

PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGING

THE HOMESELLER'S EDITION

Guide to Home Staging by THE DECOROLOGIST®

KRISTIE BARNETT

PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGING

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KRISTIE BARNETT, M.A.,ED.S.

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About the author

Kristie Barnett is an award-winning expert in residential home staging and decoration. She authors the popular design blog, The Decorologist, where she inspires and teaches her readers how to create the homes they have always dreamed of. Kristie works with local clients in Nashville, Tennessee and online clients throughout the country.

International awards include Real Estate Staging Association (RESA) Top 10 Redesigns of the Year 2015 & 2014, RESA Best Occupied Staging of the Year in North America 2013, Best of Houzz Awards for Service 2015, 2014, & 2013, and Best of Houzz Award for Design 2015. Kristie currently serves as a Regional Vice President for the Real Estate Staging Association.

Kristie is a contributing writer for *Everyday Home* magazine and *The Tennessean* newspaper, and has written for the top home design website Houzz.com. Her articles and designs have been featured in numerous national design and news publication outlets including *Romantic Homes*, *Everyday Home*, *The Washington*

Post, *USA Weekend*, *ABC News*, and

GoodHousekeeping.com. Kristie offers Expert Psychological Staging™ (EPS) certification training and teaches classes and workshops on choosing paint color, arranging furniture, and decorating on a budget.

She also donates her time and talent to multiple charitable organizations, including Habitat for Humanity.



INTRODUCTION

If you are considering putting your house on the market, it's time to think about how you will need to prepare your home. To sell your property for top dollar in the shortest amount of time, you need to understand the psychology of home staging and how it can benefit you when you are ready to sell your home.

This book will help you emotionally prepare for this process, understand the difference between decorating and staging, and determine how and what to declutter. You will also learn how to stage your home in a way that removes any potential objections from homebuyers, as well as how to determine the best listing price and how to work with real estate professionals who can help you meet your goals.

What are you waiting for? Let's get started!



A photograph of a kitchen corner. White cabinetry with dark metal handles is visible. On a speckled granite countertop sits a silver teapot on a stand, a vase of bright yellow hydrangeas, and a glass dish. A framed picture hangs on the wall in the background.

chapter 1

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HOME STAGING

WHY YOU SHOULD STAGE YOUR HOME

In the recent past, home staging was a vastly unknown home-selling strategy. When people decided they wanted to buy a new home, they contacted a real estate professional who scheduled a handful of showings of homes tailored

to their budget and desires. A buyer might view anywhere from three to ten homes before making an offer. At that time, expectations for home interiors on the market simply weren't as high and specific as they are now.



As recently as five to ten years ago, the market for fixer-uppers was flourishing. Smart buyers knew they could pay less for homes that needed some improvements, and after a little do-it-yourself handiwork, could resell them for a nice profit. Many of those

inexperienced renovators did little more than “put lipstick on a pig.” Today’s homebuyers are not impressed with the previous owner’s DIY repairs and updates. Now buyers want the best house with the best amenities for the best price in the best neighborhood.

Today, homes that are not staged are quickly dismissed by real estate professionals and would-be buyers. Buyers are now more discriminating and believe they deserve the best the real estate market has to offer. Some sellers are offended by this attitude and may refuse to stage their homes to better appeal to picky buyers. It is those unstaged homes that sit on the market for months without a decent offer. If you want to sell your home quickly and are willing to do what it takes to make that happen, you can learn how to use buyers’ desires and emotions (no matter how unrealistic or frustrating) to work in your favor when selling your property.

STAGING VS. DECORATING

There is a distinct difference between decorating a home to live in and staging a home to sell. You may have heard it said that staging is actually *undecorating*. Staging is about strategic editing and depersonalizing. But it’s even more than



that. Psychological Staging™ will broaden the buying audience by appealing to a wide variety of tastes and preferences.

The purpose of staging a home is to market a lifestyle, but not necessarily the current homeowner's lifestyle. A good home stager sets up a home to sell an idealized lifestyle (not the current owner's reality) to buyers. This is not as deceptive as it may sound. The focus is on presenting the property in a way that highlights its best, most attractive features. This is different from decorating, which is designing a space to fit your own personal taste. Instead, the goal of staging is to make it easier for any buyers to mentally place themselves and their belongings in the home.

If you are staging your own home, the concept of creating a space that has such a broad appeal may initially be difficult to grasp. However, failure to embrace the difference between decorating and staging will almost always result in more days on the market and a lower selling price.

In order to sell quickly for top dollar, you have to get outside your own head and inside the mind of a potential home buyer. Being objective and unsentimental about your own home can be challenging, but it's crucial if you want to sell it quickly (selling quickly always means more money). Although everyone

has different tastes in décor and furnishings, most people want a home that is welcoming, functional, peaceful, and organized. Tailor your house so that buyers will describe it in those terms rather than by your style of decorating.

SHIFTING FROM HOME TO HOUSE

Staging a home to sell can be a very difficult and emotional task for many homeowners. You will need to begin the shift from viewing your house as a personal,

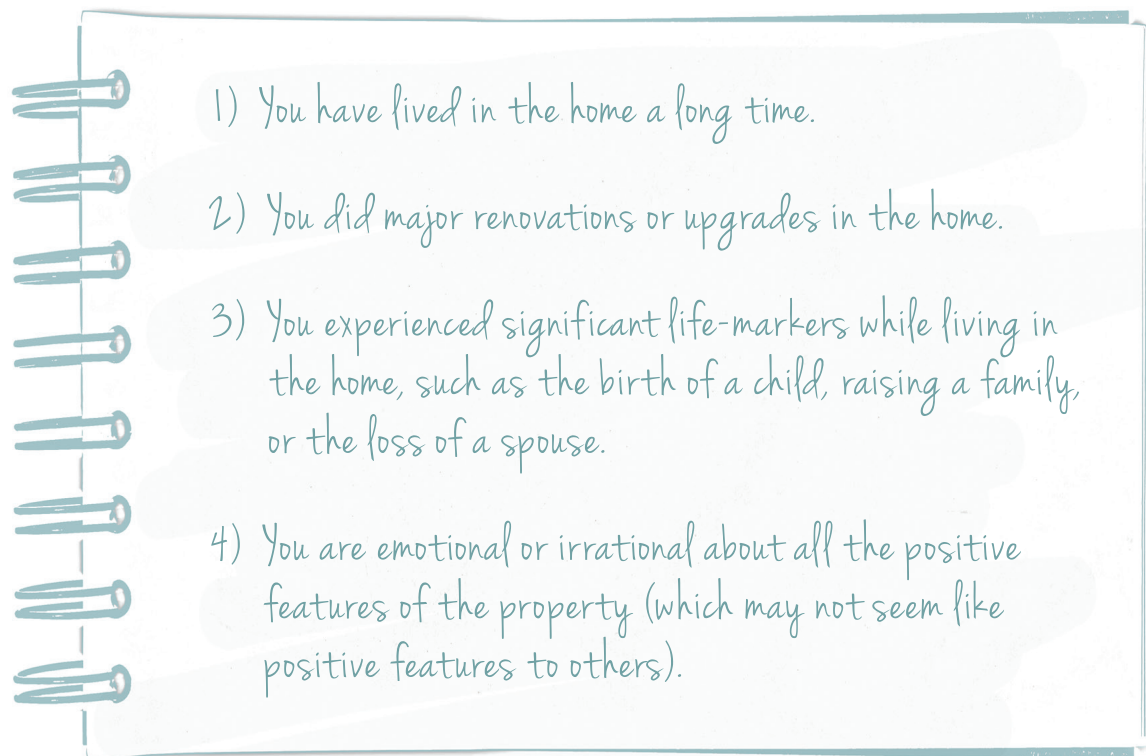
memory-filled home to a product you are now marketing to people who may or may not have similar tastes. You will need to separate yourself emotionally from the home you have been living your life in so that you can let go of the house and move on to the next chapter in your life.

