



How to Home Stage Like a Pro

Household clutter, outdated décor and unpleasant odors are just a few homebuyer turnoffs. When home staging is done right, it reduces a home's flaws and maximizes its features. Read on for expert tips to make your clients' homes buyer-friendly and primed to sell.

Declutter. There's a reason this is the most important rule of home staging: It makes the rooms look bigger, creates a sense of calm and order, and helps potential buyers envision the home filled with their own belongings. Banishing clutter means getting rid of both the big things (awkward pieces of furniture) and small things (clothes, toys).

Remember, viewers will be opening every door and touring your entire house, so don't just move the clutter into the garage or a spare bedroom. If your clients can't part with these items but don't have the extra space for them, they could rent a storage unit short term.

Fill an empty house. Of course, a vacant house can be a disadvantage too. Many national furniture rental companies, such as [Cort](#) and [Rent-A-Center](#), offer several rental options that range from furnishing an entire home to just a room. Homeowners might be reluctant to take on another monthly payment, but if it means their house will move quicker, they might reconsider. An added plus is that most companies don't require contracts. Most also deliver and set up the furniture.

Think small. Staging a home doesn't have to be an expensive project. Small changes go a long way. Have clients consider these easy upgrades to give rooms a refreshed look:

- Switch out old lampshades with modern ones
- Get rid of dark drapes and install simple wood blinds—they'll let in more light
- Add a fresh coat of paint in a neutral color
- Replace old or dated light fixtures, light switch plates, and outlet covers
- Buy new decorative pillow covers—or sew them yourself
- Hang new artwork
- Buy new ceiling fans—or spray paint the housing and/or replace the blades of the current ones

And don't forget the little repairs. Running toilets, pipe leaks and door squeaks should be fixed before buyers see the home. Chipped or smudged paint should be touched up.

Clean thoroughly. The details matter. Dust the blinds and furniture; clean the counters, sinks and windows; sweep and mop the floors; remove ceiling fan cobwebs. When every inch of the house is spotless, buyers will take notice. If your clients don't have the time or energy to embark on a complete house cleaning, they can hire a professional cleaning service, such as [Merry Maids](#).*

Don't overthink it. You don't have to be particularly creative to add special touches to a room. Put out large bowls of colorful fruit like oranges, apples and bananas. Arrange hardcover books on coffee tables and cookbooks on the kitchen counter. Fill baskets with decorative towels, scented soaps and moisturizers, and place them in the bathrooms.

Take a tip from the pros and keep decorative objects restricted to groups of one, three, or five. The idea is that items arranged in odd numbers are more pleasing and memorable than pairings of even numbers. Within each

grouping, create a hierarchy of different heights, textures or shapes. [HGTV.com's accessories section](#) has photo galleries of art, lamps, pillows and other items to help with decorating ideas and information.

Be scent-conscious. Your clients might love the smell of sandalwood or vanilla, but don't assume potential buyers have the same preferences. The house should smell fresh—not like air freshener. The key is not to add aroma, but to get rid of offensive or stale odors.

How do you do this? Tackle the source(s). This may mean cleaning out the fridge, taking out the trash, doing the laundry, cleaning the garbage disposal, or changing the kitty litter. Opening windows and vents can help. If the basement smells musty, run a dehumidifier—just make sure to remove it before the showing, since a dehumidifier in the basement can signal water damage to some buyers. Dry-cleaning kits like Dryel can get rid of laundry odors. At \$9.95, [Citrus Magic Solid Air Freshener](#) is an inexpensive yet effective method for eliminating food and general household smells.

Call a professional. Your client may prefer to have a professional handle home staging. A directory of Accredited Staging Professionals® can be found at [StagedHomes.com](#). Friends and colleagues might also have recommendations based on home stagers they've worked with.

*Merry Maids, like American Home Shield, is a ServiceMaster brand.

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