



# Lights, Staging, Sell!

By Charles Burbank

Homeowners looking to sell their properties unfortunately are doing so in one of the worst markets in recent memory. While prices seem to have stabilized somewhat, it is still a buyer's market and there are many properties to choose from.

To give their homes a competitive edge, some people are using the services of home stagers. To learn more about this marketing technique, Savvy discussed it with Angela Gagauf, President of NJ Home Staging and Redesign of Montville (201.317.9072, [www.njhomestagingandredesign.com](http://www.njhomestagingandredesign.com)). She is a member of the Real Estate Staging Association (RESA) and has earned the RESA-PRO® designation.

## What are the advantages of home staging?

According to the report "Home-Gain 2009," home staging typically shows a 586 percent return

on investment. Another study by RESA showed that in 2009 staged homes sold on average in 40.5 days as opposed to 263 days for homes that were not staged. These are significant differences.

In my own community of Longview at Montville between August and December 2009, only one townhouse unit sold for more than the asking price and did so in a single weekend. I staged that home with a budget that was far below the additional money realized in the sale. You can

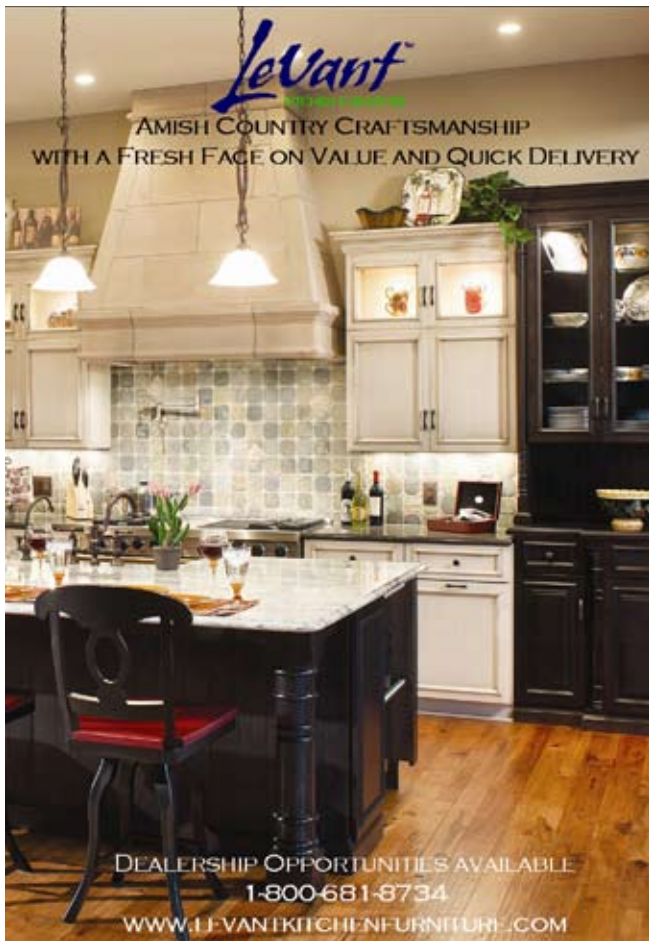
imagine how relieved the owners were to sell so quickly. No one wants to deal with a home languishing on the market for months on end.

## What is the working philosophy of home staging?

When used effectively, home staging is a marketing tool that creates an environment attractive to a wide range of buyers. Part of



All photos courtesy of Angela Gagauf



## Loveladies Bayfront – Long Beach Island



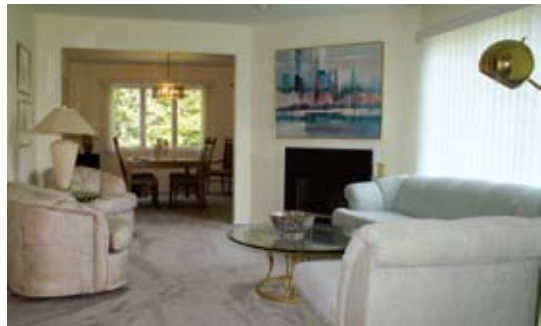
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Before (left) and after (above)

what I do is transform the home so that it no longer reflects the individual tastes of the seller, but is more of a clean canvas the buyer can envision making their own.

Staging always keeps the target audience in mind while accentuating the positive features of the home and reducing any negatives. It creates an ambiance and lifestyle that the target buyer can relate to, greatly enhancing the sales potential.

**If a house is in relatively good condition and is clean and neat, would it not move just as easily if it were not staged?**

Undeniably, ensuring rooms are spotless and uncluttered is a must for selling any home. But in most cases cleaning is not enough. A key aspect of staging is the “de-personalization” of the home. This is basically the elimination of décor and furnishings that are specific to the tastes of the homeowner. Again, I try to create an environment that the buyer can see being appropriate to their style and tastes.

Sellers need to realize that while a home may be in pristine condition, if the rooms are dated, overcrowded, hide the best features, or are too geared to a particular taste, it may still sit on the market for too long and sell at a lower price. I recently consulted with a woman with a house in basically good shape who couldn't afford a high degree of staging. Once we de-cluttered, painted over some areas that were in need of simple repair and did some rearranging, the house sold in four days at the full asking price.

Owners need to keep in mind that no matter how well the home looks, it is imperative that the property be priced realistically and

competitively, reflecting both its condition and how it compares to other homes in the area.

**What is the cost of staging?  
How does it work?**

Because home staging is NOT interior design, it is a nominal cost, but based on the statistics I mentioned, a great investment. Depending on what the home needs, it can cost between \$350 and \$3,000. I typically charge between \$250 and \$300 for a comprehensive two-hour consultation, by the end of which the homeowner has a clear staging strategy they can retain me to complete or they can do on their own.

Staging can be finished in anywhere from a day to several weeks, depending on the condition of the home. I provide clients with a list of the contractors who can handle any update they can't do on their own.

If a home is vacant, which is often the case, I provide rental furniture and accessories at a cost that is in addition to the staging fee. Of course, this fee varies based on the amount and quality of the furniture and accessories that need to be rented. Studies show that furnished homes sell much more quickly than those that are empty. That is something to keep in mind for builders or owners who have already moved out of their properties.

**What is the difference between home staging and interior redesigning?**

Staging is for those strictly interested in selling their homes, while interior redesign services are provided to homeowners not interested in selling their homes. Redesign is typically accomplished by utilizing the owner's current furniture, décor and accessories. This is much less costly than a complete interior design project that could include the buying of all new furniture and accessories, repainting or installing new carpeting and flooring.

**What is typically your most challenging staging client?**

An older home that hasn't been updated or thoroughly cleaned for years. One that also is overflowing with furniture and "tons of stuff." In many cases I help the owner see

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underneath all the layers to rediscover a charming home that will appeal to as many buyers as possible. Equally challenging is a homeowner who resists "depersonalizing" their home. I have to convince them that their home has to appeal to a potential buyer and not their own tastes any longer.

**What is the typical range of home prices you work in?**

I've staged homes as low as \$300,000 and as high as \$1,700,000, but most of the homes fall between \$625,000 and \$900,000. The bottom line is that no matter the price point, any home can benefit from home staging. 🏠