

22 Critical Staging Tips to Guarantee Your Selling Success

1. Attitude

Starting anything with the right attitude is key and it's even more important when staging your home for successful selling. Before you do anything, stop thinking of your house as a HOME and think about it as an investment. It's likely the most important investment you have and you want to get the largest possible return on it to support your move on to bigger and better things, right?

2. Better photos are everything!

Today's potential buyers are first searching online for their next property so you need the best possible pictures available on the Internet. That "first look" often determines whether the prospects will want to visit your property or not. Your photos have to impress and generate an emotional desire from the potential buyer to see the property "live". Without pictures that stand out from the others, you are probably missing out on dozens, if not hundreds of potential buyers.

3. Boost curb appeal.

Curb appeal (or, lack of thereof) can deter a visitor from wanting to go in at all. Have you ever driven by a house for sale and disliking it from the outside you leave without even giving it a chance? Avoid it happening to you:

- Power wash siding and walkways.
- Hang new easy-to-read house numbers or polish the existing set.
- Plant blooming flowers and fresh greenery.
- Keep the lawn cut, watered and reseed or add fresh sod as needed. Rake the leaves in the fall and shovel the snow in winter.
- Walk around the house and ensure that the path and the perimeter of the house are clear. No foreign objects such as toys, bicycles, garbage cans or unused building materials should be visible.
- Washing your front windows is essential but doing them all is a great idea. One-time window cleaning services can be reasonably priced too.
- Repaint or stain the porch floor as needed.
- Scrub and wash the front porch, the door as well as the trim, the mailbox and polish the street number.
- Put all small items away from the patio/deck, so as not to distract the eye from the available space.

4. Welcome visitors with an inviting porch.

Even if you have only a tiny stoop, make it say “Welcome Home” with a clean doormat, blooming potted plants and — if you have room — one or two pieces of neat porch furniture. Keep your porch lights on in the evenings in case potential buyers drive by. Illuminating the front walk with solar lights is a nice extra touch, especially if you’ll be showing the house during the evening.

5. A great smell makes a house memorable.

Baking cookies has become too cliché, but buy a room spray with a fragrance you love and spray the house *sparingly* before each showing. Staging your home can be easy and inexpensive, especially if you focus on the small details. Then you can sit back and relax, confident that your house will impress potential buyers.

6. Get your house sparkling clean and fix items that need it.

From shining floors and gleaming windows to clean counters and scrubbed grout, every surface should sparkle. This is the easiest (well, maybe not *easiest*, but certainly the cheapest) way to help your home put its best foot forward. You may want to hire pros to do some of the really tough stuff, especially if you have a large house. Don't skimp — this step is key!

Fixing small but visible things is important. Chipped paint, loose or missing tiles, a broken door handle or a closet door that doesn't quite close properly — all the little things you never had time to fix — unfortunately, they can be a BIG turnoff for a potential buyer. After all, they probably don't want to deal with the extra repairs while moving, unpacking and settling in. In addition, it gives people reason to wonder whether some other, more important things have been left uncared for in the house. No torn screens, cracked plaster or burnt out pot lights. You may have gotten used to seeing them, so tour your house with a critical eye (or ask someone else to), and repair anything that needs it

As far as the Home Staging tips go, this item is usually first on the list and it may seem obvious but you'd be surprised at how many people neglect basic cleaning and repairs. If you're unable to do it yourself, hire a professional. I recommend walk through each room and making two lists — one list for cleaning and the other for fixing. Pay particular attention to the entrance, as it's the first space the visitors will see, and then the kitchen and bathrooms next. Don't forget the walls and the ceilings (cobwebs!), windows, and appliances. If you have carpets and they haven't been shampooed in the last year, wash them. Remember, if nothing else, your home should be spotless for the shows.

