not go through extreme

seasonal changes, there are subtleties in our native flora that can be captured. You can help potential buyers see the lush landscaping as it greens up in spring, instead of viewing the dry and brittle results from our recent cold snaps.

You needn't spend a great deal of money in staging a home, it's often just a matter of removing what's not absolutely necessary and rearranging what's left. Think

"lifestyle" when you think of staging a home. If its got a great outdoor living area, highlight it by cleaning off the grill and preparing it as though you were about to toss on a couple of thick, juicy steaks. An opulent master bath? Dress it up with richly scented bath products. Wonderful eat-in kitchen? Set the table, and pretty soon you'll be sitting at the closing table!



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