



# Home Staging

## Secrets to a Successful Home Sale

***Reveal Your Home's Hidden Value and Ignite Buyer Interest***

A collection of published articles by professional Home Stager Susan Atwell

*Thank you for downloading:*

# Home Staging

Secrets to a Successful Home Sale

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*(This book was previously published as “How Much Does Home Staging Cost?”)*

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# Table of Contents:

Page 3: Table of Contents

Page 5: About the Author and this eBook

Page 6: **How Much Does Home Staging Cost?**

*That's often the first question, but really, the fundamental question to ask is, Can Home Staging help me sell my home faster and for more money?*

Page 9: **An Inconvenient Truth about Selling Your Home**

*4 tips to minimize the stress and inconvenience that comes with selling your home.*

Page 12: **Going for the Gold: Why Staging Your Home to Sell is Like Training for the Olympics**

*Selling your home is a competition, but it doesn't have to be as challenging as the Olympics if you employ these 5 simple steps.*

Page 15: **Home Staging Proof: Solid Science Proves Staged Homes Sell Faster**

*Even if you haven't staged your vacant or occupied home yet, that's OK because evidence shows that it's never too late to stage.*

Page 18: **Selling an Inherited Home: What You Need to Know**

*Help for selling any home, but especially if you're caught in the emotional and often rushed selling situation associated with an inherited home.*

Page 21: **Everything I Know About Home Staging I Learned From My Mother**

*Learn how my mom's approach to home decorating can work for you too.*

Page 24: **New Year's Resolution: Commit to Home Improvement**

*If you had to sell your home tomorrow, would you be ready?*

Page 27: **It All Boyles Down to This: Looks Count (to Home Buyers)**

*Singer Susan Boyle proves that first impressions and looks count—probably more than we like to admit.*

Page 30: **Adopt the “Big Bang Theory” of Home Staging**

*It is always better to delay the listing of your home than try to trickle out fixes and updates while the home is on the market.*

Page 32: **AtWell Staged Home—Services**

## About the Author and this eBook

Susan Atwell, President of *AtWell Staged Home*, is a home staging expert who's known for her ability to showcase the beauty and character of any for-sale home so that it sells high and sells fast.



As one of her recent clients said, "Susan's homes sell!" With her trained eye and knack for knowing what impresses buyers, Susan makes it quick, economical, and fun to organize, arrange, and decorate a home so it becomes impressively beautiful yet highly functional...without making extravagant alterations or expensive makeovers.

Since 2005, Susan has staged homes of all sizes and in all price ranges in Westchester, Rockland, Putnam, Dutchess, and Fairfield counties. From a 750 square-foot post-war co-op to a multimillion dollar 10,000 square-foot historic home.

These experiences inspire her free monthly online resource, [\*Stage Every Listing Letter and Log \(SELL\)\*](#), which is full of home staging tips, tools, and transformations. Whether you're a real estate professional, home seller, or just someone who enjoys interior decorating, these tips are for you!

**Vacant or occupied, Susan can help you stage your home so that it sells fast and for the best price possible. Give her a call today at 914-525-0454.**

# How Much Does Home Staging Cost?

By Susan Atwell

**As a home stager the first question I often hear is, *How much will it cost to stage my home?* But really, the fundamental question to ask is, *Can Home Staging help me sell my home faster and for more money?***

To put this into perspective, if your doctor recommended a life-improving procedure, would your first question be, *How much does it cost?* or are you more likely to investigate the efficacy and perceived personal value of the treatment?

Let's start at the beginning. What is Home Staging and why would I want to spend money on a home that I'm selling?

Home Staging is a marketing tool that uses decorating to properly prepare a home for sale. Staging shows off a home's best features while downplaying its flaws. Its main objective is to sell your home quickly and at maximum value. In less analytical terms, Staging invites buyers to fall in love with your home.

Staging speeds home sales by making your home appeal to the largest number of potential buyers, and a faster sale generally leads to a higher sales price. Put another way, improve your product, and more people will want it. Simple, right? In this case, the product is your biggest asset—your home. And as with any form of marketing—or advertising—there is usually an initial investment made with the hope that the principal invested will be returned, along with a little profit, when the “product” sells. In the real estate industry, this investment sweet spot is generally accepted to be between one and three percent of the price of the home. (But most home sellers spend far less.)

The initial goal of any staging project is to make a home move-in ready. With that foundation, you can determine how much (or how little) investment is required. You also will need to know which projects are most essential for improving the salability and desirability of your home. If you are having trouble figuring this all out—and most home owners will—consider hiring a professional home stager. A stager will quickly evaluate your home and ensure that you invest your home-staging dollars wisely.

I recently talked Jayme, a Putnam Valley home seller, out of putting most of the contents of her home into storage. Instead we simply create a plan to equally distribute these items throughout the home. That advice alone saves her much more than the price of the three-hour consultation, and Jayme has an accepted offer within 48 hours of listing. To be on your way to a quick sale, consider starting with these six tasks.

1. Clean, clean, clean. And then when you think you are done, clean again!
2. Declutter spaces without leaving them feeling cold or abandoned. Remember, buyers need to make an emotional connection with your home.
3. Pack collections and items you will not need while the home is on the market.
4. Make necessary repairs, but don't involve yourself in any major renovations (like that new kitchen remodel or master suite addition that you never got around to).
5. Paint walls with fresh, warm, universally appealing colors.
6. Rearrange furniture, art, and accessories to create a flow that shows off the best features in every space.

If that sounds like a lot of work, you may be wondering if simply offering a lower price than the competition will guarantee a quick sale.

Here are two reasons price reductions alone won't sell your home. First, price reductions won't make buyers fall in love with your property. All buyers have a list of features they want in a home. But when they really love a home, they often throw out that logical list and buy the property anyway. If all buyers love is the price, they probably are not going to buy the property.