This separation does not have to happen overnight. Ideally, it takes



place over a period of time so that you can prepare for the drastic changes that are about to occur. In order to embrace a new chapter in your life, you must learn to let go of the previous one. Sometimes that takes a little time and preparation.

Here are some things that could indicate you may have difficulty detaching from your home:

- 
- 1) You have lived in the home a long time.
 - 2) You did major renovations or upgrades in the home.
 - 3) You experienced significant life-markers while living in the home, such as the birth of a child, raising a family, or the loss of a spouse.
 - 4) You are emotional or irrational about all the positive features of the property (which may not seem like positive features to others).

If any of those things describe you, chances are you have a high level of self-esteem and emotion tied up in the home. You may need to grieve a bit for your house during this time—this is normal. It's important to work through those emotions so that you can begin to successfully market it as a property.

The focus of your home needs to shift from being the place where you live to becoming a property that buyers want to make their own. Anything in the property that draws attention to you or your family is a distraction for buyers who are trying to imagine how they might live there. People naturally gravitate to homes that reflect who they are (or wish they were) and steer clear of those that do not reflect how they see themselves (or how they'd like to see themselves). When buyers walk into a house, they are very easily distracted by anything that represents the people who are currently living there. Once buyers are sucked into your story and your family's story, it's over—they're never going to see that property as their own.

Let's say you are an empty nester with an affinity for cats. If the potential buyers are a hip, young couple with a child who is allergic to cats, they will immediately be put off by what they might consider an old-fashioned style and any evidence of cats. No matter how great you may be at envisioning a given space in a totally different way, it's a fact that 90 percent of the population are



completely unable to see beyond what is in front of their eyes. They can't begin to imagine how young and fresh a room could look with a few coats of on-trend paint colors and a different style of furnishings. It's your mission to set the stage so that they don't have to strain their brain to envision something different.

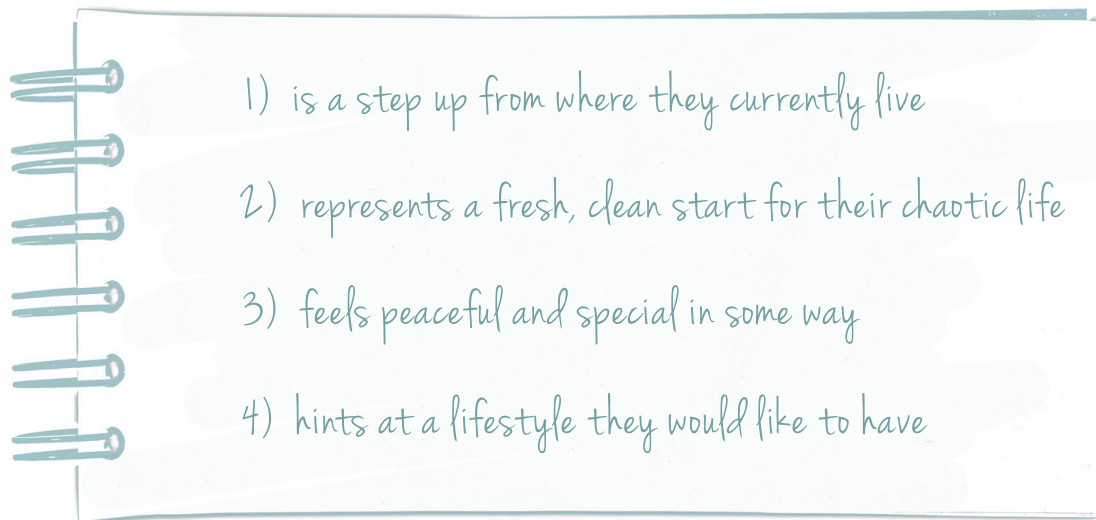


Rather than stretch their imaginations, most people will simply give up and walk away from the listing, looking for the next “perfect” house.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT BUYERS WANT

It's important to look at the house objectively and unemotionally, and don't become defensive to the reactions of others to your property. Be ready to look at feedback, both positive and negative, as simply more information to help you get the property in the best position to sell quickly and for top dollar.

It's true that every buyer is different. Tastes and desires in a home will vary from person to person. But the reality is that the basis for everyone's tastes and desires is not as different and unique as you may think. Practically all buyers want a home that:



As a seller, aren't these the things you want in your next home, as well? Successful staging requires setting up a property in such a way that attention is drawn to its features in a subtle, classy way. In order to get there, strategic editing of the home's contents and a carefully balanced arrangement of furniture and accessories are required.



before



after

A photograph of a bookshelf. In the center, three volumes of Reader's Digest Condensed Books are standing upright. The spines are dark green with gold lettering. The titles visible on the spines include 'THE SECRET TRICKS OF IRISH-OLEARY', 'DEAR MR. GLENNON'S FORTUNYAN', 'A PALM FOR MRS. POLLIFAX', 'THE CAMERONS', 'THE JAPANESE', and 'GREEN DARKNESS'. To the left of the books is a green ceramic teapot and a white ceramic bowl filled with greenery. To the right is a green ceramic bird figurine and a white ceramic flower. The background is a light-colored wall.



Make buyers believe that whoever purchases the property will be smart by staging your house with hardback books. Make them believe the new owner will be artistic by staging your house with art and musical instruments. Make them think their lives in this home will be clean and simple by organizing and editing ruthlessly. And finally, make buyers believe that whoever lives in this home will be well-travelled by topping off the décor with a few interesting artifacts and travel magazines.

TARGETING YOUR DEMOGRAPHIC

It's very important to learn about and keep in mind what the demographic of your buyer will be. Think about who has moved into your neighborhood within the last two years, rather than who has been living there for many years. In most cases, the next owner of your property will be younger than you are. That's why it's crucial that you don't necessarily think about what you like or want in a home, but instead focus on what your most-likely buyer may want.

There are specific things that appeal to most buyers. These include maximum square footage, high-end kitchens and baths, hardwood floors, storage, and curb appeal. But what appeals to younger buyers?



Lighter Neutral Walls

If your target demographic is “young professional” or “young family,” try using a warm gray as a neutral wall color. The gold or pinky-beige wall color you chose 10 years ago is going to seem outdated to this new group of homebuyers. On-trend neutrals like grays allow potential homeowners to envision bringing in complementary colors and clean-lined furnishings to make it their own.



White Kitchen Cabinetry

The majority of homebuyers younger than fifty years old prefer white or off-white kitchen cabinetry. They want something different than their mother's dark kitchen cabinetry in their new home. Consider a kitchen facelift if

you have dark kitchen cabinetry with orange or red undertones. Not only will a painted white kitchen appeal to younger homebuyers, it will make your kitchen look brighter and larger. Make sure your painter preps the cabinets properly and uses the proper paint for wood cabinetry.



