

# the HOME FRONT

Your Weekly Putnam & Westchester Real Estate Roundup

## Staging Makes a World of Difference in Selling Your Home



By Bill Primavera

With home values down and inventory up, the best way to jump ahead in catching the buyer's attention in any price range is through the dynamic medium of home staging. A good home staging can do more than a price reduction in capturing an offer to purchase.

For some, the term staging is relatively new, but the concept is not. Home sellers have always tried to make their homes look their best when they go on the market. But most times it's better to have another set of eyes to make needed improvements. Buyers want to see the features of a home and how they could fit into it without being distracted or turned off by what's in it or how it's decorated.

Professional home stagers are not decorators, as some think. Rather, they prepare a home for sale by going with the flow that is already in place but eliminating clutter, editing and arranging furniture and helping with curb appeal.

Home sellers might be apprehensive about hiring stagers, wondering what their credentials are in proclaiming themselves professional and, in fact, there are really no national qualifying standards.

"Today, it's true that anyone can be a home stager because there's no real certification," said Susan Atwell, president of A Well Staged Home in Somers. "But when home sellers make a decision to hire me, they can go through the process of getting referrals for the work I've done, talk to me on the phone and they can check my Web site that has my portfolio,

testimonials and examples of my work."

From her earliest memory, Atwell said she had a natural inclination toward organization, leading to her chosen career.

"I had done a lot of IT work, but what I really loved was organizing space. Even when I was in grade school, I organized my locker so that everything was accessible," she recalled. "I started helping friends and family organize their living space as a part-time hobby and that evolved into a full-time profession when I found that's all I wanted to do."

Atwell said that her company's mission is to increase resale value and expedite the selling process. "Selling a home is more than just a number's game. There's a creative aspect to selling a home that goes beyond list price."

That creative process involves a number of basic rules. If there is too much furniture, diminishing the size of a room, some of it must go. Decorative accessories usually must be thinned out in a way that gives appropriate focus to the room itself. And strong, personal decorative motifs must be neutralized so that the buyer can best see the room's features, rather than what's been done.

"Normally 95 percent of wallpaper must be replaced by a neutral paint color because both wallpaper pattern and strong

paint colors are too personality-specific for most home buyers to get past," Atwell explained.

The most important proviso of good staging is that a home must be scrupulously clean. "It doesn't matter as much if materials and appliances aren't updated if everything is as clean as it can be," she said. "If prospective buyers feel that something isn't to their personal taste or really needs

updating, they are more willing to make an offer if the place is ready to move into. Then, they can change things to their own preferences later."

Sometimes staging requires adding rather than eliminating. An empty house can seem forlorn, and a stager might recommend renting certain

pieces of furniture and décor to warm the place up.

The cost for staging is relatively modest, especially when the seller factors in the prospect of securing a higher offer. Atwell charges \$350 for a two-hour consultation and includes everything from brightening the living space to removing clutter and organizing belongings in a visually appealing way. From that point on, clients can be on their own or Atwell can continue managing the project or give referrals for other suppliers to accomplish the needed work.

"It's important for the public to know

that staging isn't just for the rich and famous," she said. "A client with a modest home might invest as little as \$500 for a staging and changing a few items and they might get thousands back with a better price for their home."

Two applications for staging are somewhat inventive. Some realtors offer a free staging consultation to every homeowner who lists with her or him (myself included). Sometimes staging is offered as an incentive to buyers of new properties. Atwell works with The Retreat, a new age-restricted development in Carmel built by Pulte Homes. Pulte offers buyers as much as a \$1,000 staging credit to be used to help sell their current home.

Atwell said the best time to hire a stager is as soon as the decision is made to sell. "It's never too late to hire a stager, but it's better to do it before you place a home on the market," she said. "Most times people call me when they're desperate. Their home might have been on the market for months and it's not moving, but they get to the point where they must move on with their lives.

"It gives me a great deal of satisfaction when I can take a home that's been lingering on the market and get the homeowner a good offer just days after doing a staging."

We all know that all the world's a stage—including our homes.

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