Second, price reductions still won't make a home move-in ready. Many of today's buyers are busy two-income families. They don't have the time, money, or energy to do major fix-ups and renovations if they perceive your home as requiring too much work. They will instead continue their search, often paying more for a home that is move-in ready.

Think of selling your home as a competition. Those who prepare and train will always have the competitive advantage over those who do not.

Does home staging *always* work? No, it does not. But not for the reasons you might think. Staging needs to be combined with a realistic price that represents the current value of the home. No matter the market, there is no amount of staging that will make up for a home that is overpriced or underrepresented.

So back to the question at hand, *How much does home staging cost?* Many home-staging techniques like cleaning, decluttering, and furniture rearrangement, cost nothing to implement. And those recommendations that do come with a price tag will be returned at closing. Done right, home staging more than pays for itself.

I'll leave you with this. If you could sell your home faster and for more money by making only a relatively minor financial investment, wouldn't that be an investment worth making?



Susan Atwell, home staging expert and President of *AtWell Staged Home*, is known for her ability to showcase the beauty and character of any for sale home so that it sells high and sells fast.

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**“Thanks to Susan’s home staging skills, we received multiple bids and had an accepted offer in the first listing week. Total time, from listing to closing, was an astounding 26 days!**

**Susan was involved from the beginning** and assisted in every aspect of the home’s preparation, right down to helping me pick countertops, flooring, and paint colors.

Empty, most of the rooms in this house appeared to be tiny, a sales-killer. **This home would never have sold as quickly, or for as close to asking, without the addition of the appropriate furniture. Susan’s staging made a critical difference** in bringing this home to life and helping buyers visualize themselves living in this space.

I have used Susan multiple times for a variety of listings and will continue to refer her. **Her staging helps homes look amazing, show well, and sell quickly!”**

Maryanne Durr  
Licensed Real Estate Salesperson  
Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, Katonah, NY



This 4-bed, 2-bath, 1,900-square-foot, split-level “flip” home in Katonah, NY, sells for \$675k, just 2% below asking after only 4 days on the market. [Read the full story here.](#)

# An Inconvenient Truth about Selling Your Home

By Susan Atwell

## Truth is few things are more inconvenient than having your home on the market.

Imagine a bad reality show, where you are forced to live in *Macy's* window for weeks on end. Your personal items, your life, constantly exposed to strangers and their criticisms—with no end in sight.

If your home is currently on the market, or going on the market soon, you may already feel this way. So what's the best way to get out from under the microscope? Sell fast. Well, that sounds easy—and obvious—but how do you sell fast?

In addition to the right price and a good real estate agent, the winning combination also includes home staging, effort, and a willingness to be inconvenienced while your home is on the market. The following questions will help you understand if you are ready, willing, and able to do what it takes to sell a home in this market?

1. Are you willing to detach yourself emotionally from this home and view it as a product or commodity?
2. Are you willing to let go of your personal style and decorate to appeal to the widest variety of buyers?
3. Are you willing to pack up anything you won't need for the next few months—even if it includes children's toys, personal photos and keepsakes?
4. Are you willing to eliminate or hide TVs, computers or other electronic devices?
5. Are you willing to send your pets away when the home is being shown?
6. Are you willing to furnish an unfurnished home so that it is warm, inviting, and spacious?
7. Are you willing to clean like you've never cleaned before?
8. Are you willing to establish a budget of no more than 3% of the price of the home for repairs, upgrades and updates?

If you answered “yes” to most, or all of these questions, then you are probably ready.

More than ever, home buyers are looking for move-in ready homes that feel fresh, spacious and up-to-date. On the Web, buyers may like the price, pictures and attributes your home has to offer, but that's not always enough. They need to be impressed the minute they walk through the door. Showcasing every space will make them fall in love at first sight. It's this positive emotional response that can lead to an offer and hopefully a sale.

Here are a few tips to meet buyers' demands, “up” your game, and beat the competition. At the same time, you'll reduce the amount of time your home is on the market and consequently the amount of time that you will be inconvenienced.

**Be prepared.** The hardest part of living in a home that is on the market is constantly being prepared to show your home. But you must be ready at a moment's notice. You never know when your perfect buyer will walk through the door. This is not a good time to entertain or have guests.

**Clean sells.** All homes should be thoroughly cleaned prior to listing. Daily touch-ups may be necessary for occupied homes, but vacant homes can become surprisingly dirty as well. Dust on surfaces, cobwebs in corners, stains in stagnant toilets, fingerprints on windows and appliances—all of these areas need to be inspected and cleaned regularly. Occupied or vacant, consider hiring a professional cleaning service during the period your home is on the market.

**Pack it up.** Pack up and store anything you won't need while your home is on the market. Packing sooner, rather than later, will make the transition easier. Many moving companies offer storage options for those staging their homes to sell.

**Stick to the essentials.** Too much or no furniture can make a home feel small. Cluttered homes are distracting, while vacant homes can leave a buyer cold. Either way, buyers will have trouble picturing their furniture in these spaces. Define each space to have a single purpose, minimize clutter, and make sure there is plenty of light.

The more you do in advance of listing your home for sale, the faster it will sell, and the sooner you can return to a normal life. Showcasing or staging your home will help to minimize the stress and inconvenience that comes with selling. The truth is that you will be inconvenienced, but it will be well worth it, and your efforts will be rewarded, when your home sells fast and for top dollar.



Susan Atwell, home staging expert and President of *AtWell Staged Home*, is known for her ability to showcase the beauty and character of any for sale home so that it sells high and sells fast.