Updated Appliances

Many younger homebuyers cannot fathom buying a home without stainless steel appliances. You'll need to update your almond ones with stainless replacements before putting it on the market. Depending on your property's price point, you may not need to replace your appliances if they are in good condition and are either white or black.

Stone Countertops

Granite or stone countertops are a must-have for most young homebuyers — it will make the difference between whether they choose your home or your neighbor's home. However, don't make the mistake of installing busy or taste-specific granite that may not appeal to everyone. Instead, choose a granite or quartz that is almost black or almost white - something with a minimum of colors and veining. Anything more might be a turnoff to those picky younger buyers.





Low Maintenance

People with young kids are less likely to want a fixer-upper. If your target demographic is “young family with small children,” it’s important that your property be ready for them to move right in. Make sure the home has no unfinished projects or red flags for young families. That being said . . .

Ok, Maybe A Fixer-Upper

If your neighborhood is becoming a mecca for young professionals, there may be some appeal to the fixer-upper if the price is right. These younger adults without children may have the time, energy and imagination for making over an older home. Even so, the price will have to be lower than if it were picture-perfect.





chapter 2

PRE-STAGING WITH STRATEGIC EDITING

DECLUTTERING

Decluttering is vitally important and undeniably essential when preparing a home to go on the market. Decluttering isn't easy, but it is simple. You will need to become focused and disciplined to begin getting your home ready to sell.

There are several options for decluttering:

- 1) Use this opportunity to get rid of things you don't use or love. Divvy up some things to family members, give items to charity, or haul off items to the local dump. Every town has great causes that are looking for donations of furnishings and décor. Goodwill, Salvation Army, veterans' charities, homeless and women's shelters, children's charities, and churches are often looking for donations. Find out which deserving charities in your area will pick up and haul off your stuff, as well as what the parameters are on what they will accept.
- 2) Consignment and secondhand stores are great places to take your gently used furnishings to resell. Use the proceeds to pay for the carefully considered upgrades you may need prior to

listing your home, such as fresh paint. Muted colors are best for staging properties.

- 3) Selling items on Craigslist and eBay is another avenue for making a bit of cash on furnishings and collectibles.
- 4) Check on local storage options, including PODS (portable storage). If you have family members with basements or garages, they may be willing to let you store some furnishings or stacked boxes there.
- 5) If you need help, find out more about organizing professionals in your area. Professional organizers can help you sort and organize in ways you may not be able to get your head around on your own.

STORING WITHIN YOUR HOME

Storing things does not mean stockpiling the basement, storage areas, closets, and garage with furnishings and boxes. This is the least favored option for storing clutter.



Part of effective staging is highlighting storage areas and making them appear as large and plentiful as possible. When all available storage areas are packed to the gills, buyers perceive them as smaller and as unable to fulfill the needs of the current homeowner. That is definitely not the impression you want to make.

If boxes must be stored somewhere in the house, they should be placed judiciously.

- 1) Anything stored in the garage should be stacked neatly against one side and should not encroach on the area needed to park cars. Do not line the whole perimeter with boxes, as that will eat into the buyers' perception of size. Rather, stack the boxes fairly high and keep them on one wall.
- 2) Closet floors should be kept as clear as possible. When you can see the floor all the way back to the wall of a closet, it makes it appear larger. No boxes should sit in the floor of a closet; stack them on the top shelf instead.
- 3) In attics, basements, and other storage areas, keep any stored items in plastic or cardboard boxes in neat stacks. Keep as much floor space open as possible to increase the perception of square footage.

WHAT GOES AND WHAT STAYS

There are very specific items that always need to be packed away when staging a home. You will need small boxes, packing filler, packing tape, and a Sharpie to mark your boxes. Below are categories that need to be removed from your home before you put it on the market.

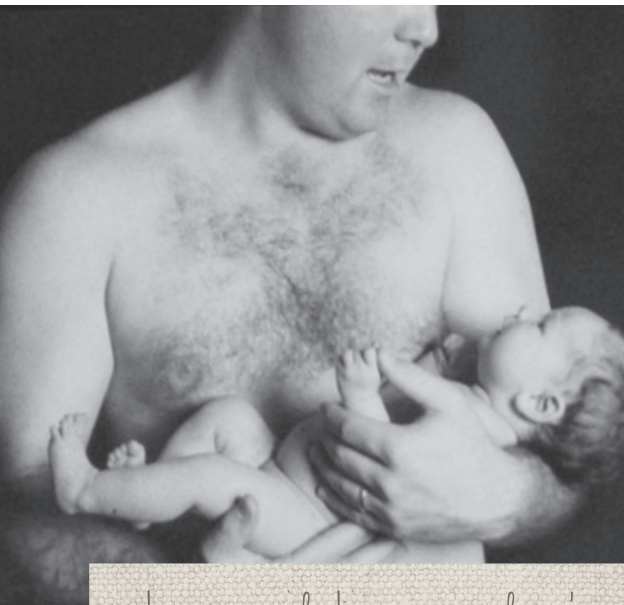
Personal Information

This includes any paperwork, mail, business documents, etc., that may be lying on desks or elsewhere throughout the house. The reason for storing these items is twofold: ensuring your safety while strangers peruse your listed property and eliminating any messiness.

Personal Photographs

Family photos should be removed from all areas of the house. Refrigerators must be completely clear of photos, children's artwork, and papers. No snapshots in frames on tabletops, no wedding photography or senior pictures on the wall, no snapshots of your pets, no photos of you in a bathing suit tacked

onto a mirror. The ONLY exceptions to my no-personal-photo rule are black and white photos of people from another era (e.g., grandparents' wedding photo) and black and white baby photos. Most babies look similar, so they don't seem as personal as photos of older children and adults. Any photos above the age when your children have grown hair are a no-no. No mother-and-baby photos either. Only fully clothed bald babies and black and white photos taken prior to 1960 are allowed in my staged homes!



this personal photo in my client's living room was packed away for staging

Personal Care Items

Even though you may still be living in the home, you should begin pretending that you do not! Seeing someone else's used toothbrushes, toothpaste, or hairbrushes sets up the mindset that the property is "used" or belongs to someone else. Of course it does belong to someone else, but that is not the psychological mindset you want a buyer to establish when viewing the property. Personal care items should be tucked away neatly in a container and out of sight whenever the property is being shown.

Paperback Books

All paperback books should be boxed up and stored. The next-best alternative would be to store them in rattan baskets that fit into the bottom of a bookcase. No trashy novels or offensive titles should be visible to buyers.

Personal Collections

All collections that reflect a taste-specific interest of the homeowners should be packed up and removed from the space. You don't want buyers to get distracted when viewing the house. As soon as buyers are drawn into figuring out the story of your family, they are no longer imagining themselves living there.

Personal collections that may be particularly offensive or distracting to buyers include religious artifacts, sports team paraphernalia, war or military collections, taste-specific art, pet-centric décor, or anything that could possibly be mocked. Mock-worthy collections include all those things that could be perceived as old-fashioned, childish, obsessive, or offensive. In case you're wondering, a collection is more than three of any one thing. If you have more than three of something, you should probably pack them up.



Small Accessories

Whether you call them tchotchkes, trinkets, or accessories, small items on tabletops, mantels, or shelves will need to be paired down ruthlessly. Clear out and pack away most small accessories and leave out fewer, larger accessories. A tabletop with one to three larger items will look less cluttered and distracting than one with multiple small accessories.

