7 Tips for Staging Your Home

1. Start with a Clean Slate

Before you can worry about where to place furniture and which wall hanging should go where, each room in your home must be spotless. Do a thorough cleaning right down to the nitpicky details like wiping down light switch covers. Deep clean and deodorize carpets and window coverings.

2. Stow Away Your Clutter

It's harder for buyers to picture themselves in your home when they're looking at your family photos, collectibles, and knickknacks. Pack up all your personal decorations. However, don't make spaces like mantles and coffee and end tables barren. Leave three items of varying heights on each surface, suggests Barb Schwarz of Staged Homes in Concord, Pa. For example, place a lamp, a small plant, and a book on an end table.

3. Scale Back on Your Furniture

When a room is packed with furniture, it looks smaller, which will make buyers think your home is less valuable than it is. Make sure buyers appreciate the size of each room by removing one or two pieces of furniture. If you have an eat-in dining area, using a small table and chair set makes the area seem bigger.

4. Rethink Your Furniture Placement

Highlight the flow of your rooms by arranging the furniture to guide buyers from one room to another. In each room, create a focal point on the farthest wall from the doorway and arrange the other pieces of furniture in a triangle around the focal point, advises Schwarz. In the bedroom, the bed should be the focal point. In the living room, it may be the fireplace, and your couch and sofa can form the triangle in front of it.

5. Add Color to Brighten Your Rooms

Brush on a fresh coat of warm, neutral-color paint in each room. Ask your real estate agent for help choosing the right shade. Then accessorize. Adding a vibrant afghan, throw, or accent pillows for the couch will jazz up a muted living room, as will a healthy plant or a bright vase on your mantle. High-wattage bulbs in your light fixtures will also brighten up rooms and basements.

6. Set the Scene

Lay logs in the fireplace, and set your dining room table with dishes and a centerpiece of fresh fruit or flowers. Create other vignettes throughout the home — such as a chess game in progress — to help buyers envision living there. Replace heavy curtains with sheer ones that let in more light.

Make your bathrooms feel luxurious by adding a new shower curtain, towels, and fancy guest soaps (after you put all your personal toiletry items are out of sight). Judiciously add subtle potpourri, scented candles, or boil water with a bit of vanilla mixed in. If you have pets, clean bedding frequently and spray an odor remover before each showing.

7. Make the Entrance Grand

Mow your lawn and trim your hedges, and turn on the sprinklers for 30 minutes before showings to make your lawn sparkle. If flowers or plants don't surround your home's entrance, add a pot of bright flowers. Top it all off by buying a new doormat and adding a seasonal wreath to your front door.

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