

Home staging has hit Charlotte

Industry moves east,
helps sell homes

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Home sellers know: Curb appeal can get prospective buyers in the door. Once inside, does the outdated décor, the hand-me-down furniture, the piled-high clutter – perhaps even the odor – incite an urge to run right back out the door?

Popular TV shows such as HGTV's "Designed to Sell" and A&E's "Sell This

leave few or no issues that buyers can use as leverage to negotiate a lower price. Raised velvet wallpaper in the living room and a trio of pet kennels in the laundry room are viewed by stagers as certain candidates for removal.

The staging concept capitalizes on a home's strengths and minimizes or removes features or décor that can detract from universal appeal. In occupied homes that are on the market, stagers may reposition furniture and accessories, replace them with more mainstream choices or remove them altogether, depending on whether the goal is to improve traffic flow, update a look, make small rooms appear larger or create a cozier feel in a cavernous space. In vacant homes, they'll rent furniture and accessories or supply them from their own inven-

Photos: Domaine Staging



A luminous example of home staging in Charlotte reclaimed a dining room from ancillary and inelegant use and reinstated it to its intended stature as a somewhat formal and yet warm, welcoming gathering place for meals.



House" have brought the staging concept into most households, but now Charlotteans have more than two dozen certified home-staging professionals in the area that they can actually call into their homes

to help spruce up the place and pump up its salability.

Oust the ceramic pig collection

A professional home stager should

tory because studies have shown that buyers are more attracted to a look that reflects livability. Other staging efforts may include interior and exterior paint-

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ing, pulling up carpet, removing clutter and revising the landscape.

Stagers also aim to depersonalize a space so that potential buyers can more easily envision themselves and their belongings inside. That ceramic pig collection, or even an excess of family photos, may be temporarily relegated to storage so the house shows better. The investment generally means less time on the market; staged homes sell 40 percent faster, on average, according to a BusinessWeek article. They command a higher selling price too – an average 5 percent increase in sale price over comparable unstaged homes, although individual results may be much more significant than that.

No longer a West Coast novelty

Costs can amount to \$10,000 in bigger markets and in million-dollar homes, but staging is no longer just for high-end homeowners. “For most markets, \$1,500 to \$3,000 is the norm,” said Marcyne Touchton, who operates Domaine Staging from her University City location. For homeowners interested in doing much of the work themselves, home stagers conduct a consultation and then give the clients a punch list of tasks they

should tackle. This scaled-down service runs just a few hundred dollars.

Touchton described staging as a West Coast real estate phenomenon slowly making its way to the East Coast. “Nationally, only about one in five properties on the market is staged, though that number is rising as the concept spreads,” she said. “Nearly every home is staged before selling in Seattle or San Francisco. Staging also is taking off in cities like New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Atlanta, Nashville, Houston, Dallas and Chicago,” she continued.

Add Charlotte to the list. Formed less than two years ago, the local chapter of the International Association of Home Staging Professionals now has 25 members with a growing number of staged homes to add to their portfolios.

Touchton recently staged a 1,500-square-foot home in southeast Charlotte.

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Sometimes home stagers rearrange a homeowner's existing furniture; sometimes they supplement or replace that furniture with items from a rental outlet or the stagers' own inventory. Either way, the goal is to declutter, depersonalize, and punch up each room's appeal. In this Charlotte staging project, the dramatic improvement is not lost on potential buyers.



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She said the homeowners, like most people, were using all their rooms as storage. "They had endless projects – five boxes of brand-new fan kits that they'd never put up – all throughout the house. They had large TVs in every room, laundry piled up on their beds." With Touchton's guidance, they eliminated much of their clutter and accessorized. "People comment, 'That's not the same house,'" said Touchton. Even the husband, a bit skeptical at first, said he hadn't realized how stressful it was to live in a cluttered home. The house goes on the market this week.

Aside from preparing homes for quick and profitable sale, stagers often do seasonal staging and staging to live. For seasonal staging, a professional can help clients determine the best seating, serving and sleeping arrangements for holiday meals and visitors, for example. Staging to live can mean transforming a garage into a space to accommodate a new home-based business or transforming a home for streamlined living.

Giving back

Once a year, the local chapter of stagers observes World Staging Day on

the third Saturday in September as an opportunity to give back to the community. Typical projects include staging a nonprofit office for efficiency or staging to help improve delivery of services in a homeless or women's shelter or a juvenile hall. This past September, Charlotte's chapter of stagers focused their efforts on an after-school child care classroom affiliated with the YWCA. After the staging, the Charlotte IAHP members threw a pizza party for the teacher and students in their like-new classroom. □

Want to know more?

Visit www.stagedhomes.com for more information and statistics about the home-staging industry. To find a stager in Charlotte, visit the local chapter's Web site, www.northcarolinachapter.iahsp.com. For those interested in staging their own home, Touchton recommends "Home Staging: The Winning Way to Sell Your House for More Money" by Barb Schwarz, a pioneer in the industry. Learn more about Touchton and her services at www.domainestaging.com.

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Bobby Cochran/CW photo

Teachers and students enjoy a pizza party in their like-new classroom on World Staging Day.