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***“Susan helped bring this home back to life! All her recommendations, work, and staging helped buyers envision this home as their very own and helped pull people in the door. The first impression is always the best impression, and she made sure that this home made a statement!***

***Our team is so lucky to be working with Susan; not only do our clients love her, but the buyers were impressed with her work as well.***

***Susan is a professional who makes sure to answer emails and phone calls quickly, handles pressure like a champ, is efficient and has the most AMAZING level of energy! She can handle anything!”***

*Laura Lulgjuraj  
Real Estate Salesperson  
Gino Bello Homes Sales Team  
Houlihan Lawrence, White Plains, NY*



*Split-level 4-bedroom, 2-bath, 2,200 square-foot Mamaroneck house has 10 offers in the first listing week and sells for an astounding \$100,000 over the \$850,000 asking price. [Read the full story here.](#)*

# Going for the Gold: Why Staging Your Home to Sell is Like Training for the Olympics

By Susan Atwell

## **Selling your home is a competition, but it doesn't have to be as challenging as the Olympics if you employ these 5 simple steps.**

At age 12 my gym teacher suggested gymnastic lessons. My parents agreed, and what started as 1 hour a week at the gym, turned into more than 3 hours each day, 6 days a week.

Little did I know at the time that the ability to endlessly hold a handstand would teach me so many of life's lessons—and all before leaving for college at the age of 18.

Like any athlete, I was just doing something I loved and was passionate about. And like many athletes, years later I still think back to the lessons gymnastics taught me.

As the credit card commercial says, you can place a price on the cost of a gymnastic lesson, the equipment, and even the coaching, but the lessons learned are priceless. So even if you've never participated in organized sports, there is no reason you can't learn from the experiences of others.

Motivational speaker Tony Robbins in *Personal Power!* explains that people are driven to act by either inspiration or desperation. Or...people take action based on emotion.

Athletes have a passion for their sport and a desire to achieve, but have you stopped to think about what you are trying to achieve with the sale of your home? Is it to sell quickly or for the highest price possible? Or is it something more, something bigger, something only you can feel?

For example, will the sale of your home allow you to downsize to an easier condominium lifestyle, never having to mow the lawn or shovel snow again? Is your desire to help a loved one move to assisted living? Imagine your relief at knowing that someone will always be available to take care of him/her. Or, will a move give your children a better life, realized through quality schools and a safer neighborhood?

How will the sale of your home make you feel? These are the emotions that drive you to sell.

Now, what do you need to do—and what are you willing to do—to achieve this goal?

### **Step 1—Hire a Coach**

All Olympic athletes have a coach. Even Michael Phelps, after winning 21 Olympic medals, still depends on his coach to succeed. Sure, Phelps is the one who needs to perform, but without someone trained to properly direct his energy, how does he know he's not just spinning his wheels?

When you're selling your home, it's a good idea to engage the services of a professional coach, also known as a home stager. Seek help from a professional who sees your home's potential and will help you achieve a perfect score from critical home buyers.

A good coach will assess your home to help create a focused and realistic plan based on your budget and abilities. For some do-it-yourselfers, all they'll need is a 2-to-4-hour consultation. Some will require a little more assistance; others will want it all done for them.

### **Step 2—Set Realistic Goals**

Once you know what needs to be done to properly prepare your home for sale, you'll want to see how you can achieve these goals within your timeline and budget. A home stager will help you prioritize tasks and invest wisely in fix-ups and improvements.

### **Step 3—Commit to Achieving Your Goals**

This step seems simple—and it doesn't take much time, sweat or money—but don't be fooled. In sports, as in anything in life, commitment—or mental discipline—is often the most challenging aspect and what creates winners.

### **Step 4—Get Psyched!**

All athletes know that attitude is everything. As Gabby Douglas said after winning the all-around gold in gymnastics, "Hard days are where champions are made." Selling your home is not going to be easy, but what worthwhile venture is?

### **Step 5—Execute**

This sounds like the hardest step, but with the plan you've created with your home stager, this should be the easiest—and working from a good plan will save time and money. Do as much as you can, focusing on the most important changes first.



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*"I thoroughly enjoyed working with you and your assistants. **You were clearly knowledgeable, had a vision, and were without a doubt on my side.** You saved me money by using my furniture to show off my home's best features, were willing to get your hands dirty, (not avoidable in my home!), and are **well worth every penny!**"*

*My home received a full price offer after being on the market for only 3 days!  
(Compare that with the nearly identical home next door that wasn't staged and is still on the market after 5 months!)*

*I know that other factors go into the sale of a home, but during open houses of both homes, **I was hearing comments from people that they liked my home better because of the 'feel.'** I attribute that to **YOU, Susan.***

*Considering carrying costs, worry, and the fire that you lit under my butt to get things done, **you were, by far, my BEST INVESTMENT.** You were the best part of dealing with my personal tragedy.*

*Thank YOU again for your assistance, friendship, and expertise in preparing my home for sale."*

*Rick F  
Pelham, NY*



*This 5-bedroom, 4-bath, 3,600-square-foot, Pelham, NY, home built in 1910, has a full-price offer only 3 days after listing and sells for just 1.8%, below its \$925k asking price. [Read the full story here.](#)*

# Home Staging Proof: Solid Science Proves Staged Homes Sell Faster

By Susan Atwell

I may have a BA in English, but my passions lie in the sciences and math. After a few years in the business world, my love for logic evolved into a successful career as a computer scientist.

**So when I first heard that staged homes sell faster than unstaged homes, it seemed to make sense, but I still wondered, How do they *really* know?**

In my mind, there's only one way to prove that home staging works, and that's scientifically. To perform this experiment, we need to take two identical homes. One staged (or decorated to sell), one unstaged. Everything else being equal—the home's location, its price, and promotion to potential buyers—we need to see which one sells faster.

Since we know this isn't really possible, we can still devise a comparable strategy. Not one that we recommend, of course, but one that many home sellers unwittingly end up trying. Regardless, this technique will still prove if staged homes really do sell faster than unstaged homes. Here are the steps:

First, attempt to sell a home "as is" or unstaged. Then wait and see what happens. If there is no sale, stage the home. Clean, declutter, put away personal items, freshen up paint, add lighting, update bedding, remove old window treatments, put out fresh towels—anything that will show off your home's best features while making it feel both inviting and move-in ready. Once staged, wait an equal amount of time, or until the home finally sells. Finally, compare how long it takes to sell this home staged versus unstaged.