7. Depersonalize and clear away all clutter.

If you are serious about staging your home, all clutter must go, end of story. It's not easy, and it sometimes requires temporarily utilizing offsite storage (or a nice relative's garage), but it is well worth the trouble. Clean and clear surfaces, floors, cupboards and closets = more space in the eyes of potential buyers, so purge anything unnecessary or unsightly. You need to make your house appealing to a wide range of prospects — a young family with kids, a DINK (double income, no kids) couple, single person, retired couple, etc... Consequently, you need to make the house as neutral as possible by taking down and storing any religious or political symbols, diplomas, abundant collections and knick

knacks as well as **all family photos** – they distract from what you are selling – a **property** and not a **home**. An additional, often overlooked benefit for some people is that this process of ‘depersonalizing’ your home will help you to get emotionally detached from it and prepare you for sale and eventual move! De-cluttering is a big task and it may feel daunting. But, you’ll have to do it before you move anyway, so start now and you will feel better. De-cluttering is one of the most valuable Home Staging tips of all, so don’t cut corners or ignore it.

But it's my style! Guess what? It may not be the style of those seeking to buy a house in your neighbourhood. So even if you have an awesome vintage-chic look going on, rein it in for the sake of appealing to a larger number of people. Your personal style will come back into play in your *new* home.

Here’s a few things to focus on to make de-personalizing and de-cluttering easier:

- *Please* no piles on the floor, anywhere.
- Take everything off all horizontal surfaces and then, put only a few items back. No knick knacks, photo displays, large collections, magazines, bottles/jars, small appliances and anything else that might distract buyers eyes from the beautiful features of your property. Remember to clean the kitchen and bathroom countertops off as well. Take it all off and put it away. The extra space you’ll need for your essentials to be put away out of site becomes easy once you’ve properly de-cluttered and emptied those spaces of all things that aren’t absolutely necessary.
- Organize book shelves by ensuring all your books and magazines are upright and in order.
- Every closet has to be cleaned out, maybe more than once, until they all look spacious and well organized. Anywhere from a third empty space up to two thirds empty space in all your closets will help buyers see the potential space and feel much better about your home’s available storage space.
- Even the garage has to be de-cluttered and emptied out as much as possible – buyers attentively consider how much space is available in your home and the garage too, so show them.
- Rearrange your furniture. In the living room, symmetrical arrangements usually work well. Pull your furniture off the walls and use pairs (of sofas, chairs, lamps) to create an inviting conversation area. Too much furniture impedes good traffic flow in a house and makes it look smaller, so the golden rule is “Less is more”! The same applies to art and accessories – when in doubt, take them down and keep only one or two items per wall.

8. Strike a balance between clean and lived-in.

Yes, I know I just said to get rid of all your clutter but now it's time to judiciously bring back a few elements that will really make your home appealing. Think vases of cut flowers, a basket of fresh farmer's market produce on the kitchen counter or a bowl of lemons beside the sink.

9. Refresh

Make sure all your furniture, light fixtures and accessories look contemporary. Most of the time, you can achieve the “fresh” look without spending a lot. For example, changing the counter top and/or cabinet handles in the kitchen can make a huge difference without having to remodel it. Changing light fixtures or faucets can also make quite an impact on the look and feel of a room. Simple things

such as a new bed ensemble, a few decorative pillows and two nice table lamps will transform a bedroom.

10. Let buyers imaginations do all the cooking in the Kitchen

Counters should be clear and clutter-free. A single bowl or vase holding cooking utensils is okay, but that's about it. Store all small appliances in cupboards. If your kitchen doesn't have a backsplash then a new one is only a weekend job that doesn't cost a lot and that any reasonably handy person can tackle cost. Get some gorgeous tiles (since it's such a small area it usually doesn't cost too much) or consider glass mosaics, mirror tile, or plain tile interspersed with a few fancy ones.

11. Give your Bathroom a gorgeous makeover for cheap

Now that the counters are clear and the space is sparkling, consider these few small (and economical) but impactful makeover suggestions. An ugly builder's mirror can be replaced with a pretty framed mirror for under \$100 and makes a big difference. For a little more, you can buy an antique or higher-end model and help potential buyers fall in love with the bathroom. Switch out the lighting for a nice chandelier or some attractive new sconces and your bathroom will look as if it's been renovated. One of the biggest and most economical things you can do is try a pedestal sink to maximize space. If you have a small bathroom but a cabinet-style sink, you may want to swap it out for a more attractive pedestal version. Your bathroom will appear instantly bigger.