Unnecessary or Unattractive Items

Ask yourself if you need a given item for the next few months. If it's unnecessary, it should be put away. This decluttering also works to your advantage because it will be easier to keep a staged house maintained if there aren't a lot of dust collectors sitting around the house. Anything that can be described as "taste-specific," meaning anything that would appeal to a



minority of people, should be packed away before putting the house on the market. Which leads me to the next discussion . . .

Anything Taste-Specific

This is a tough one for many people. Avoiding any décor that is taste-specific, or overly personal, does not mean that it will be staged as a boring space. It just means that it will turn off very few people.

Taste-specific décor is anything that lands obviously into a specific style of decorating or time period that could be named by someone walking through the house. Here are some examples: country, 1980s, bachelor pad, girly, floral, and shabby chic. If buyers don't like the specific style they perceive the home to be, they will be less likely to visualize integrating their own possessions and style in the space.

A few taste-specific items that must be removed include:

1) fussy window treatments

4) unusual or loud color combinations

2) floral or other busy patterns

5) extreme or distracting art
and sculptures

3) artificial floral arrangements

Items Deemed Unstageworthy by The Decorologist

In addition to things I have mentioned previously, there are some other items that need to be removed because they are simply not stageworthy. I won't waste your time trying to explain why, just trust me and for your own sake, remove them!

- 1) fabric or carpeted toilet covers
- 2) handmade items or "cozies" of any kind
- 3) art with large colored mats in dated colors (hunter green or burgundy, in particular)
- 4) naked sculptures or art, no matter how "tasteful"
- 5) posters or amateur artwork (except a couple in a child's room or playroom)
- 6) figurines
- 7) triangular or pleated lampshades
- 8) afghans, knitted blankets, or throws
- 9) pillows that were purchased more than five years ago



REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE

Making any needed repairs on your home is absolutely necessary. No matter how wonderful your home may be, buyers will run—not walk—right out the door at the sign of water damage, foundation problems, and the like.

When selling your home, it is critically important that repairs be made before the house goes on the market. A crucial part of staging is removing any potential objections a buyer may have when first viewing the property. Write down all the things you already know you are going to need to repair,

then walk through your home as if you were a property inspector. Do a visual inspection and take notes on all of the following:

1) any cracks, stains, or other indications in the ceilings or floors of water damage

2) pet odors or visible damage done by pets

3) musty, moldy smells in basements, garages, or storage areas

4) condition of front door hardware

5) condition of all faucets and sinks

6) condition of tile, vinyl, and grout in bathrooms and kitchens

7) condition of wall and trim paint

Anything and everything that is broken or damaged must be repaired or replaced prior to listing. You will also need to complete any unfinished projects or repairs prior to listing. The buyer's home inspector will find those issues anyway, and you will be seriously hindering offers if there are obvious repairs that need to be made.

Unfinished repairs or projects reflect badly on the overall maintenance of the

home and send up a red flag to would-be buyers. Nothing will make a buyer pull out of a deal and run for the hills faster than a home inspection report riddled with needed repairs and safety concerns.

If the carpet is old or stained, it should be professionally cleaned or replaced. Often a professional cleaning is enough to get it ready to show, but sometimes that just won't do the trick. Stained or dated carpet is a huge turnoff to potential buyers, especially if you have pets. Even pet lovers are not interested in buying a home with carpet stained by other people's animals.

Although you heard of them often in the past, "carpet allowances" really don't work well anymore. Mortgage companies are increasingly reluctant to allow a contract with repair and update allowances. In addition, most people don't have the luxury to stay a few extra weeks in their previous home after the closing date while new carpet is being installed. Fresh, new carpet is even more crucial when selling an empty property, since that is all buyers will see in an empty room.

The same thing goes for vinyl flooring—you're going to have a hard time selling if it's old, torn, or stained. Replace it with a clean, neutral vinyl or vinyl composite tile (VCT).



WHERE TO SPEND YOUR MONEY

No one wants to spend money on the home they are getting ready to sell, but it can be crucial if you want to sell the house quickly and for the price you want. Beyond basic cleaning and decluttering, some money may need to be spent on important things. These are things that will give you the most bang for your buck and will help you get your property sold for more money in less time:

Paint

Painting the walls in updated neutrals and on-trend colors that complement the fixed elements in your home will set your home apart and help buyers remember each room. Open areas all should be painted the same color, in a light greige or muted color. You'll want to skip dark or intense colors in these open areas.

Master and guest bedrooms are best painted in muted but distinct colors. Muted versions of blues, greens and yellows are good bets for bedrooms.





Solid Surface Countertops

You've probably heard that kitchens and baths sell houses. If you are interested in getting your house sold quickly, replacing laminate countertops in the kitchen will help make that happen. Solid surface, natural stone or quartz countertops will help sell your home.

When a property is above the \$350,000 range, I highly recommend the upgrade. If it's below that, there is absolutely nothing that will sell a home faster and for more money. Buyers on the lower end will swoon over them and will always choose a home with solid surface countertops over other homes in their price range that don't have them.



Flooring

As mentioned in the repairs and maintenance section, old or stained carpet or vinyl will need to be replaced. However, if comparable properties in your neighborhood or at your price point have hardwood flooring, you may need to consider installing them in your property. Rather than installing hardwood throughout the entire home, you can save money by only installing it in the most important areas. Hardwood in the entry, dining room, kitchen, and the living area closest to the kitchen will give

you a huge advantage in getting an offer. Many people will compromise on square footage and exterior curb appeal in order to get a home with hardwood floors.



chapter 3

THE BASICS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGING

In order to ready your property for the market, you need to understand some of the basic principles of Psychological Staging™.

USING FURNITURE TO ESTABLISH ROOM SIZE

Some people think a space will appear larger if it is completely empty. This is not true. If you show the average person an empty room and a well-staged room of the same size, she will estimate the empty room to be smaller than the furnished room. Why? Because most people need a point of reference (furniture) in a space in order to estimate its size, and more importantly, to determine if their own furnishings will fit.

When buyers walk into empty dining rooms, they automatically wonder if a table for eight will fit in the space. When they walk into an empty bedroom, they will be concerned that their king-size bed may not fit in the room. Furnishings spell it out for them. Never leave potential buyers with unanswered questions about the property that may dissuade them from seriously considering making an offer quickly.

Although it's important to use furnishings to establish room size, that does NOT mean you should fill it full of furniture. Use fewer, larger pieces in each room and eliminate all the other non-essential pieces you can in order to make the room feel spacious and decrease distractions.



GIVING EVERY ROOM A SINGLE PURPOSE

Odd uses of rooms
and multipurpose
rooms are very confus-

ing for buyers. When you've converted your dining room into a den, they will be stumped about where to put their dining room table. When your third bedroom is set up like an office or an exercise room, they may be scratching their head wondering where the nursery should go.

Make sure you have a good-sized eating/dining room set up (eat-in kitchens don't count unless they seat six to eight). Stage every bedroom as a bedroom, even if that just means setting up a bed with a side table and lamp in each room. Make sure dens and recreation rooms look neat and orderly, not like a chaotic storage area.



If you have a front parlor room without a devoted purpose, there are three good options to consider.



A Library

You can convert your front living area into a library by moving in a bookcase and either a matching pair of upholstered chairs or one upholstered chair with an ottoman. Make sure to stage the bookcase with

hardback books. Provide a side table for one of the chairs and include a nice lamp for reading.