In 2006—before I even thought about starting my business—I unknowingly performed this exact experiment with a friend who's home was on the market 9 months, with no sale and no offers. The market was beginning to cool, but when the home was originally listed, the market was still hot—proving that even in the best markets, some homes won't sell "as is."

The total transformation cost less than 1% of the listing price, and once staged, the home proceeded to sell in just 2 months, with multiple offers and the beginnings of a bidding war. At the time the home was listed, there was a 7-month inventory of homes glutting the market. This means that under normal or average conditions, this home would not be expected to sell for at least 7 months. Staging lowered that time to 2 months.

Even with my passion for decorating—and my addiction to home staging television shows—it wasn't until I saw firsthand the impact staging had that I was truly convinced that it worked. (This experience was also the catalyst that launched my home staging business.)

The Real Estate Staging Association (RESA) has used a similar approach—but on a much larger scale—to prove that home staging works. Each year RESA compiles a report based on feedback submitted by hundreds of home stagers around the United States. Here's what they found in 2011:

"[RESA] studied 174 homes previously on the market on average 156 days before the homeowners gave up trying to sell on their own and called in a professional home stager. Those same homes were staged, relisted and sold on average in 42 days after staging. This is 73% less time on the market.

"[They] also studied 410 homes that were staged before they went on the market and sold in 42 days on average after staging.

"[RESA's] study proves it does not benefit the homeowner to list the property first to see if it will sell. When they invest in staging before listing, they sell 79% faster."

So even if you haven't staged your vacant or occupied home yet, that's OK because evidence shows that it's never too late to stage.

There are two variables not taken into account in RESA's study. We do not know if the asking price was adjusted or if the same real estate agent was used throughout the selling process. The influence of either could be significant.

It is also possible that home sellers anxious to sell are not only more willing to properly prepare their home for sale, but may also be more willing to price the home to sell because, as any home stager or real estate professional will tell you, there is no amount of staging or marketing that can make up for an asking price that is too high.

Try this experiment. Decorate your home to appeal to prospective home buyers, combine that with a great agent and the right price. Then sit back and see how quickly it sells. What have you got to lose?



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***“I can’t believe it actually all got done! Thank you SO much for staying so late to finish the staging—the house truly is gorgeous!”***

*Everything went perfectly with the photographer, and he was able to get some really amazing shots. Because of that, we had a crazy number of online views as soon as the listing went live.*

***We had our first showing a few days later, and it lead to an offer, which we accepted. Everyone commented on how beautiful the house was—and that was all you!***

*Thank you again. We greatly appreciate all that you did! We’ll definitely be contacting you again the next time we need to sell a house! :)”*

*Tamara & Tony C.  
Carmel, NY*



*Multiple offers are made on this 7-bed, 6-bath, 6,500 square-foot center-hall Colonial home in Carmel, NY, but the first, and accepted, offer comes only 4 days after listing. [Read the full story here.](#)*

# Selling an Inherited Home: What You Need to Know

By Susan Atwell

In January 1997, I began the search to find my first home. I started the process by consulting with a mortgage specialist. The reality of what I could afford was a bit disappointing, but there was a ray of hope. With a slightly higher down payment, I could afford a small condominium in Heritage Hills. This brought to mind my father's advice that "it's better to buy the smallest house in a great neighborhood than the biggest house in a less desirable one."

The first time out with my real estate agent, we saw three units. The first, an older two-bedroom estate, was dark, dated, and haunted by a dank odor. The fact that it was devoid of furnishings added to my intense desire to leave upon entering. The second unit we toured was equally unappealing.

But as they say, the third time is the charm, and the third unit we viewed became my home. It was the smallest of the three and the most expensive. It was priced at the upper limit of my budget and for good reason. It was bright, clean, neutral, and possessed a character unlike the others. It was move-in ready. And even though the kitchen and bath hadn't been updated in twenty years, it gave me something with which I could work. What it didn't do was scream "estate" as the others had, even though it was exactly that.

I continued to view other units over the next few weeks as we negotiated, and what I remember most from that search are the estates. Most were like the first unit I saw—dark, depressing, obviously vacant for some time, and often with the added bonus of a musty odor.

Since then, I've shopped for other homes in Heritage Hills—for myself and with family and friends—at least a dozen times, purchased and renovated another estate, and, most recently, staged two more estates for sale.

Having purchased, staged, and viewed so many homes and estates over the years, I've compiled a few lessons learned to help you when selling an inherited home. These rules apply to all homes being sold but are especially relevant to those caught in the emotional and often rushed selling situation associated with an estate.

## **First...Get Help**

Few people are experienced in dealing with the sale of an estate, so help from the right people can be invaluable. In addition to a real estate agent who will get you through the selling process quickly and easily, plan to hire a specialist in staging homes for sale. A home stager will help you properly prepare and decorate your home to sell. Showing off its best features makes the home more desirable and will increase the speed of sale, along with raising the sale price.

A stager will analyze the home, assessing its strong and weak points, put together a plan and—if you want—implement that plan.

## **Set a Budget and Stick to It**

You should plan to budget between 1% and 3% of the list price of the home for staging, repairs, minor updates (such as paint, light fixtures, and hardware), and a very deep cleaning. Most real estate professionals agree that an investment of this amount will be returned at closing as the result of a quicker sale and a higher sale price.

## **Keep the Home Furnished**

Do not clear out the home and try to sell it vacant. A vacant home takes longer to sell, does not connect emotionally with a buyer, and often comes across as smaller than it really is. Vacant homes also send a signal to home buyers that you are desperate to sell, encouraging lower offers than are warranted.

Clear clothing from dressers, remove important papers, and safely store valuable items such as silver and jewelry. Keep all furniture, art, lighting, and accessories in the home until the home staging analysis is complete. Home Stagers prefer to use what is already in the home rather than shopping for new items. Stagers also enjoy coming up with creative and thrifty solutions because this saves the seller time and money.

