

RAISE THE CURTAIN: HOME STAGING TO LIVE

H&D: How is staging to sell different from staging to live?

Staging to sell is designed to make a home into a house—meaning, the goal is to “neutralize” the décor so that it appeals to the broadest number of buyers. When your home is on the market, it’s a product to be sold, competing against other like products. Staging to live is more like interior design—you’re staging the home to honor the tastes of the homeowner, but you want to give them a fresh, new look, using basically the same furnishings. Staging to sell is like the show *Designed to Sell*. Staging to live is more like *Design Remix*.

In staging to sell, we Accredited Staging Professionals (ASP™) follow our training and arrange the furniture to show off the features of the house. For example, we try never to have prospective buyers walk into the back of a piece of furniture—it’s not welcoming. But in staging to live, that may be the precise arrangement that allows a home owner to enjoy the fireplace, with the sofa back to the room’s entry.

Another example is in the window coverings. Less is more in staging to sell. But with staging to live, rather than remove window coverings (so more light enters the room) we may add valences or sheers to help give more personality or privacy to a room.

H&D: What common decorating mistakes do people make that you can help with?

It’s not so much that people make “mistakes.” It’s more that they have a difficult time stepping back and seeing their interior design/decor with “new eyes.” One of the most fun parts of staging to live is to “shop the home.” This is where I go through the house and shop for furniture, artwork, accessories that can be used in other ways, in other rooms. By putting that lamp from the bedroom and that table from the loft in the living room, I can create a whole new look, without spending any money (except for my time, of course!)

H&D: How does someone know their home is not staged well to live?

Again, it’s not so much a matter of right or wrong. It’s all about personal preference. Maybe you recently downsized your home, but not your furnishings. So you feel crowded, overwhelmed with “stuff.” I can help you sort through what goes and what stays, and arrange what stays into a more pleasing living space. You want to consider your lifestyle: do you have parties and need circulation space? Do you have intimate gatherings and need conversational seating areas? Do you need to leave room to walk from the kitchen to the Great Room? In the case of staging to live, it’s all about just that—how the client lives.

H&D: Do you simply arrange/re-arrange furniture accents? Or do you recommend painting, remodeling, construction, etc.?

In general, I will do as much or as little as the client desires. Much of the decision depends on budget. A simple and relatively inexpensive way to change a room is with paint. But because color is such an emotional decision, choosing a paint color is highly subjective. I work closely with my clients and ask them what colors they really love, and go from there.

If budget allows, and I see the need or opportunity to improve the space by moving walls, creating built-ins, or replacing or resurfacing counters or flooring, I will certainly suggest it and help the homeowner find reliable contractors.

H&D: What services do you provide as a home stager?

Various stagers offer various services. Since I'm an ASP™ and have a degree in design, I am capable of offering a broad range of services. My business, RE:STYLE Limited Liability Company, will: restyle your home for living or for resale; style vacant homes (a very necessary service since most buyers have a difficult time visualizing what to do in an empty space); work with seniors who are downsizing from homes into condos, senior living or assisted living facilities; holiday styling or restyling.

Actually, my greatest service is to help people to move on to the next phase of their lives, if they are selling a home; or, to live more comfortably, in more pleasing surroundings if they're staying in their home.

H&D: What are the advantages of having your home staged to live?

It's like getting a whole new space in a very short space of time! You feel better because you're in a fresh, different, exciting and more livable environment—everyday becomes more pleasant. The positive effect is exacerbated if you're a visual person like I am. If your former arrangement was less than ideal, you may even become more efficient.

H&D: Statistics?

StagedHomes.com has statistics on staging to sell; however, how do you measure personal satisfaction and pleasure in living—that's what staging to live is really all about. I do have a quote from one of my stage-to-live clients, Carol Marsh: "The living room now has a softer, more sophisticated style. It's no longer a room we walk through but one we relax in."

H&D: What is the typical process you follow when a client calls?