A Music Room

If you own a piano and/or your family members have musical instruments, consider grouping them together in a dedicated music room.



A Tidy Office

Many people are working from home or at least need a dedicated space for a home office. Provide them a solution to that problem by placing a leggy desk



or even a small rectangular dining table four to five feet from the wall opposite the entry, facing out rather than the wall. Place a high-backed chair behind the desk (a wingback chair or upholstered Parsons chair is ideal) and make sure to include a nice lamp, a large

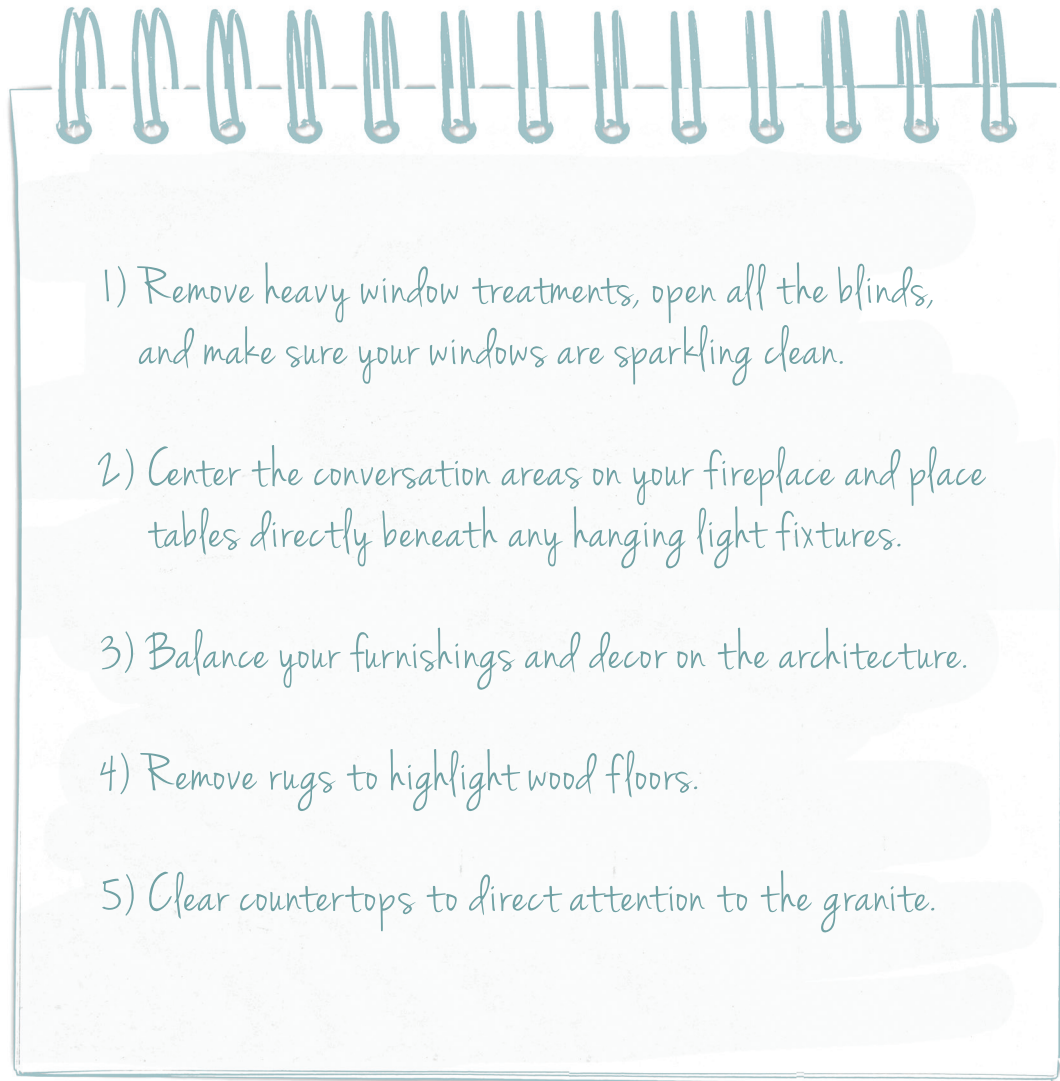
piece of art directly behind the desk, and a few attractive accessories.



PUTTING THE FOCUS ON THE ARCHITECTURE

Try to remember that you are selling the home and its architecture, not the content or furnishings. Put the focus on any and every architectural detail. This includes fireplaces, windows, hardwood flooring, granite countertops, built-in bookcases, and any special features in the home. Make sure the furnishings, décor, and color subtly draw attention to the architectural details rather than distract the buyer from them.

Here are several ways to put the focus on the architecture:







before



after



before



after

PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGING



before



after

PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGING

65



before



after



before



after



before



after



before



after



before



after



before



after



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after

PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGING

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before



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before



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PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGING





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before



after

PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGING

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A photograph of a house entrance. A wooden door with a transom window is open, revealing a white interior door. Above the door is a transom window with a light fixture. A black light fixture is mounted on the wall above the door. The house has green siding and a white trim. The floor is made of wooden planks.

chapter 4

PSYCHOLOGICAL MARKETING

THE IMPORTANCE OF AMAZING LISTING PHOTOGRAPHS

A recent study by Dr. Michael Sellers, a professor from Old Dominion University at Norfolk, used ocular tracking to determine what buyers focus on most when viewing homes for sale on the Internet. Dr. Sellers found that buyers mainly concentrate on photos and quantitative descriptions of listings, such as the number of bedrooms and the square footage of the house, and that 60 percent of their time is spent looking at photos of the home. In contrast, very little time is spent reading verbal descriptions of the property or real estate agent comments. When marketing a property, photos and numbers are what it's all about.



One of the most powerful tools you have when marketing a property for sale is amazing listing photography. No matter how fabulous the home is, it won't sell if the listing photos don't represent the property well or highlight its best features. The photos should be light, bright, and welcoming so that potential buyers are immediately interested and schedule a showing. Here are some ways to get the most out of these incredibly important photographs:

- 1) Take photos with the best camera possible. Ask your agent if he or she provides professional photography as part of the service.
- 2) If you are taking photos, make sure to take shots with and without a flash so you can judge later which are best. Shots taken with a fisheye lens are certainly in vogue for MLS, but the results can be deceptive. I prefer using a slightly wider-angle lens so that buyers don't walk into the property and experience instant disappointment when they realize how much smaller the house looks in person.
- 3) In the online listing, include only photos of the most attractive rooms. Include the description and dimensions of the other rooms in the home, but you aren't doing yourself any favors by

including photos of poorly staged rooms. Lure potential buyers in with lovely spaces and don't show them anything that might keep them from scheduling a showing.

