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## Staging Homes: Turning Your Home into the Buyer's Home

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PHOTOGRAPHER ANDREA LUDWIG

Your neighbor down the street's house sold in a bidding war three days after it hit the market, and your house has been sitting on the market for five months without so much as an offer.

The neighborhood is desirable, the home is in good shape, you routinely receive compliments on the décor, and the price is comparable to other homes in your area, so what's the deal?

Maybe the problem is that your home looks too much like your home, and house hunters cannot connect in a way that makes them feel like it could be their home.

Enter a home staging professional. Home staging is a proven marketing technique of preparing a home for sale to present the home in its best possible condition for the buyer's eye, so that it sells at the highest possible price in the shortest amount of time.

Home stagers are nationally certified in a rigorous training program and usually come from a design or real estate background. The technique has been around on the coasts and in large metropolitan areas for years, but it just recently made its way to the mid-South.

"The technique of staging is so different than decorating or redesign," says Michael Taylor, owner of Michael Taylor Integrated Room Design and currently Memphis' only certi-

fied home stager. "In design, you take a person's personal taste and make their house a home. The way you live in a home and the way you sell your house are two different things. When you put it on the market, it becomes a commodity. In staging, you're taking the home and turning it back into a house that will appeal to the masses."

Some basic rules of staging are to minimize furniture and decorations, remove personal photos and effects, and make the home appear as spacious as possible. Create an upscale atmosphere in the house. Use natural light where possible, and present the rooms in the house in the way they're meant to be used.

"While there are many techniques in staging, the most important are the three C's," Taylor says. "Make sure the house is spotlessly clean both inside and out. Next, make sure the house is clutter-free, and that includes closets. You do not want to have jam-packed closets and storage areas because that tells the homebuyer that your home lacks storage space." The last C is for color. "Depending on where your home is, it's usually best to show a house in neutral color schemes accented with colorful accessories."

The idea is to see past the seller's belongings and be able to mentally move in and make it the buyer's home.

"A lot of people can't see past paint, clutter, and dirt," Taylor says. "The house will sell faster and for more money when you leave the house to speak for itself."

And there are statistics to back that up. Staged homes sell an average of 17 days faster than non-staged homes, and the average difference in selling price over list price for staged homes is 6.3 percent versus 1.6 percent for non-staged homes, according to Village Voice March 2002 in homes ranging from \$229,000 to \$4.8 million.

"Studies also show that a potential buyer will lower their offering price three times as much as it would cost to fix an item in the house," Taylor says.

"The most important thing when selling a home is to have it completely ready before you put it on the market," Taylor says. Most realtors say you have about 20 seconds to make a first impression, and in most cases, that's the only impression you get to make. ●



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