

## A Closer Look

### Staging Experts can make home into star for buyers

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For the Journal-Constitution

If your listing agent offers staging as part of the marketing plan for your home, consider yourself lucky. Staging is a cost-effective way to edge out the competition in the current buyer's market.

Staging makes a home look larger, brighter and well-maintained, plays up the highlights and makes it easier for potential buyers to imagine living there. The cost to the seller ranges from elbow grease to thousands of dollars, but always beats dropping the price.

"Any house is going to move faster than it would if it wasn't staged," says Beth Carscallen, president of Classic Home Presentation. Her company has staged hundreds of homes for more than 150 agents in the Atlanta area.

Television shows such as HGTV's "Designed to Sell" and A&E's "Sell This House!" have made the stager's job easier. Viewers are now familiar with basic principles of staging, such as neutralizing and editing.

Carscallen offers these hints for sellers working with stagers:

**Find out what to expect before the staging:** "Everybody does it differently." Carscallen explains the reasons and process thoroughly beforehand. She spends two to three hours on the property, going through each room and critiquing the yards and exterior. She rearranges furniture and accessories, gathers items to be packed and makes detailed to-do lists. By the next business day, the agent and the seller receive a detailed plan.



The right photo shows how a bathroom can be spruced up through staging. The paint is a rich neutral color; the shower curtain is a simple, light-colored cloth, open halfway to give the impression of more space; and the one large decorative item adds punch.



**Thick skin is in:** Begin thinking of your house not as your home but as a product. You don't have to accept disrespectful treatment but do keep the bottom line in mind. She tells the seller in advance, "I am coming into your home as a prospective buyer. I'm going to tell you the things that you need to do, and I'm not going to hold back."

**Do the math:** If you're skeptical that the work will save you money, "Get estimates and then ask your agent, 'If my home stays on the market for 30 days, and you want to lower the asking price, how much are we going to have to lower it?' I guarantee you the cost of making those improvements is much less."

Carscallen has these tips for those eager to get started before the stager calls:

**Scope out storage space:** You'll probably have to pack away more than you think. For example, at least two-thirds of items on shelves should go. Use empty drawers as much as possible. Set aside a corner of your basement or garage. Even better, use a neighbor's basement. Don't plan to keep a portable storage unit in your driveway. "That's a real turnoff."

**Streamline:** Free up space "so buyers can visualize putting things in it." Pack away most small items but keep out nice home magazines, hardback books, and large decorative items. The stager may accessorize with these.

**Go neutral, but not "builder beige":** An experienced stager can suggest paint colors with some richness

**Send Fluffy on vacation:** Believe friends who tell you they can smell the dog or the cat's litter box. Relocating pets "always works to your advantage."

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