- 4) Photos should focus on the architecture of the house rather than the decor.
- 5) Capture attractive exterior views by taking pictures from inside open doors or windows to the outside.
- 6) Taking photos from the far corners of rooms and low to the ground get more flooring into the photo. The more flooring you see, the larger the room will appear. Removing all rugs from a space adds square footage—at least in a buyer's mind. Unbroken floor space makes any room appear larger, and square footage is king. Getting on your knees to take shots of the room enables you to get more of the floor space into the photo, which makes rooms look more expansive.



living room shot taken from the knees

- 7) Take photos at a time of day when you have the best natural light in the key rooms of the house: the living room, the kitchen, and the master bedroom. Make sure you open every window covering and even open doors to let more light in. Don't use a flash if you don't have to—it will distort colors and appear harsh.
- 8) Although most interior photos in magazines are shot with the lights off, it is usually best to turn on all lights for listing photos. That means turning on all the overhead lights, pot lights, and lamps in the room. Those spots of light draw your eye to every corner of the space so that a buyer may linger a bit longer on the picture.
- 9) In rooms with a fireplace, take some shots with the fire lit to create a sense of intimacy and hominess. As I mentioned earlier, make sure you open all the windows and doors to let in light so a cozy room doesn't appear dark.



interesting photo through
French doors

- 10) Consider taking a few unconventional photos rather than just the old shoot-from-the-entry standards. Open the French doors, throw open a window, or move the chairs out from the table to create a photo that entices and captures the imagination of a would-be buyer.
- 11) It's standard to take a photo from the front door into the entry, but try taking a shot of the entry from the interior toward the front door and open the door, like in this photo. It's much more interesting and may be a better vantage point to see the space.



Make your entry welcoming and fresh.

WORKING WITH REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONALS

Although I sometimes stage homes for FSBOs (For Sale by Owners), I always advise my clients to hire a real estate professional. Here's why:

- 1) Homes that are not represented by real estate agents rarely get shown by other real estate agents.
- 2) Sellers should never meet buyers before the deal is done. Buyers will automatically judge the property based on their impression of the seller. Real estate agents are the neutral go-between and keep the sellers out of the equation.
- 3) Buyers' agents know the pitfalls and problems that arise from dealing with emotional and inexperienced home sellers with no representation. They may discourage their buyers from viewing FSBOs.

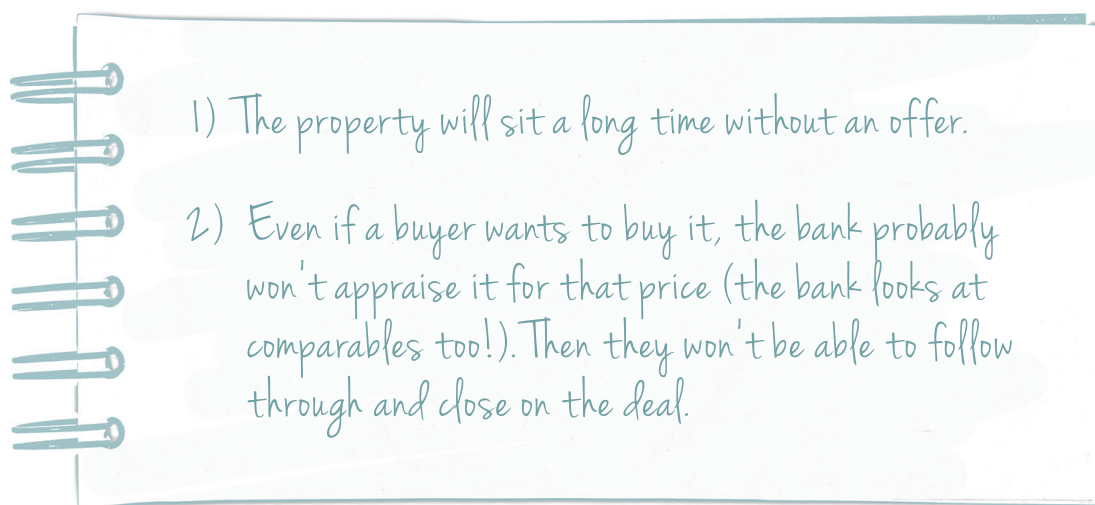
- 4) Real estate professionals can help you understand the demographic of buyers in a given neighborhood, provide accurate comparable property information that will help you know what buyers in that price range expect, and give you feedback as buyers view the property after staging.
- 5) Real estate agents often have good resources for handymen, painters, contractors, and home stagers.

Seek out a reputable Realtor who can not only get your listing on MLS but will also make sure your listing is seen as many times as possible. A good real estate agent will provide professional photography for your property, and many will offer a home staging consultation by a highly effective home stager.

USING COMPARABLES TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

An assessment of comparable properties is important for the seller in making pricing decisions. Ask your real estate agent to provide you with a copy of the

comparable properties in your area, or check for comparables yourself on RealTracs.com. Accurate comparables are typically based on area/neighborhood, square footage, and number of bedrooms and bathrooms. If you are running comparables yourself, just type in that information and see what comes up. Don't consider comparables as those properties currently on the market; you need to base your price on what has actually sold over the last few months. If you price the house based on the comparables of what has not sold, the consequences may be:





When deciding on the right price for your property, consider these things:

- 1) The sooner the house sells, the closer to the asking price you will get. Once it sits on the market for more than a month, buyers expect a discount.
- 2) If you list slightly below comparables, you may generate a bidding war between anxious buyers who will be competing for such a great value. It's not uncommon for a well-priced, well-staged home to get multiple offers within the first few days and end up getting a higher offer than the listing price.
- 3) The first offer a listing gets is almost always the best offer and the best chance of selling the property close to list price. Even if it's below what you want to get for the property, always present a reasonable counteroffer and try to work with the buyer to come to a compromise you can live with.
- 4) Take your emotions out of the picture and simply view this as a business negotiation. This is another good reason to have a real

estate professional conducting the transaction. Too many buyers or sellers back out of a deal over a couple hundred dollars or hurt feelings. Don't make a regrettable mistake because you allow yourself to become too emotional in the negotiation process.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE LISTING PRICE

So-called “charm pricing” is the strategy of pricing an item a few cents or dollars below a round number in order to make it appear less expensive. A house listed at \$299,999 sounds like more of a bargain than one listed at \$300,000. Yes, it's only a dollar difference, but it makes a big difference psychologically. The listing is perceived as being in the \$200,000s versus the \$300,000s, even when there's only one dollar difference!

A study at Florida Atlantic University found that homes that utilized charm pricing sold closer to the asking price than those listed at round-number prices. It appears that buyers may see listings priced at round numbers as more negotiable than those utilizing charm pricing.



You may sometimes see properties listed at \$305,000 or \$315,000. These are really bad price points. People usually make MLS or Real-Tracs searches in a range where the top end is a hard, even number like \$300,000, \$350,000, or \$400,000. People don't often type in a Real-Tracs search with a top end of \$320,000.

If you list a property for \$305,000, anyone who topped off at \$300,000 will never even see your listing or photos. If their top end was \$350,000, they may see your listing, but it's likely that the listings closer to \$350,000 will have more square footage or amenities than yours and will overshadow your lower-priced property. Choosing a listing price for your house isn't the lottery—don't use “lucky” or arbitrary numbers when determining your list price.

Of course no one wants to leave money on the table. However, pricing a property right at or below market value is the absolute best pricing strategy in today's market. The sooner the house gets an offer, the closer to asking price you will get—and sometimes it will even be above asking price.

CALLING IN A PROFESSIONAL HOME STAGER

Sometimes an objective viewpoint from a well-trained home stager may be exactly what you need to get from “for sale” to “sold.” The Real Estate Staging Association (RESA) conducted a study in 2013 that found that unstaged homes were on the market an average of 156 days, while homes professionally staged prior to listing averaged 42 days on the market. Homes staged before listing sell 79 percent faster than unstaged homes.

Ask your real estate agent if he or she thinks your property requires professional home stager. Then seek out one with a good track record and excellent reviews. Don't be afraid to ask for help from your real estate agent or a good home stager, especially one that is trained in the concepts of Psychological Staging™. Admitting you need help is the first step to getting your home sold quickly for the most money.