### **Stage the Home to Sell: Make Needed Repairs, Clean, and Beautify**

Now is the time to repair that power outlet that hasn't worked for years, to oil that squeaking door, and, generally, to fix all of the small things that are easily repaired.

Even the tidiest home will have some dirt, windows that show fingerprints, and corners that haven't been dusted in some time. It is also important to think about the dirt that you cannot see under the washing machine, in the carpeting, behind the refrigerator, or above the ceiling fan. Paying attention to these details will distinguish your property as a truly move-in ready home, differentiating it from other homes on the market.

The definition of home staging is decorating for salability. Even if you have an eye for interior design, it is important to view your home through the eyes of a potential buyer. This is another area where a professional home stager can be valuable, either to give advice on what to do, to review your plan, or to both plan and execute the process of staging for sale.

### **List Quickly**

Quickly preparing and listing the home for sale will minimize expenses in the form of monthly holding costs such as condo fees, taxes, and utilities. Not to mention the emotional benefits of getting this task behind you.

If you've hired a home stager to do the work, you may wish to thoroughly review the property after the staging is complete. It is now time to remove the items not required to sell the home—often packed away in storage areas, dressers, cabinets, or the garage. You can get a head start on clearing out these areas prior to the sale. And you will want to get a head start because staged homes sell faster. That said, in today's volatile mortgage market, many deals are falling through. Therefore, it is important to keep the home staged until the sale is final.

### **Putting it All Together**

As happens with all projects, there will be limitations and challenges. These limitations could be in the form of budget, time, or the home's physical structure or location. Home stagers are practiced at working within these constraints. Some of us even enjoy the challenge!

Do the best you can to show off the home's best features and to create a space that is clean, light, bright, warm, inviting, spacious, move-in ready, and as up-to-date as possible. If the budget is small, cleaning, decluttering, and staging are far more effective than doing nothing at all.



Susan Atwell, home staging expert and President of *AtWell Staged Home*, is known for her ability to showcase the beauty and character of any for sale home so that it sells high and sells fast.

Let Susan show you how quick, economical, and fun it can be to stage your home beautifully using what you already have.

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*“Recently, I began a **project involving 50 new units in Carmel, NY.** My sellers agreed with my suggestion to stage one unit to serve as both a model unit and the centerpiece of an advertising campaign. I needed the help of a professional Home Stager and a colleague referred me to Susan Atwell of Atwell Staged Home.*

***Susan was very knowledgeable, consistently professional, and just a pleasure to work with.** She involved me in all of the major decisions and took the time to teach me a lot about the staging process. This is valuable information that I will share with future sellers.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed the entire process, which was incredibly effective. In fact, **the staging was so beautifully done that the unit sold for asking price even before it was photographed!***

***I highly recommend Susan** to anyone in search of a stager, no matter how big or small their project might be.”*

Susan Panny  
Real Estate Salesperson  
RE/MAX Classic Realty, Somers, NY



*1,260-square-foot, open-floorplan, 2 bedroom, 2 bath model unit at the Villas at Seminary Hill, a newly constructed age 55-Plus active adult community in Carmel, NY, sells for full asking price prior to listing. [Read the full story here.](#)*

# Everything I Know About Home Staging I Learned From My Mother

By Susan Atwell

It all begins in 1964 when my parents take a drive in the “country” and see a model home they fall in love with and decide to buy.

As they consider the move north from Yonkers to Katonah, they discuss plans to put their home on the market with a neighbor. That neighbor tells a friend, Mrs. Brooks, who comes by to see our house. Later the same evening, the Brookses return and agree to pay the full asking price.

**Without knowing it, my mother staged her home to sell, and since then, she has steadfastly held the belief that the home sold quickly because of the way it was decorated. I think she may be on to something.**

If your mom is like mine, she takes great pride in decorating and showcasing her home. I remember our formal living room. There are no electronic devices—phones, stereos, or TVs—and it is set up purely with friends and family in mind. A cozy conversation area is established, highlighting the room’s two main features—a fireplace and large picture window. And as with any home staged for sale, these spaces are always ready for company.

Even today, my mother’s home is a reflection of how she wants guests to feel when they visit—welcomed and relaxed. From the minute you drive up, until you enter the living area, you are greeted by warm, inviting, and distraction-free spaces.

My mother understands the emotional response to home decorating and I learned, through my parents’ quick sale, that this emotional response is even more powerful when decorating a home to sell.

Both home staging—and my mother’s decorating style—are based on emotion, because few people buy a home based on logic alone. Think back to when you purchased your home. Most likely, you bought the home you fell in love with, not necessarily the home with the most items checked off on your wish list.

There are many factors that can impact a home’s marketability, but even if you don’t experience the kind of rapid sale that my parents enjoyed, there are simple and inexpensive ways to make your home more attractive to potential buyers. And it is generally the case that the faster a home sells, the higher the sale price.

As you prepare your home for sale, step into your buyer’s shoes and consider the questions that guide my mother, and perhaps yours as well, in decorating her home:

- Are the rooms inviting?
- How do they make you feel?
- Are the spaces clean and neat?

- Do they encourage conversation and/or relaxation?
- Does the furniture layout draw you into each space?
- Is your home designed to appeal to a wide variety of friends, family, and potential buyers?
- Will your “guests” feel like staying—lingering—perhaps long enough to make an offer?

By the way, these are the same questions home stagers ask themselves as they walk through the homes that they stage.

Having trouble stepping into your buyer’s shoes? Consider the help of a professional home stager.



