

Home Staging Entrepreneur Helps Sell Houses at Top Prices

Despite our poor economy, Susan Atwell's thrifty house staging tips have helped numerous home owners market their dwellings for quick, well-priced sales.

"I



understand people don't want to spend a lot of money on the house they are selling," says Atwell, president of

[Atwellstagedhome](#), during a recent phone interview from her Somers, N.Y. condo. "We need to do enough to make that emotional connection for prospective buyers and get that house move-in ready."

Home Staging Consultation Provides Sellers Immediate Info

Toward that end, Atwell starts the process moving by meeting with sellers for a two- to three-hour consultation. "Most times, by the end of the consultation, clients know everything they need to do to get their home ready for sale," she says. That's the difference, explains Atwell, between her and many other home stagers who visit a home first, then return to their office to write up a report. That takes a lot of time, she adds. "By doing that "working consultation," it's very quick and people get the information they need immediately."

Her suggestions are often things that home sellers can do themselves or have done without major expense. It's frequently about packing, [cleaning](#) and rearranging furniture, says Atwell, who charges \$350 for a two-hour consultation and \$125 each additional hour.

The most important areas are kitchen and bathrooms. If your kitchen is dated, give it a facelift with new hardware, lighting fixtures, perhaps a coat of paint and new countertops, she says. Even new appliances, if need be.

Among a home's worst enemies depending on their severity are [odors](#). "It should smell pleasant in the house," says Atwell. "You have to be careful if you cooked fish the night before, the smell is in the house. Odors are tough to conceal."

While the real estate agent's mantra is "location, location,

location," Atwell's is "clean, clean, clean. If it's really clean, it will make a difference because above everything else, the house has to be move-in ready."

Get Repairs Done Before Buyers Shave Home's Selling Price

Make sure repairs are taken care of before prospective buyers begin their own list of things that require fixing. They will definitely ask for money to be shaved off the home price, she says. "For something that may cost the homeowner \$500, they may ask for thousands off the house."

If a home is in good condition unstaged, bringing it up a notch through staging will "give it a little wow," notes Atwell. Painting makes a big difference as does furniture placement that can show a house at its best. Features like a bay window or fireplace will also through staging add to its pizzazz.

Entrepreneurial Home Stager Creates a Little Wow

Atwell helps spread the word about her business through Internet blogging and an electronically dispatched newsletter. In addition to home sellers, many of her clients are realtors who understand the importance of staging a property. Some agents, she says, bring her every listing they have. "Especially when they find out it sells in the first week and with a higher offer. It's a marketing tool for them." When a house goes on the market well staged and priced right, "it has everything working for it," she adds.

Her venture into the home staging business began with a seed planted in her mind several years back while visiting a friend. He didn't know whether he wanted to stay in his condo, Atwell recalls. Meanwhile, he needed help with showing his furniture

and artwork to their best advantage. "We thought we would redo (the condo) in respect to selling," says the home stager who spent a couple of hours rearranging his furnishings. She also suggested he upgrade his bathroom with a natural stone floor and new wall color.

When her friend decided to sell a year later, he received three offers the first week for the asking price and higher. "He made one comment to me that stuck in my head," she says. "His realtor said his condo was different from others with the same floor plan."

A year later, another friend asked her help when he had trouble selling his home. It had been sitting on the market without any offers for nine months. The house required a much-needed boost. "He had raised his family there and was in the house for 42 years."

Atwell suggested he [declutter](#) the home, invest in a deep cleaning job and lighten and brighten it. Wallpaper was removed in three rooms that received new coats of paint. "He spent \$3,000 in materials and labor to fix it up," she notes. "That house sold in 2 1/2 months with multiple offers. There was a 7-month inventory of homes at the time; most houses were taking a lot longer to sell." In fact, prospective buyers, recalls Atwell, got into a bidding war at the end.