I first interview the homeowner(s). I want to know what they would like to get from the staging (or restyling, as I call it). Do they want better flow? A fresh look? More

extensive changes? I find out what their budget is, and then tailor my offering to that. I give them a bid, based on their input. Often I will offer them a menu of services from which they can pick and choose.

From a design perspective, I go through their entire home, even if all I'm restyling is one room. I want to get a sense of their personal style, their tastes, color preferences, etc. At this time, I'm also noting interesting furniture pieces and accessories that I may want to use in a different way.

Usually I view each room from its doorway, to see what kind of first impression it makes. I then look at the features of the home. If this was staging to sell, that would be basically all I needed to start with. But since this is about how the owners live, I need to take into consideration what they do, how many children and/or pets they have, what their hobbies are, etc.

H&D: Do you have a team of people? How many people does it take?

At the risk of sounding cheeky, my reply is: it depends. Very often the homeowners are involved in the process—they are the movers, along with me. If that's not the case, I do have people to assist with moving smaller items. Actually, with the proper equipment, two people can move some pretty big pieces of furniture safely. I personally draw the line at anything with lots of glass—this requires a professional. Again, I have resources for this to help out the homeowners. I will act as a project manager and arrange for any auxiliary assistance if the job is very large or outside my scope. My goal is to make the whole process of restyling as much fun as possible, and as easy as possible for the homeowner—"turnkey" comes to mind.

Two things determine how many people are needed to complete a job—the size of the job and the desired timeframe for the job. One room usually takes 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 hours, working alone or even with the homeowner. I recently worked with two other ASP™s and we staged two bedrooms and a hall in four hours, including packing up a lot of "clutter." Please note—stagers are not usually packers or cleaners. We will pack things away if requested, but you're paying a premium and we don't guarantee our work like a professional mover will. And though we do clean up any messes we may make, we don't really "clean." Again, we'll help you get professional assistance with this.

H&D: How long does a job take?

How long it takes to restyle a whole house for living depends—that word again!—on the size and the amount of "stuff" in the rooms. It might take as long as a week with a 2-person team restyling a 2500-3500 square foot house. Then if there's any painting or changing out of cabinets, flooring, counters—add that to the time. I was part of a group of ten ASP™s from the Great lakes Chapter of the International Association of Home Staging Professionals (IAHSP) who staged a home for living for a segment on

the news. By working in teams, we were able to stage the living room, dining room, master bedroom and bath, kitchen and breakfast nook, a child's bedroom and a guest bedroom, all in about four hours! However, this house looked terrific already, and in fact it was a challenge to see how we could improve it—which we did, much to the homeowners' delight. But as you can see, if you count “woman hours”, it took us forty hours or one week to achieve our goal.

Back to the question of a team of people—I have affiliated myself with a number of individuals, mostly fellow ASP™s, who I can call on as the occasion arises. And I work with them, as well, when they need help. I also am creating alliances with other professionals (painters, landscapers, carpenters, etc.) whom I feel confident in and will recommend to my clients.

H&D: Are there any tips you can give people on how they can improve their livability?

Be off the wall—and I mean that literally! Furniture doesn't have to be lined up against the walls in your home. Push out your couch, your bed—be daring and try things on an angle. Oops! I just gave you one my biggest secrets! Study the design magazines and analyze what the designers do—you'll get lots of ideas. (I do!)

H&D: Any other insights?

I would like to go on the record as noting that I believe shows like Designed to Sell (which I love, by the way!) do a disservice to stagers in the sense that they say all of what they do can be accomplished for \$2000. Well, that's material costs only. If you added up all the time of all those talented professionals, you'd have a much larger bill indeed! Not that staging, or restyling, is expensive. When you consider that it's almost always well below the amount that a homeowner typically reduces their price by, or compare it to the cost a REALTOR® pays for one ad, you'll see it for the cost-effective bargain it is! And staging to live compares quite favorably to the costs (and sometimes the hassles) associated with hiring a true interior designer. There, I feel better now.

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