

Home Staging

CREATING ADDED VALUE TO YOUR SERVICE BY CAMILLA MCLAUGHLIN

With roots in Los Angeles and San Francisco, the practice of bringing in experts to prepare a home for sale might be California's latest contribution to real estate. No matter what they are called—home stagers, design enhancers, home facilitators—these design professionals bring a practiced eye, neutral palette of colors and plain talk for sellers reluctant to make changes.

The benefit for Realtors? Staged homes usually sell faster, often for more money. Having a stager deliver negatives regarding the property means less strain on the Realtor-client relationship. Also, including a consultation with a home stager as part of a listing creates added value for an agent's services. Most importantly, issues with homes that languish on the market can often be quickly identified and overcome.

Take a home in Charlestown that had been viewed by 128 potential buyers. When no offers were forthcoming, the owners called Suzanne Koenig, owner of Bella Figura in Winchester. In less than a week, the cluttered spaces dominated by a bright red and green sofa had morphed into an upscale urban retreat. The home was relisted, received three offers after the open house and sold for \$19,000 over the asking price.

Some properties might simply require de-cluttering and repositioning furniture while others call for a more substantial make over. Moving Solutions, of Natick, works with sellers on all facets of the move. Says co-owner Lynn Falwell, a former Wellesley Realtor, "The staging challenge for us isn't just a matter of decorating. It is a matter of opening up spaces and creating visually the suggestion that rooms that currently exist can be used in multiple ways."

Although there are organizations that train and certify home stagers, there is no one standard for this profession.

Typically, stagers charge a fee in the \$200 to \$400 range for an initial consultation and written report, which includes suggestions for either the stager or owner to implement.

During the initial visit, Maureen Reddy, owner of Davinci Design Gallery in Winthrop, moves furniture and pictures. Her menu of recommendations gives sellers control of the process. "They decide what and how much they want to do," she says.

Maura Bang, an agent with Century 21 Mario Real Estate in East Boston was so impressed with the results of Reddy's work that she now includes a complementary staging consultation with many new listings, particularly higher end properties. Since both the inside and outside of the property are addressed, Bang says, staging "increases curb appeal" and "gives the buyer an indication of what they can do with the property." Plus, she adds, "It is easier to have a third party tell the seller that the shag rug has to go."

Using a stager can be a win-win situation. Says Falwell, "the broker gets the listing sooner and gets it in better condition. We make their job easier. They can be out selling while we are getting the house ready to be sold." Lastly, staging brings the assurance that the seller comes away from the closing without leaving any money on the table. 🏠

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WHICH IMPROVEMENTS RESULT IN THE GREATEST RETURN?

HomeGain surveyed approximately 2,000 real estate agents in 46 states nationwide. Listed below are the top five improvements that agents recommend sellers do to reap the most return on investment.

Project	Typical Cost	Price Increase	Return on Investment
Lighten & brighten	\$86-\$110	\$768-\$935	769%
Clean & de-clutter home	\$305-\$339	\$2,093-\$2,378	594%
Landscape & trim yard	\$432-\$506	\$1,594-\$1,839	266%
Stage a home for sale	\$812-\$1,089	\$2,275-\$2,841	169%
Update kitchen & baths	\$1,546-\$2,120	\$3,823-\$4,885	138%