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What should I do to get my house ready?

By Elaine McArdle, Globe Correspondent

Paint the kitchen mint green. It sounded like terrible advice to David and Kate Rizzo, who were selling their Marblehead home and wanted professional guidance on how to showcase it. "It is not a color we would have selected ourselves," admitted David Rizzo, who preferred the kitchen's white walls.

Still, the couple put their faith in Maureen Reddy, a designer with DaVinci Designer Gallery in Winthrop, which specializes in "staging" homes for resale. The bold color would highlight the floor tile and oak cabinets, insisted Reddy, who also suggested they rearrange furniture in the family room and turn a bay window into a sitting area with pillows.

The Rizzos' home sold in four days for the asking price of \$789,000, and the couple is convinced that Reddy's work was the key to their success. "It showcased our house in the best possible light and presented it in a way that allowed people to envision themselves living there," said David Rizzo. "The bottom line is: We are thrilled with the process and the results."

Popular on the West Coast, staging homes for resale is growing in popularity in Greater Boston. Even in a sellers' market, homeowners and realtors are seeing the benefits of having a design professional suggest the best way to highlight a home's features.

Reddy charges \$350 to go through a home, take photographs, and write a report with recommendations for changes that homeowners can either make themselves or hire her to do. Some brokers include staging at no extra cost to real estate clients.

The basic philosophy of staging is simple: Emphasize the house itself instead of the personal belongings inside it. Let potential buyers focus on the architectural features -- the "bones" -- so they can imagine it as their own. "The benefit is that you know you've done all you can to showcase the home in the best manner, and you don't second-guess yourself later," said the Rizzos' broker, Michael Cannuscio. "You've made the best effort in creating an environment buyers will find attractive."