

THE ART & SCIENCE OF HOME STAGING

WRITTEN & PHOTOS PROVIDED BY CANDICE MUTSCHLER
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Home staging is not merely decorating; it's decorating's clever cousin, the charismatic one who can read the room, woo the guests, and get the deal done.

TV has popularized home staging with a plethora of shows that reveal incredible (albeit unrealistic) transformations. While it makes for great entertainment, this is not staging for the real world.

A typical homeowner may not remodel their kitchen in order to sell, or replace all their flooring, fixtures, and furniture. Some may paint or buy new bedding, while others won't put any money into the home at all, believing it will sell regardless. And that may be true, but how much money are they leaving on the table?



A single aqua vase draws eyes to the center of this room before circling to notice luxe fixtures and finishes.

This high-contrast room is perfectly balanced. Notice, windows are left bare for a more spacious feel and to showcase the view.



HOME STAGING DEFINED

Home staging is a combination of design, psychology, neuroscience, and art, all conspiring to emotionally connect a buyer to the property. It helps the seller showcase their home in the best possible light and allows the buyer to imagine living there. A staged and "neutralized" home opens the door to possibilities for buyers to make it their own.

Of course, decorating is a part of the process, but it's the conscious manipulation of decorative elements that makes staging so powerful. For example, how can we use furnishings and décor to intentionally move buyers through the space? Where do we want them to linger? How can we highlight a view, or make a room appear bigger or brighter? What will make buyers notice the fixed assets—the home's permanent features—rather than the décor?

Done successfully, staging not only elevates how a home looks in photos, but it also changes how it feels in person. The energy, mood, and excitement of a potential "housing match" evoke emotional and physiological

responses that linger, like a lover's first kiss, long after they've departed. Get it right and you're on your way to a mutually satisfying offer.

STAGING IS NOT JUST FOR VACANT HOMES OR THE LUXURY MARKET

Most people are familiar with vacant home staging, where an empty house is filled with new furniture and accessories to help buyers visualize the potential. This type of staging is design-focused because the home is a blank slate. Luxurious décor injects personality and promotes a certain lifestyle that buyers can embrace. Vacant staging is so effective that it has become the norm in many markets.

But given the volume of properties that are lived-in until sold, occupied home staging is emerging as the new "it service" for practical reasons. It is affordable (stagers work primarily with the homeowners' belongings). And if a seller wants to DIY, the pre-listing consultation prepares them to do just that with a room-by-room action plan to follow.



White is always a good choice for bedding. Repeating accent colors used elsewhere in the home creates continuity.



The goal is serene and clean in the bathroom, with simple accents that signify peace and well-being

Entry-level homes benefit from staging as much as luxury properties as it ensures a more competitive listing. A conscientious home stager will meet the seller where they are, finding cost-effective solutions for those on a budget.

Zillow.com lists "failing to prep and stage" as one of the nine mistakes to avoid when selling a home. Now that home staging has become mainstream, it's easier than ever to find a professional to help get even the most challenging properties photo-ready for a fast and lucrative sale.

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