

LUXURY LIVING

Professional staging is vital marketing tool to close sale

By Gretchen A. Peck

Staging a home is a tried and true marketing strategy that ensures a property shows its best side and expressly appeals to serious buyers.

"Empty homes are really the best candidates for staging," Leslie McElwreath said. She's a Realtor with Sotheby's International Realty's Greenwich office. "A staged home allows the prospective buyer to experience what living in the home will be like. They can sit at the kitchen table and imagine their life in the house. It is a compelling selling tool."

Patte Nusbaum, also with Sotheby's, attributes some of her marketing and sales success to leveraging staging.

"I sold my last staged listing this spring," Nusbaum recalled. "It was new construction at 12 Ridgebrook Road in central Greenwich. The staging was very important, because the house had an open floor plan, with a great room that opened to the dining room, which was open to the kitchen. Buyers had a hard time envisioning the best use of the space."

Clever staging resolved that problem and helped the home sell this past spring.

Greenwich has a great number of design and staging experts that the brokerages around town keep busy. The challenge that Realtors and their clients most often face isn't who to hire, but whether or not to stage at all. Price point of a property is obviously important when determining to make the investment, but there are other considerations, as well.

"What are the goals of the seller," Nusbaum asked. "Are they motivated to sell quickly? ... Will the staging be likely to get the house sold sooner and for a higher price?"

Staging is not without its perils and pitfalls. It's why hiring reputable professionals matters.

"Going 'too safe' with lighting can ... be a pitfall," Patrick Eagan said. Eagan is a Realtor with Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices



Sotheby's International Realty

Above: Successfully sold this spring, 12 Ridgebrook Road was newly constructed and required staging to help potential buyers envision how they would use the open floor plan. Below: Created by renowned architect Romaldo Giugola, the 17-room modern home at 25 Windrose Way is on 2.09 acres and is listed for \$6.995 million. Geoffrey Peter Walsky of Iconic Modern Home staged the property.

"It is amazing how much smoother a showing can be when the buyer sees what the house might live or entertain like."

Patrick Eagan, Realtor with Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices New England Properties

New England Properties in Greenwich.

"Lighting that a buyer will rip out immediately is not worth it," Eagan advised. "A gorgeous light — which can be found for not a lot of money — can help to sell a house, particularly if a room has a higher ceiling. An unimaginative light can actually detract from a home."

But an un-staged empty space can be even more detrimental.

"An un-staged vacant home can look cold, uninviting and actually look smaller than it is," Eagan



said. "It may also read more dated or less finished — and therefore worth less — even though the furnishings do not stay with the house."

Staging a home allows a buyer to see an example of a good layout, especially when rooms are vast or not straightforward, he said.

"Today's open-concept layouts

can be tricky to make into smaller grouping and to give each area purpose," Eagan said. "Staging allows the buyer to see what the areas should be used for. It is amazing how much smoother a showing can be when the buyer sees what the house might live or entertain like."

Eagan suggested a few tips for

staging well: Be open to a new design style. Err on the side of subtlety when choosing themes. Modern, traditional or coastal styles can be overdone and contrived, for example. Of course, it's also important to style the home without adding clutter to it.

Choosing the right pro

Staging professionals work in different ways, but it's not unusual for listing Realtors and the selling clients to be part of the conversation about how to stage the home.

"Customarily, both the seller and the Realtor meet with the stager, especially in new construction, where the builder has an idea of what the rooms should look like," Nusbaum said.

"The final decisions should be made by the stager, with the Realtor's input, based on their experience in the area and with the current market conditions," she added.

Many of Greenwich's brokers and agents have a bullpen of staging professionals with whom they've worked and can recommend to their clients. Obviously, the staging designer's experience and past projects are important credentials to scrutinize, and it's also important to ask about how the pro prefers to work — whether his or her time is flexible and whether input from the homeowner is welcome.

Price matters, too, Nusbaum said, pointing out there is typically an initial charge and possibly some incremental monthly fees, especially if the contractual agreement about the length of the staging period expires and needs to be renewed.

"Hopefully, the property is sold before that, and there will be no need for an extension," she said.

"A good stager will have a vast inventory of beautiful furnishings that will work in both large and small homes," McElwreath said. "They work quickly and have a large enough staff to manage several projects at the same time. When the homeowner is ready, the stager must be able to complete the work."