

How Martha Stewart Changed My Life

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Staging with Michael Taylor

By Mary Cashiola

Putting your home on the market? He'll "edit" your interiors.

PROFESSIONAL STAGER MICHAEL TAYLOR admits he couldn't sell his Central Gardens home the way it is now. Despite the rich red walls, stained glass cabinetry, and tasteful furnishings, people would focus on his vintage box collection.

"If someone walked in here, they would say, (continued on p. 84)

"THEY'RE LOOKING AT ALL THE THINGS IN THE HOUSE. YOU'RE NOT TRYING TO SELL YOUR THINGS; YOU'RE TRYING TO SELL THE HOUSE."



Michael Taylor — on a mission to banish unnecessary accessories.

Photographs by Brad Jones

Staging with Michael Taylor

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'Oh, look at the pretty boxes.' They're looking at all the things in the house. You're not trying to sell your *things*; you're trying to sell the house."

Staging is the up-and-coming concept of rearranging furniture, banishing clutter, and adding accents to a home to make it more attractive to potential buyers. Started in the early '70s, staging has become so popular in California that some real estate agents won't even show a home that hasn't been through the process. HGTV recently began airing *Designed to Sell*, in which couples use \$2,000 to turn their "tired house into a show piece."

Taylor has been involved in home redesign — using what people already own in his interiors — for about 10 years and only started

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staging after being accredited in the practice a year ago. "You make it so they can mentally see themselves moving in," says Taylor. "People will say, 'Oh, well, the walls are purple. I can't live here.' They can't see past things that can be fixed."

So Taylor tries to make sure potential buyers never see those things in the first place. He likens his visit to an inspection: he asks the homeowners to take him through their home room-by-room and point out what they like about it. Usually the features that they show him — skylights, hardwood floors, a striking view, for instance — are the ones he tries to emphasize.

With the homeowners' help, of course. He often encounters resistance from those who hire him.

"With staging, you have to be very careful. You have to tell the homeowner if the carpet is worn out. The potential buyer will see that and reduce the price about three times what it costs to replace it," says Taylor. He under-

stands that people might not want to repaint their walls right before they move out or take down all their children's awards. But the staging credo is very clear: the way you live in your home and the way a house is staged are two very different things.

Recently he staged a home that had been on the market for seven months. It was priced right, but for some reason, it just wasn't moving. Three weeks later, they're expecting an offer. Taylor says one of the main things he did was very simple: he removed a number of photographs of the family's only child from the walls and shelves.

"One real estate agent said a woman she took through the home asked, 'How many kids does this family have?' " says Taylor. "The woman spent 20 minutes looking at the pictures."

At another home, he found, among other

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things, a soup tureen on a shelf in the laundry room. He's not opposed to that in a real-world sense, but it's a no-no for homes on the market. If buyers see a messy closet, he says they'll think the house has no storage space. Taylor tries to make sure all the closets are neat and orderly.

"I tell them, 'Let's pack all this up. You're moving anyway. Why don't you pack some stuff early? You're not going to be here with the real estate agent when they show your house. Something could get stolen,'" he says.

Perhaps one of Taylor's greatest skills is tact. He has encountered houses hidden by overgrown shrubs ("If they can't see it, you can't sell it") and indoor odors from pets and smoking products ("If we can smell it, you can't sell it") and always uses a gentle touch while remembering the end goal.

"I don't want to offend the person. It's their home, but we're trying to make it someone else's."

For resources, see page 87.