



In the Chester kitchen at top, Patti Stern removed distracting wallpaper, substituted a simpler table and chairs and added a rug to soften the eating area. In a Glastonbury family room, she chose calm, neutral tones, with bright pillows to add pops of color.

## SELLING IT

# STAGE YOUR HOUSE

A Pro Can Provide Buyer's Viewpoint

By NANCY SCHOEFTLER

**Y**es, you want your home to be devoid of personality. That is, if you're trying to sell it. "I still can't believe how stubborn people are about this," says Patti Stern, principal and lead home stager at PJ & Company Staging and Interior Decorating in Cheshire. "Your home is your castle, but the way real estate has gone today is so different than even two years ago."

Stern is talking about home staging, something she has done professionally for a decade. Staging gets your house ready to sell—and protects your asking price. Enlisting a professional's help can provide an invaluable third, critical eye.

"People who are selling still don't recognize that buyers—especially the younger buyer—want move-in condition."

And, she adds, the way homes are sold today is online. "If your picture doesn't look appealing, if it doesn't look modern, they're going to click right off."



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER

At top, a living room needs to look serene, not cluttered, says Stern, who brought order to this Cheshire home. Above, vacant homes take longer to sell, says Stern, who added neutral furnishings and simple accessories to this Hartford dining room.

## What Stern Hears — A Lot

*"But I had a decorator do my home."*

Stern says decorating is "all about you, it's very personal. Staging is the opposite... When you're selling less is more. When you're decorating, more is more."

*"But that carpet, it was so expensive, and we've hardly walked on it."*

If the carpet is a lovely but dated shade of jade green, buyers will immediately start mentally knocking down the price.

*"The cabinets are still in great shape."*

But if they're oak, that's "deadly right now," Stern says. "The good news about oak is that it can be

painted, but I really recommend hiring a professional painter."

*"It just needs some minor repairs."*

Stern says even minor issues will distract a prospective buyer.

*"I'm going to give them a credit to fix the driveway... or to do new landscaping."*

Stern says curb appeal is crucial to making a good first impression. "The buyers haven't even made an offer and the first thing they see is a cracked driveway, overgrown bushes. The curb appeal is awful. Buyers don't entertain the idea of a credit anymore. Credits don't work like they used to."

*"Why should I paint now? Why should I change?"*

Stern says the new generation of buyers frequently doesn't have the time to spend on painting, and fresh paint in "modern Pottery Barn colors" — warm taupes and grays — can really help a house move. "It's all about what a buyer wants."

*"I can't afford that. It's only for more expensive homes."* A variation on that one is: "It's going to cost a fortune, and they're just going to bring in flowers and bake cookies."

Stern says staging is tax deductible "and it always costs less than the first price reduction of a home."

## Standing Out

Stern says the more you stand out from the competition, the faster you'll sell your home. She recommends that a seller start with a staging consultation, which runs

## Staging costs less than a price reduction.

about \$250 for a small home to about \$400 for a 5,000-square-foot home.

A stager should walk the entire property inside and out, checking things you'd think would be obvious — does the doorbell work? — and making preliminary recommendations on what to do — good, better and best. Should the hardwood floor be refinished, or does it just need some area rugs?

A proposal and budget are developed, typically based on the size of the home and how many rooms “we have to touch.” In a three- to four-bedroom home, a seller might want to stage the main living areas — the living room, dining room, kitchen, family room and perhaps the master bedroom.

Most of all, a seller shouldn't take the process personally. See your house through a buyer's eyes — not

as a home full of your idiosyncratic personality but as a house that is a product that as many people as possible can envision living in.

And consider this: A survey by the Association of Staging Professionals found that 95 percent of professionally staged homes sold on average in 11 days, versus 90 days on average for homes that weren't staged to sell.

### Quick Check

**Outside:** How's the mailbox? Does the front door need touch-up paint? Powerwash the patio or deck. Trim shrubs.

**Inside:** Should some furniture be rearranged or removed to make it easier for prospective buyers to walk through the house?

**Kitchen:** Should the oldest appliance

be replaced? Are counters mostly clear?

**Cabinets:** White continues to be the overwhelming choice.

**Wallpaper:** Almost always a negative.

**Knobs and hinges:** An easy update.

**Closets:** Create as much empty storage space as possible.

**Knickknacks and collectibles:** Out of sight.

**Cleanliness:** Declutter. “Q-Tip clean,” no cobwebs in the chandeliers or light fixtures. ♦

*For more information: PJ & Company Staging and Interior Decorating, [pjstagingdecorating.com](http://pjstagingdecorating.com); 203-640-3762. National Association of Realtors' *Styled Staged & Sold* blog, [styledstagedsold.blogspot.com](http://styledstagedsold.blogspot.com).*