Staging is an important component of the home selling process and is vital in getting the most out of the sale of your home. With the information you have now learned in this book, you are well on your way to selling your property quickly and for top dollar. It's time to step into the next great chapter of your future.



chapter 5

HOME STAGING CHECKLISTS FOR SELLERS

HOME STAGING TO-DO LIST

General Guidelines

- ☐ Walk through each room and look at things critically from a buyer's perspective.
- ☐ Clear away all clutter. If you haven't used it in the past six months or don't need it for the next six months, pack it away.
- ☐ Remove excess and oversized furniture that crowds the space
- ☐ Keep all shades, blinds, and curtains open during showing hours.
- ☐ Keep all lights on during showing hours. Lamp lighting is important, as well as overhead lighting. The expense of leaving on lights is very little in comparison to the importance of your house selling quickly for more money. Utilize timers if necessary.

- ☐ Pack away all personal items such as family photographs, personal information, jewelry, and valuable items.
- ☐ Leave only the nicest and least taste-specific decorative items such as art, plants, and accessories unless specifically mentioned to pack.
- ☐ Pack away all paperbacks and leave only attractive hardbacks.
- ☐ Open various windows throughout your home for at least 15-20 minutes each day. This will help it smell clean and fresh.
- ☐ Do not use scented room sprays, plug-in deodorizers, or other artificial air freshening products. These tend to smell fake and make buyers think you are trying to mask odors. They can also be offensive to people with sensitive noses or allergies.
- ☐ Check that all your light bulbs are working and bright. If a light fixture has multiple bulbs, make sure they are of equal brightness. If not, replace all bulbs. Incandescent or new LED bulbs are preferred to fluorescent ones.

- ☐ Hire a contractor to handle any major projects or repairs.
- ☐ Cleanliness is a crucial factor to potential buyers. Thoroughly clean tile, carpet, hardwood floors, doors, and trim prior to listing.
- ☐ Sell, donate, or throw away anything you don't need.

Entry/Hallway

- ☐ This is all about first impressions. The front door must be clean and pristine.
- ☐ Paint or stain front door.
- ☐ Consider replacing entry light fixture with an updated, more significant option.
- ☐ Replace front door hardware that is worn or dated.

Kitchen and Breakfast Room

- ☐ Clear off counters, leaving only a few necessary appliances in good condition. Everything else should be kept out of sight in order to create space.
- ☐ Leave out larger decorative items to use in staging.
- ☐ Keep the kitchen floor and countertops clean for showings.
- ☐ Remove knife blocks from countertops and store them out of sight. These can be used as weapons.
- ☐ Clear off refrigerator (no magnets or artwork!)
- ☐ Keep the kitchen sink pristine. Keep dishes out of the sink and in the dishwasher. If there are dirty dishes in the dishwasher, run it before leaving the house so as to minimize food odors.
- ☐ Thoroughly clean the stovetop and oven. Replace burner pans if needed.
- ☐ Empty garbage daily and when there are dirty diapers.

- ☐ Keep all soaps, scouring pads, and cleaning supplies out of sight under sink.
- ☐ Make sure the area under the sink is clean and tidy. Prospective buyers will check out the plumbing beneath.
- ☐ Keep all medication in a colored (not clear), closed plastic container out of sight, unlabeled. Unfortunately, there are people who will steal medication if they can find it easily.
- ☐ Clear off most of area above cabinetry, except for a few tasteful items in the corners. No faux plants.

Bedrooms

- ☐ Make the bed daily. Replace old or dated bedding.
- ☐ Clear off bedside tables and chest of drawers except for a few necessary items.
- ☐ Store all magazines and miscellaneous items in drawers or beneath bed.

- ☐ Keep closet doors closed. Keep the floor clean and free of laundry.
- ☐ Remove all photos.
- ☐ Your goal in the master suite to create a sophisticated, luxe hotel/retreat feel for the bedroom, and a spa-like feel for the bathroom.

Bathrooms

- ☐ Clear off counters. Keep toiletries in a basket or bucket under the sink or in the closet when not in use.
- ☐ Do not leave out bar hand soap. Purchase coordinating liquid soap dispensers.
- ☐ Remove scatter rugs and bathmats from floors - this eats up square footage and makes the bathrooms appear smaller.
- ☐ Mop and wax/polish the floors.

- ☐ Replace outdated hardware.
- ☐ Clean and organize the cabinets, drawers, and laundry closet.
- ☐ Clean or replace shower curtain.
- ☐ Replace old caulking around sinks and bathtubs.
- ☐ Purchase new coordinated towels for staging your bathrooms. These are for looks and are not to be used. Use your old towels and put them in the dryer each morning so they don't get mildewed and are ready to use later while staying out of the picture.
- ☐ Clear out everything of tub and shower when not in use. Keep shower curtain open – buyers will open it anyway.
- ☐ Keep toilet lid covers closed and do not place anything on the toilet tank.
- ☐ Hide all cleaning supplies and garbage can under sink or out of the line of sight.

Children's Bedrooms

- ☐ Declutter toys and books.
- ☐ Minimize small items and leave out a few larger, nicer items on tabletops and shelves.
- ☐ Store small items and toys in baskets or covered containers.
- ☐ Provide your children with containers that they can quickly and easily throw their toys into before showings or before leaving the house.

Laundry

- ☐ Put dirty laundry in washer before leaving the house.
- ☐ Throw damp towels in the dryer before leaving the house.
- ☐ Keep counters and sink clean and empty.
- ☐ Make sure all light bulbs are working and replace with higher wattage if needed.

Closets

- ☐ Reduce items in closets. Pack away what you will not need for the next few months.
- ☐ Shoot for less than 80% capacity in every closet. If you leave room to spare, it will impress the buyers with all the storage you have available.
- ☐ Try to keep items off of the floor – the closet will look bigger.
- ☐ Make closets neat and tidy. If you keep typically unseen areas clean, it reflects on how well the buyers perceive you maintain the rest of the house.
- ☐ Remove wire coat hangers, if possible.
- ☐ Remove unused hangers – it greatly increases the space.

Garage/Storage Areas

- ☐ Always keep garage doors down while your house is on the market.
- ☐ Keep cars in the garage if there is space to do so.
- ☐ Declutter. Pack up as much now as possible – you're going to have to do it anyway.
- ☐ Sweep out and organize what's left in the garage.
- ☐ Do not line the garage walls with boxes. If you need to store boxes, stack them neatly and vertically up against the farthest wall.

Curb Appeal

- ☐ Keep lawn mowed and tidy. Bag and remove leaves.
- ☐ Apply fresh mulch to gardens before putting house on the market.

- ☐ Tasteful plantings around the front entry will burst curb appeal.
- ☐ Make sure mailbox is in good condition. Apply a fresh coat of paint, if needed.
- ☐ Replace exterior light fixtures if dated. If the finishes are worn, you can take them down and apply a coat of exterior-grade black spray paint.
- ☐ Purchase a new, plain exterior welcome mat in a natural fiber. Don't use a front mat with any kind of writing on it or a kitschy pattern.
- ☐ Clean or repaint exterior handrails, if needed.
- ☐ Repaint front door and replace worn door hardware.
- ☐ Keep any front door glass sparkly clean.
- ☐ Clean gutters and downspouts.

