



By Stephen K. Hirst

Looking to sell your Manhattan residence? Get in line — plenty of homes are hitting the market right now, and more are on the way. To move things along, sellers need to stay flexible and consider offers they might have smirked at even one year ago. Another big advantage is being able to differentiate your place from the growing glut of identical lofts and apartments, and that's where a professional stager can help out.

Staging a house entails more than simply washing the windows and taking down those pretentious vintage wine posters you picked up at Bed, Bath and Beyond. Professional stager Donna M. Dazzo, founder of Designed to Appeal, shares a few tricks.

"The first thing that should be done is reducing the clutter," says Dazzo, "whether it's stacks of magazines or too many pieces of furniture." Whittle each room down to the basics, and if it still looks jam-packed, consider storing while you're trying to sell.

Depersonalizing your home is another key. "Remove any family photos, refrigerator art, or bowling trophies," Dazzo stresses. "You want them looking at the space, not at your collectibles." That means getting rid of all your little personal touches, especially the more gender specific décor, like beer mirrors, or tiny dogs.

Yes, even the Precious Moments figurines need to be boxed up, but leave room for scented candles. A pleasant smell can work on the buyer's subconscious, making a home seem more inviting. Open windows to air things out, and consider baking cupcakes for the open house. Your nose may not notice it anymore, but visitors will instantly identify that lingering scent of cats/cigarettes/diapers, and nothing is a bigger turnoff. Fresh flowers will also help here, while simultaneously brightening things on a visual level.

After



Before



Stage Now or Pay Later

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Maybe the most important advice Dazzo can impart deals with what she calls improving the “bones” of a home. “Paint your walls, refinish or buff hardwood floors, and clean every surface.” Dazzo has specific advice about color choice: “Stick with neutral colors — not white, because it’s too stark — but no vivid purple on the bedroom walls, either. You want to stay within the core range of potential buyers.”

While a professional stager’s take on things is more valuable than ever right now to help a residence stand out, many sellers would rather lower their asking price than pay more money out of pocket to a stager first — which, Dazzo says, could end up saving them the trouble of continually revising the asking price. “In this kind of market, with so many homes out there, it just makes more sense to stage than not to stage.”