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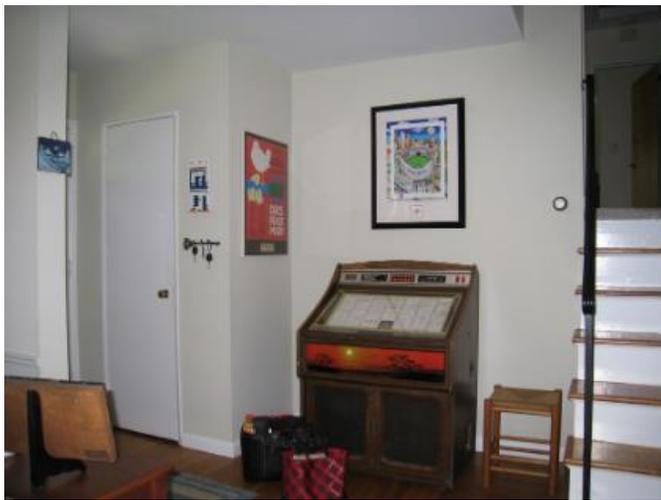
***“Home stager Susan Atwell is my secret weapon for successful sales and happy home sellers. Minor changes in a home’s appearance can make major differences in its appeal to potential buyers.***

***Susan knows exactly how to use what the home owner already has to transform a home, leading to faster sales and higher sales prices.***

*It’s not unusual for a home seller to be intimidated or nervous at the thought of having a stager in their home, but Susan quickly puts them at ease.*

***In just a few hours she collaborates with the seller for a quick, highly effective, and, more importantly, still livable transformation that everyone, especially buyers, will love.”***

*Eileen McGrath  
Licensed Associate Real Estate Broker  
Douglas Elliman Real Estate*



*This Katonah, NY, 3-bed, 2-bath, 1,700-square-foot home lists for \$539k and sells the first listing weekend with a 3-way bidding war for an over-asking final sale price of \$542k. [Read the full story here.](#)*

# New Year's Resolution: Commit to Home Improvement

By Susan Atwell

## If you had to sell your home tomorrow, would you be ready?

Years before becoming a home stager, I purchase my first home, and as I ponder the inevitable and truly necessary upgrades and changes, I am keenly aware of how important it is to keep resale in mind. Maybe I'm just an optimist, hoping that Prince Charming or Publisher's Clearing House will someday come knocking on my door, or maybe I just realize that you can never tell when life will change. Whatever the reasons, I know I wouldn't want to be forced to put my life on hold just because of a few neglected home improvements, repairs, or upgrades. "Be prepared" is not only the Boy Scout motto, but mine as well.

After moving into my small, one-bedroom condo, I make a list of all the potential improvements. Besides the avocado green kitchen appliances and 1970's wallpaper, there are all the builder-grade light fixtures, moldings, and finishes. My list includes upgrades to the doors, moldings, flooring, reconfiguration of closets, a bathroom upgrade, and the biggest item of all, a complete kitchen remodel.

Chunking it out by year makes it achievable. Each year, first picking a project, then estimating costs and setting the time line, along with the inevitable savings plan, keeps the momentum going. Over the course of seven years, learning and earning as I go, I work my way from the smallest and least expensive projects to that final and most ambitious project, the kitchen remodel.

So why not make this year, and every year, the year you resolve to tackle just one of your own home-improvement projects? This is an easy resolution that takes little willpower or sacrifice. It's not about restrictions, it's about personal enjoyment and return on investment.

The key is making changes that you will enjoy while simultaneously adding value to your biggest investment, your home. My first rule of thumb? Keep in mind the next potential owner. Will it most likely be a family, senior, or young professional? Will the new owner be on a fixed income, or is this his/her starter home? For me, knowing that I am the third owner of my home, tells me that I will probably not be the last. So I simply take what others have started and build on it for the next owner.

Even so, I never make a change that I don't absolutely love and—here's the tricky part—know that I will love for years to come. My second rule of thumb is to go for classic design and neutrals with your biggest and/or most labor-intensive investments. Have fun with color and style, with the finishing touches like paint, light fixtures, hardware, and accessories. I choose white cabinets, white tile, and white appliances. Sounds boring, right? All that white. Well, the beauty of white is that it goes with any color palette you choose. You may need to repaint before the sale, to depersonalize those choices, but you will probably need to do that anyway.

Repairs and maintenance are your top priority. Keep up with minor repairs as they occur, and plan ahead for major maintenance and upgrades. Everyone knows that kitchens and baths sell houses, so pay special attention to keeping these spaces current. As stated earlier, paint, light fixtures, hardware, and window treatments are easy and inexpensive upgrades that can change the look and feel of a room for little investment. Do you remember remarking on things during the buying process that you said you would fix after the purchase? Well, now is the time to fit those items into your plan. Remember, if you didn't like these things when you initially saw the home, it's likely the next buyer won't like them either.

Does this all sound like too much work? Well, imagine what a potential home buyer will say if you don't make these changes. Not only are you asking a new buyer to pay big bucks for your home, you're asking him/her to make the improvements that you refused to tackle as well. Keep in mind—at a minimum—that buyers desire a move-in-ready home. No buyer wants to pay top dollar for a project.

Having trouble choosing which projects to attack? Seek the advice of a professional *home stager*. Use this time to brainstorm all your goals—both short and long term—while breaking them down by priority and value added.

As a home stager, one of the saddest statements I hear from my home sellers is, “I wish I had made these changes before I decided to sell so that I could enjoy them.” Start this year with no regrets, and end it happier than you were when it began.



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***“It takes a person with a rare combination of skills to help someone prepare their beloved home for sale in a limited time and as economically as possible.***

*To do what Susan does requires a combination interior designer, accountant, and project manager. It also requires empathy, something that you don't learn in school, to help sellers complete the work that needs to be done while simultaneously navigating the emotional roller-coaster that comes with selling their long-time home.*

*This remarkable combination of high-tech and high-touch is why **the Gino Bello Homes Sales Team—and our home sellers—love working with Susan Atwell** of AtWell Staged Home.*

*The sales team agrees that **her work is exactly what buyers are looking for today** when purchasing a home, and **our sellers consistently tell us how happy they are with Susan's work**, as well as how comfortable they feel working beside her. We greatly appreciate everything she does!”*

Gino Bello  
Gino Bello Homes  
Real Estate Sales Team at Houlihan Lawrence White Plains, NY



*White Plains, NY, 4-bedroom, 2.5-bath, 2,240-square-foot, split-level home receives 8 offers in the first listing week and sells for 110.2%, or \$61.1k, over asking price. [Read the full story here.](#)*

## It All Boyles Down to This: Looks Count

By Susan Atwell

Recently, I was up late, channel-surfing when I came across a documentary on singer Susan Boyle's 2009 meteoric rise to fame. You may remember her as the frumpy, 48-year-old that blew everyone away on *Britain's Got Talent*.

