

Get over yourself

Stage your home so buyers see themselves – not you – in your for-sale house

By Patricia Bathurst

Your home may be a perfect expression of wonderful you and your matchless style, but if you're ready to move on, you need to come to grips with one important idea.



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"It's designed for your life so it's essential that it's all about you," said Meegan Berner. "Selling means you need to open a door and help other people see themselves in your home."

Berner, an interior designer and Accredited Staging Professional (ASP) based in Phoenix, is one of a cadre of professionals who help homeowners and real estate agents set the stage for home resales.

According to a survey of 400 home sales across the U.S. and

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Equitable Sotheby

Potential buyers decide within seconds whether they are interested in a home. This staged home in Arcadia has none of the owner's personal effects, and it shows like a model home.

Where to start

Staging, according to real estate professionals Meegan Berner and Susie Danesi, is always a better option than lowering the price of a home that's lingered on the market.

"It helps buyers put themselves into the home and becomes a real assist," Danesi said.

Berner said to take the emotion out of selling a home. "If you were to walk into any retail store and it was cluttered, dirty, dark, had an overbearing odor and was disorganized and just basically didn't appeal to your taste, would you buy anything there?"

Berner offers tips to get sellers started:

First impressions count.

Make certain the home's exterior is pristine, with updated landscaping and live flowers or plants. Be sure the front door opens to a welcoming space, and use a product like Pure Ayer to neutralize pet or cooking odors. Add a plug-in air freshener in linen or vanilla scent.

Create welcoming spaces with fresh color.

Too much furniture makes rooms look small and difficult to walk through. Brighten spaces with punches of color in throw pillows, accessories and art.

Accessorize like a pro.

First, declutter and depersonalize. If something is smaller than a basketball, pack it up (and not in a closet!). Put all your accessories in one space, and pull out those you want to use. Arrange accessories in groups of three, small to large. Avoid art that's ethnic, religious or sports-oriented – you need a wide appeal.

Open the view.

Bright open spaces sell faster, so open the blinds or drapes to show off your newly freshened yard or great views. Make sure all the lights are bright enough and turn them on when you show the house.

Depersonalize the space.

Remove your personal photos, collections, kids' toys and pet dishes, toys and beds. The buyer needs to focus on the home itself, not your interests or lifestyle.

Pack it now, rather than later.

You want buyers to be able to see their Christmas decorations, seasonal clothing and keepsakes – not yours – in your closets and storage spaces. Prior to listing your home is the best time to sort through your stuff and decide what to keep, sell or throw away. Have a garage sale; take loads to the resale shops, and consider renting a storage garage.

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Equitable Sotheby's

De-personalizing is hard. Experts say if the home is for sale, now is the time to let it go.

Let buyers see themselves

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Canada done by the Association of Staging Professionals last year, staged homes sold in an average of just over a month, while non-staged homes took at least 160 days.

Quick decisions

Potential buyers typically take less than 15 seconds to decide whether they're interested in a home.

"You don't want the buyer to be distracted wondering about you," said staging professional Donna Jamison, of Wild About Staging in Surprise. "You're moving. Pack up those NASCAR plates or that angel collection."

Two problems come into play in showing a home for sale, these professionals said. First, sellers see the home décor and furnishings they love. But too often, potential buyers can't see beyond that décor to see themselves in the home.

"You need to let potential buyers see the home, the views from the windows, the wonderful space," Berner said. "They can't do that if they're focusing on your belongings."

Realtor Susie Danesi, of Equitable-Sotheby International Realty in Phoenix, agreed. "Staging helps define the space for people," she said. "You really need to help the buyer envision living in the house."

Size matters

"Our experience has been that smaller homes will sell if they're vacant, but we always try to

stage those that are at a higher price," Danesi said. "Last year, for instance, we had a golf-course property that had been listed with a different agent for more than a year. It was vacant and around 5,000 square feet. We had it staged – and it sold in a month."

Staging a home can be as emotional as the sale itself, Danesi said.

Clean sweep

"Everyone knows they need to de-clutter," She said. "But some of the de-personalizing is hard. If the house has been on the market a while, though, people just want to get it done."

Looking at your beloved home through the eyes of a beholder is rough. Berner suggested that one way to begin is with defining the space.

"It's best to revert to the original use of a room," she said. "If you've been using the dining room as an office, move that arrangement to a guest bedroom or other area of the house."

"The way you live in a home and staging it to sell are two different things," Jamison said. "The whole point is to sell the house."

"We're all attached to our homes," Berner said. "But your home is on the market and it's time to move on."

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