

Open house tips from 'The Stagers'

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Series shows you how to get the best price for your home



If you were in the market for a new home – a sprawling bungalow, chic condo or even a majestic Tudor-style house – would you want to pay top dollar if it looked like a frat boy's deserted party pad?

No way, dude. That's where HGTV's new series *The Stagers* comes in. Giving an inside peek into one of the biggest growing aspects of the real estate industry, each half-hour episode follows professional stagers as they prep homes to sell quickly for the best price possible.

The stager – either high-energy Matthew Finlason or mother-daughter duo Maureen Powers and Bridget Savereux – must consult with the homeowner, create a design plan, find furniture and artwork, and execute the vision for the first open house. Oh yeah, and there are only five days and a tight budget with which to do it.

What's the pay off? "The National Association of Realtors have a statistic out that staged homes sell 49 per cent faster and they sell for 7 to 11 percent more than non-staged homes," says Finlason.

"We're not there to interior design for anyone's personal taste – and a lot of clients believe that's what it is. It gets very personal and dramatic. Staging is about sometimes working with your third and fourth choices and making it look spectacular."

To pull it all off, the stagers have an indispensable resource at hand: DEKORA.

"It's this wonderland of sofas, area rugs, coffee tables, lamps, vases – everything that can make up a home. You see us running around arm-wrestling for area rugs with other designers who are also on staging jobs," says Finlason with a laugh.

"There's a lot of attitude. We're not teaching anyone to match a cushion to a wall. We're pulling people's hair out for area rugs to sell real estate. It's pretty wild."

Here are his top tips for planning an open house.

1. Curb appeal

Trim hedges, cut lawn, remove debris, power wash where needed, weed flower beds, plant fresh flowers, buy a new door mat. Buyers usually drive by a home before deciding whether to request a showing or attend an open house. You want them to fall in love with your home from the street.

2. Cleanliness

Think "white glove" clean and this includes the exterior areas such as walkways and patios that might need power washing. Sweep away cobwebs! Clean in areas you may not expect buyers to see, such as under sinks, in cupboards, appliances and the garage. Also, pay particular attention to odours and ensure your home smells fresh – you may consider consulting a "neutral nose" by having a friend come by for a smell test.

3. Declutter

Few things deter buyers more than a cluttered home. Ensure prospective buyers view your home and not your excess things. This includes closets and cupboards as buyers will often look in these areas.

4. De-personalize

Prospective buyers want to envision themselves living in your home. Excessive personal items like photos, collections, personal awards, religious items can potentially make it difficult for buyers to see past your life and may deter a sale. Taking "yourself" out of the house makes rooms for others to come in.

5. Colours

Neutralize strong colours for the broadest appeal. Re-paint if needed.

6. Light

Open blinds and draperies, turn on lights and ensure there is sufficient lighting throughout the home. Renew the look of the room by replacing old or dated light fixtures.

7. Maintenance

Squeaky doors, chipped or smudged paint, broken fixtures and fittings should all be fixed.

8. Furnishings

Consider consulting with a professional staging company for design direction and rental furnishings to create an inviting home with broad appeal to a wide range of buyers.

9. Pets and children

During an open house send the pets and kids to the park and put the toys, litter box and kibble dishes away.

10. Plan ahead

Selling your home is stressful. Give yourself sufficient time to best showcase your home and to meet your open house date.

The Stagers airs Tuesdays at 10 p.m. ET/7 and 11 p.m. PT on HGTV.

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