12. Style your dining room table.

The dining room is often a blind spot when decorating/staging the home. Between dinners, a large dining table can look bare and uninviting, so styling it up with visitors in mind can substantially increase the appeal. An oversized arrangement can look too stiff and formal, so instead, try lining up a series of smaller vessels down the center of the table.

13. Light it up

A bright house is a great house. So, open all the blinds/curtains and make sure there is sufficient light in every room, add fixtures, stand up or table lamps – you can't have too much light! One of Tavazoe's favourite low-cost, high-return investments is chandeliers. "People think you have to spend a fortune on lighting, but you can go to any big box store and get beautiful ones for, at most, a few hundred dollars," she says. "Many houses don't have enough lighting to begin with, so if you're having the electrician in anyway, have more overhead fixtures installed -- or at least buy some great lamps."

14. Paint! And choose sophisticated neutral colors.

FIND THE NOTES YOU LOST CHRIS!! Now is not the time to experiment with that "fun"-looking lime green. But that doesn't mean go all white either. Rich mid-tone neutrals like mocha and "greige" create a sophisticated backdrop that makes everything look more pulled together.

15. Create a gender-neutral master bedroom.

Appeal to everyone with a clean, tailored master bedroom, free of personal items and clutter. You can't go wrong with clean, crisp linens, tasteful artwork and a blanket folded at the foot of the bed.

16. Open those closets!

Visitors will peek inside your closets. If they are already open it can make rooms look bigger and help people see and remember more available storage. Closet space can be a make-it-or-break-it selling point for buyers, so show yours off to their full advantage by giving excess stuff the heave-ho (to off-site storage). Again, this is really important, so even if you need to store a few boxes elsewhere, it's worth it. Aim to have 20 to 30 percent open space in each closet to give the impression of spaciousness.

17. Clean up toys.

Yes there will be families with children looking at your home, but just because they have kids too doesn't mean seeing toys strewn everywhere will sell them on the place. When people are house hunting, they are imagining a fresh start. Show them that in this house, it is possible to have a beautifully organized kid's room, and they might be swayed.

18. Use "extra" rooms wisely.

If you've been using a spare bedroom as a dumping ground for odd pieces of furniture and boxes of junk, it's time to clean it up. Each room should have a clearly defined purpose, so think about what potential buyers might like to see here. An office? A guest room? Another kids' room? Whether you buy inexpensive furnishings, rent them, or borrow some from friends, making a real room out of a junk room will have a big payoff.

19. Use only perfect personal accents.

Especially in the bathroom, it is important that anything left out for visitors to see is pristine. If you have a beautiful plush white bathrobe, hanging it on a decorative hook on the door can be an attractive accent — but if your robe is more of the nubby, faded-blue floral variety, you should hide it away. Look at every detail with a visitor's eye — bars of soap should be fresh and clean, towels spotless, the garbage always emptied (you get the idea).

20. Beware pet odors.

Really, this can be a big one! If you have pets, get all rugs steam cleaned and be extra vigilant about vacuuming and washing surfaces. Also be sure to keep any 'extra-loved' pet toys and doggie bones hidden when tours are scheduled.

21. Create a lifestyle people are looking for.

Generally speaking, you want to play up what your neighborhood or area is known for. Have a house in a quiet, grassy suburb? Hanging a hammock in your backyard and a bench swing on your porch could be the perfect touch.

22. Stage the outdoors too.

Even if your condo has only a teensy postage stamp-size balcony, play it up with a cute café table and chairs, a cheerful tablecloth and even a little tray of dishes or a vase of flowers. When buyers look at this scene, they won't be thinking "small," they will be thinking, "What a charming spot to have breakfast!"