

## **Staged to Sell: A West Coast marketing philosophy is finally catching on in the state**

**Authored by:** Jennifer S. Reber - **Published in:** Reading Eagle  
**Created on:** 2006-02-16

According to Internet real estate news source, [www.realtytimes.com](http://www.realtytimes.com), the once red-hot housing demands have begun cooling and the trend is toward a buyer's market. They described a buyer's market as one in which there are too many homes on the market for the number of buyers. This environment is considered undesirable for sellers because homes tend to take longer to sell, the site explained, and in turn home prices begin to fall. Adding to the momentum, the spring selling season is in full swing and the inventory of listed homes continues to climb.

With competition like this, it may take a lot more than just cleaning the house and putting a sign in the yard to attract the attention of potential buyers. Sellers need to do as much as possible to make their home stand out from the rest. This is where first impressions come in. That age-old adage that you never have a second chance to make a first impression could never be so true. As a matter of fact, according to [www.realtytimes.com](http://www.realtytimes.com), first impression is the key factor in selling your home today.



With that in mind, a relatively new concept in the home selling process is starting to catch on here in the Northeast. It is called staging and it's about preparing your house to sell. The purpose of staging is a faster sale in a sluggish market and a higher contract price in any market. According to Kate Hart, an Accredited Staging Professional and certified trainer, staging has been used on the West Coast for more than 30 years, where stagers work in conjunction with Realtors. She added, 90 percent of homes there are staged as part of the standard home marketing process.

But don't get confused in thinking that staging is simply decorating - it's marketing. The goal of a stager is to view a home through a potential buyer's eyes and enhance that all-important first impression. Hart explained, this can mean offering advice in a consultation form about what the homeowner can do on their own to make the home more presentable, or offering staging services that can include rearranging and accessorizing. She said Stagers can also help those in vacant homes with furniture and accessory rental to allow the buyer to envision themselves in the home.

"When you get ready to place a home on the market for sale it becomes a product, and just like any product on the shelves at your local store it has features and benefits, pluses and minuses, and there are other products to compete with," said Barb Schwarz, CEO and founder of StagedHomes.com, who federally registered the trademark "Stage" in 1990. Accredited Staging Professional is also a trademark of StagedHomes.com.

"To gain an edge in your marketplace you must be priced right and look better than the competition," she added.

When Re/Max of Reading Realtors Melissa Brandmier and Stephanie Adam first heard of staging, they thought it would be an excellent tool to help their clients get top dollar for their homes. They attended a three-day course offered by StagedHomes.com and became Accredited Staging Professionals.

“We thought it would give our clients a competitive edge over the homes across the street,” said Adams.

Brandmier explained one concept she learned in the class was that the way you live in your home and the way you sell your house are two different things.

The two staged fellow Re/Max Realtor, Douglas B. Simonton’s home that was recently put on the market. Simonton said since he was a relatively new agent, he thought it would be interesting to see what they could do with his house. Brandmier and Adam rearranged furniture to create seating areas and tastefully added accessories to emphasize attractive features of the home.

Simonton said their work made a huge difference in the home’s appearance, adding “all the agents have been gushing over the place.”

Mother-daughter team, Reggie Gruber and Marjorie Gruber Gerhart, of Re/Max’s Gruber Works, also completed a StagedHomes.com two-day introductory course which gave them valuable insight and knowledge on how to Stage a home, but not accreditation as an independent stager.

Gruber said she believes her clients need to be mindful that how you live in your home is not the same way you want to present it when opening it up to the public.

“The need (for staging) is there because we’re not decorating, we’re emphasizing the architectural features of a home and trying to depersonalize it,” she said.

Gruber Gerhart explained that because the home-selling process is so emotional, it’s sometimes painful to separate yourself from your home. But, she said, a home is better presented when accessories are scaled down and clutter is reduced. She explained, you’re selling your space and not your collections.

The initial investment for a three-hour staging consultation costs about \$300, explained Hart. For this you’ll get a comprehensive evaluation of your home, inside and out, with suggestions on what you can do to improve it. For an additional fee of about \$250 per room, the ASP will Stage desired rooms by rearranging, adding accessories or furniture and even offer specific color choices, if needed.

This is a small investment considering the cost is far less than that of your first price reduction, said Hart. According to Schwarz, staging can bump up prices 2 percent to 10 percent in a moderate market. But the biggest advantage occurs with luxury homes or in a market with bidding wars over properties, where effective staging can boost prices by 20 percent to 50 percent, she said.

People spend hundreds on getting their cars detailed before selling them, said Hart, so it only makes sense to invest at least that when selling one of the largest investments of your life - your home.