- ☐ Power wash siding and clean windows.
- ☐ Store any toys or equipment laying around in the yard.
- ☐ Repair broken fences and paint if necessary.
- ☐ Clean, stain, or paint deck or patios.

PRE- SHOWING CHECKLIST

Use this checklist prior to each showing to make sure your home is show-ready.

Lighter and brighter makes any space appear larger:

- ☐ Open all window treatments and blinds.
- ☐ Turn on all overhead lights and lamps in the house.
- ☐ Check to see if mirrors or windows need spot cleaning with Windex.

Clean rooms lessen distractions and reflect on how well you have maintained the property:

- ☐ Take a damp, warm cloth and run over doors, around doorknobs, and on doorframes to remove dirt and smudges.
- ☐ Vacuum all flooring.
- ☐ Use vacuum attachment on any upholstery that may have pet hair.
- ☐ Clean kitchen and bathroom sinks and countertops to a shine.
- ☐ Run a damp, warm cloth over appliances to remove dust and fingerprints.
- ☐ Check toilets and showers for cleanliness.

Bad smells can turn off buyers:

- ☐ Remove all garbage from the house.
- ☐ Burn a vanilla, sugar cookie, or orange candle the morning before a showing. Do NOT use a floral or musky candle of any kind.
- ☐ DO NOT use plug-in fragrances or room sprays.
- ☐ Do not cook prior to showings, unless you are baking cookies or bread.
- ☐ Air out the house briefly by opening several windows/doors for twenty minutes to lessen any odors you may not notice.

An overall “fluff” of the house can make all the difference:

- ☐ Make the beds in every room.
- ☐ Fluff and karate-chop all pillows on beds, sofas, and chairs.
- ☐ Clear off tabletops of clutter or personal items into a plastic bin you can hide under the bed prior to showings.
- ☐ Put away toys in closed cabinets and large baskets.
- ☐ Check closets and make sure nothing is lying on or piled on the closet floor.
- ☐ Throw dirty laundry into the washer or take it with you in the car.
- ☐ Put damp bath towels in the dryer.

WHEN TO BRING IN A PROFESSIONAL HOME STAGER

The following are indicators that you may need to hire a professional home stager to consult on or stage your home:

- Your property has a challenging floorplan or oddly-shaped rooms and angles.
- You have a very taste-specific style of decorating that defines most of the home.
- Your furniture is outdated or worn out from use.
- You work full-time and are overwhelmed with all that needs to be done to market your home.

- Your kitchen, bathrooms, and/or lighting need updating, and you want to spend your money wisely with decisions that will give you the most bang for your buck.
- Your property features boldly painted walls, faux finishes, and/or wallpaper.
- You have lived in the home for 7+ years.
- You have a lot of furniture and décor that may need editing.
- You don't have very much furniture and décor to work with.
- You have difficulty being objective about your house.

CREDITS

All photography is from The Decorologist's own projects
with the exception of stock photos.

Pages with photo credits for Kristie Barnett:
pg 9, 11, 14, 17, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 33, 36, 39, 42, 45
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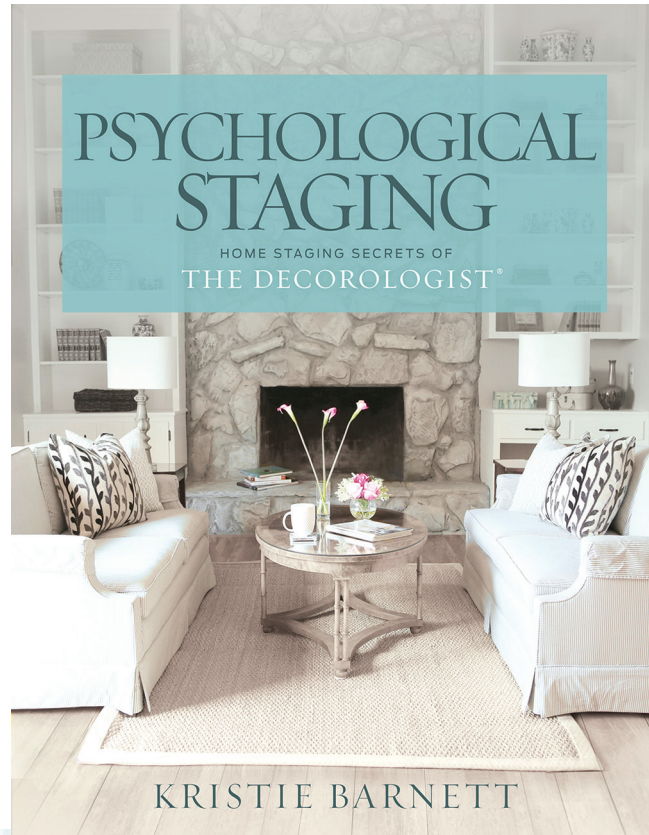
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In this book, Kristie Barnett reveals the secrets of her proven method of Psychological Staging™ to quickly sell residential real estate for top dollar. This method developed for professional home stagers has earned her both local and national awards for home staging, and has made The Decorologist® the go-to authority in the field of real estate staging.

Available at www.TheDecorologist.com and Amazon.com

EXPERT PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGER™ (EPS) TRAINING BY THE DECOROLOGIST®



Learn how to stage any home from start to finish and create your own unique business in the field of staging and design through demonstrations, hands-on activities, and real-life experience in home staging with Kristie Barnett.

What does the training include?

- 3 days of live, in-person training by **The Decorologist®** (including onsite staging of a property for sale)
- Training manual filled with my **Psychological Staging™** techniques, starting or growing your Staging business, and forms that you will need
- A printed bound copy of ***Psychological Staging: Home Staging Secrets of The Decorologist***
- Professionally photographed before/ afters from the onsite staging to start your own portfolio
- Certification as an **Expert Psychological Stager™ (EPS)**
- Ongoing support via a private **Expert Psychological Stager™** Facebook group

To find out how you can earn your EPS certification, visit
www.ExpertPsychologicalStager.com

JUST THE RIGHT PAINT COLOR

www.JustTheRightPaintColor.com



In this 100 minute online video course, you will learn how to:

- Choose paint colors that will tie in with your existing finishes
- Choose paint colors that will make your dated home feel current
- Use color to create on-trend effects

JUST THE RIGHT FURNITURE ARRANGEMENT

www.JustTheRightFurnitureArrangement.com



In this 110 minute online video course, you will learn how to:

- Create perfect furniture arrangements
- Group art and accessories in your space
- Use what you have to instantly update your look
- Choose upholstery and fabric combinations

PSYCHOLOGICAL STAGING™ FOR LIVING ROOMS

www.TheDecorologist.com/Psychological-Staging-For-Living-Rooms



In this 50 minute presentation for Professional Stagers, you will learn to:

- Use Psychological Staging™ techniques to effectively stage any challenging living area
- Arrange furnishings within an open floor plan
- Maximize traffic flow in areas with multiple openings
- Conquer the dreaded corner fireplace

Home staging expert, Kristie Barnett, will help you prepare your home to sell quickly for top dollar in this practical and informative book. Her method of Psychological Staging™ has earned her both local and national awards, and has made The Decorologist® the go-to authority in the field of real estate staging.

KRISTIE BARNETT

The Decorologist® is an expert in Residential Paint Color, Staging, and Decoration.

A sought-after writer and presenter, Kristie shares her passion for teaching others through her design blog, workshops, videos, and staging certification courses.



TheDecorologist.com