It all begins when the nervous but "cheeky," Susan walks onstage and declares her intention to become the next British singing superstar. The audience and judges react as if they've caught a live one. You can see it on their faces. The audience smells blood in the water and expects her performance to be a train wreck. *How could someone who looks like this possibly think she has anything to offer?* Looking back, even Simon Cowell, every singer's toughest critic, admits his rush to judgment.

So what does all of this have to do with real estate and selling a home? Everything. Singer Susan Boyle proves that first impressions and looks count—probably more than we like to admit.

We are superficial. We believe that what we see is what we get. The phrase "Don't judge a book by its cover" would never have made it into the public consciousness if it were not human nature to do just that. We have trouble seeing past the surface, seeing the potential and the possibilities, and this is why we must impress our audience of home buyers as soon as they see the home on the Internet or open the front door. If those first impressions are not good, few buyers will be inclined to take a deeper look.

All Susan Boyle wants is a chance to be seen, to be heard, but with her facade, those chances are greatly diminished. The same is true for selling a home. If those online photos don't inspire, no visits will be made.

It's a shame, because there could be something quite wonderful hiding below the surface. But most potential home buyers just can't see it, and perhaps worse, they won't see many of the positives that are right under their noses if the negatives jump out at them first. No matter if it's a sellers' or a buyers' market, these home buyers will not waste their time and will simply go on to the next home.

Selling a home is a competition, a *tough* competition, where your home is up against other homes similar in size, price, and location. The hardest part about preparing your home to sell is stepping into your buyers' shoes and trying to see your home through the fresh and objective eyes of the buyer. If you are having trouble with this—and 80% to 90% of sellers will — consider employing the services of a professional home stager for an impartial opinion from someone who knows what buyers are looking for in a home.

Susan Boyle's hair, makeup, clothing, all make her appear much older than she really is. Does your home's décor leave the same impression? Does your home look old, neglected, and leave buyers thinking that it is not being well maintained? How do you unleash the inner beauty in your home? Staging, of course. A professional stager is your home's personal stylist. Relying on luck to sell your home is not a marketing technique, staging is.

In 2009, the Internet, the media, the world went wild for a singer, but many were as focused on her image as on her voice and doubted that she could overcome the odds against her, proving yet again that looks count. It took an amazing amount of talent and dedication to craft for Susan Boyle to overcome the initial impression she made, solely because of her appearance. If she had been made over prior to this competition, maybe she wouldn't have waited almost 48 years to become a star. How long until you stage your home into an overnight sensation?



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*"It's been wonderful getting to know you and working with you over this past year. I really appreciate all you did, your recommendations, money-saving tips, and willingness to focus on the areas of most concern to us. We very much enjoyed living in our refreshed home.*

***I've got great news. We sold our home! If you recall we went on the market February 1. By February 16 we had two parties bidding on the house. That got us just over asking!! We couldn't be happier!***

*A year ago, when I searched to find a home stager, one of my top priorities was to find someone who used what people already had in their home. I could see from the before-and-after photos on your website that you fit the bill. Using much of what we already had saved us money and allowed us to invest those savings into higher-return projects like painting.*

***We learned so much from you. You made the process fun and collaborative. Thank you! We couldn't be more delighted with the results. It feels like a new house. As one of our neighbors said, "Why do we do this when we're moving out, we should do it when we're moving in." She is so right! Can you help us move into our new home? 😊***

*Thank you again for helping us show our home in its best light and generating so much interest in our house."*

Mary P.  
Rye Brook, NY



*Within 2 weeks of listing, this 4-bedroom, 3-bath, 2,660-square-foot ranch home sells for just over the asking price of \$959k, for \$965k, in a bidding war. [Read the full story here.](#)*

# Adopt the “Big Bang Theory” of Home Staging

By Susan Atwell

**It is always better to delay the listing of your home than try to trickle out fixes and updates while the home is on the market.**

When marketing any product—from a soft drink to a new luxury automobile—advertisers bombard consumers with images, words, and music that will entice them to buy. Marketers have learned that it may take 10 or more of these “touch points” before consumers act.

But that’s not how it works in real estate. A home is not repeatedly put in front of a potential buyer. Instead it explodes onto the market with a single big bang! Just one chance to make that very important first—and lasting—impression with potential buyers, as well as real estate professionals who promote these homes. An equally important audience that is sometimes overlooked.

Like a gourmet meal artfully described, agents and buyers see this listing as fresh, new, and tantalizing. But what happens when no one bites? The listing quickly becomes stale, doubts become concerns that soon turn into worries. Why is no one interested? What’s wrong with this home? Is it worth seeing?

So, what is the “*Big Bang Theory*” of Home Staging? Simply put, it’s when all the elements required to sell a home quickly and for top dollar come together at the same time.

The perfect formula integrates promotion, price, and product. The agent is responsible for promoting the home to potential buyers, as well as advising the seller on setting a competitive price based on current market conditions. But the seller alone is responsible for preparing the product—the home—to look (and feel) its best.

Properly showcasing a home is an important piece of the equation. And the big bang can only be achieved when the vital preparation step is complete. This groundwork takes the most time and effort, may require a financial investment, and garners the highest financial reward for the home seller. In my experience, it is the amount of effort, or “sweat equity,” expended more than the volume of money invested that has the greatest impact on how quickly a home sells. And faster home sales generally lead to higher sale prices.

For example, after 14 months and no serious offers, a large 5-bedroom split in Katonah, NY, is taken off the market. The home sellers don’t want to lower their asking price again and agree to try a new method—home staging. *AtWell Staged Home* develops a detailed and budget-conscious do-it-yourself plan, which is aggressively implemented over a two-week period. The only items purchased for this transformation are two gallons of paint and a slipcover. This approach, suggested by their agent, works. Four days after going back on the market, it sells. Same house, same agent, the only difference is an enhanced “product.”

Where do you focus? In real estate most agents say that the three most important things are location, location, location, but when staging your home to sell, the three most important things are clean, clean, clean. And when you’re done with that? Clean again. Next comes lightening and brightening, followed by removing distractions (aka decluttering) from every space buyers will look. (Yes, that means the insides of closets, kitchen and bathroom cabinets, and any other built-in storage.) Finally, arrange the furniture in such a way that buyers notice the architectural feature(s) in each room, such as a picture window, fireplace, high ceilings, or wood floors. Every room has at least one such element. Identify it, then show it off.

As Nike says, “Just do it!” Whether training for an athletic event, preparing for a presentation, or writing a term paper, we are limited only by our time, drive, and determination.

Start early and do a little each day to reap the greatest rewards while reducing the stress of moving. No all-nighters, just do what can be done in the time frame established. The key is to prioritize and focus on the tasks with the highest return on investment (ROI).

Done right, the seller’s only job after listing is to keep the home in showing condition—and field offers, of course.

Not sure where to start, what to do, or how much to invest? Consider hiring a professional home stager. A home staging consultation will quickly give you clarity on what is necessary to properly prepare your home for its debut.



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Struggling with a do-it-yourself (DIY) interior decorating project? Staging your home to sell and don't know where to begin? If your home decorating or staging project could benefit from a professional's touch, I'm ready to collaborate with you to get the absolute best results! I'm Susan Atwell and since 2005 I've been staging and decorating homes in collaboration with home owners like you.

### Staging to Sell or Designing to Dwell

Get my top DIY tips here: [StageEveryListing.com](http://StageEveryListing.com)



Fresh paint and light staging with rental furniture and accessories make this space appear large, bright, and easy to decorate. It is money well spent to help buyers connect emotionally to a home. **Homes sell faster when furnished, and this one takes just one day to receive a full-price offer.**

This is what home staging is all about—small changes that make a big impact. An awkward and undefined space, in a fully furnished home, is quickly transformed into a cozy living room. **This home has multiple offers within 7 days of listing and sells for 27k over asking price.**

Assisting home owners with major remodels—or any design project—we'll guide you through the process of creating the rooms of your dreams. **For this project, Susan assists the home owner from the very beginning, guaranteeing not just a beautiful and bright kitchen but a very functional and efficient one as well.**

## Staging To Sell

If you want to sell your home fast and for top dollar, you need to give it that “wow” factor...so it stands out online and hooks the interest of potential buyers. But how can you do that? How can you give your home what it needs to make a stunning first impression—both online and in person—without spending a fortune or turning your home into a sterile showroom? How can you use what you already have to accentuate your home’s most attractive features and downplay the rest? And how can you get it all done without becoming an overly stressed-out mess? Easy. Work with me. For more than 10 years, I’ve been collaborating with homeowners, showing them how to best stage their home to get a quick sale for a phenomenal price in any housing market.

**Here’s how we can work together to get your home sold fast and for a phenomenal price!**

1. **Call me and we’ll discuss your unique project.** I want to hear about your home, your goals, and your timeline. I’ll answer your questions regarding the process and give you time and investment estimates.
2. **Set up an appointment for an initial “working” consultation.** We start with a “working” consultation in your home. These consultations generally last 2 to 4 hours.
3. **Let’s get ‘er done!** The second I walk into your home, I start evaluating it through the critical eye of a potential home buyer. I’ll propose design and decorating modifications to accentuate the best features of every room and begin to transform your living space before your eyes. You’ll be a part of the process so that you can approve every change, learn my secrets, and be able to make smart decisions when decorating any space or home.

**Following the consultation, you’ll know exactly what’s needed to prepare your home for sale, and you can decide what work you’d like to do yourself and what you’d like me to handle.**

**Call Susan at 914.525.0454 for a free phone consultation.**

Visit [AtWellStagedHome.com](http://AtWellStagedHome.com) to learn more.

## Designing to Dwell

**With a Little Help from a Pro...**

Have you ever struggled with a do-it-yourself (DIY) interior decorating project? You thought it would be simple and straightforward, but somehow, once you dove in, you felt as if you were in over your head. Or you weren’t sure of your choices. And once it was done, it didn’t quite turn out the way you’d hoped it would. As a home stager, my favorite thing to do is to collaborate with homeowners who want to do their own redecorating but do so with the design guidance of an expert. It’s so much easier and a lot more fun when you have a decorating partner to bounce ideas off of, go shopping with, or help you hire the perfect contractor. And the result? Beautiful.

**Here’s how we can work together to make your home as beautiful and functional as possible.**

We start with a 2-hour “working” consultation in your home during which we can review any projects in process or already completed and discuss the changes you want to make. I’ll also use this time to get clear on your likes and dislikes and your long-term vision for your home.

This initial consultation is a total “brain dump” of ideas, not only for a specific space but for all the spaces in your home. Each room is interconnected and understanding how they work together, as well as how you live in your home, is key.

**My goal is to help as much (or as little) as needed and give you the courage to move forward with your ideas, make cost-effective decisions, and create beautiful, functional spaces that are ideal for you.**

One of my favorite sayings is, “Fail to plan, plan to fail.” By consulting with a professional before you spend a dime on decorating, you will be able to make smart decisions that **will work for you now, in the future, and, of course, whenever you decide to sell.**