

# DESIGNED TO APPEAL<sup>SM</sup>

A Home Staging Company serving New York City and the Hamptons

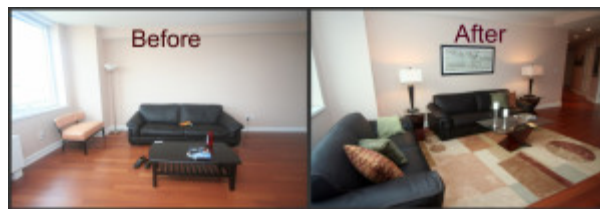
## Choosing a Home Stager: 10 Things You Should Consider

While not every home seller and real estate agent believes in the power of home staging when selling a home, there are those who do, thanks to the proliferation of shows on television and real life success stories.

So, if you have made the decision to hire a professional (and that is a key word, "professional") home stager, then what should you be looking for?

There are a number of things you should consider:

**1. Portfolio** - every home stager should have a website (this in itself is something you should look for) where you can view his or her portfolio of homes they have staged. There should be **before and after photos** for occupied homes and at least the after photos for vacant homes.



And **make sure it IS their portfolio**, not some stock photos they purchased, or worse, photos they have stolen from another home stager's website (this has been known to happen). While it may be difficult to prove the photos are really the stager's, one way you might be able to tell is if some of the photos look amateurish and others look totally professional and expensive.

You can also meet with the stager and ask to see their printed portfolio of before and after photos. And in particular, ask to see pictures of homes that are in a similar market and style as yours.

**2. Experience** - This goes hand-in-hand with number one. While every newbie deserves a break, experience and longevity should be given high consideration. All things being equal, it is better to go with someone who has been a home stager for awhile and has the portfolio to prove it as they have more experience dealing with any stumbling blocks. Also, think "survival of the fittest".

**3. Decorative Style** - one of the goals of staging a home is to make it less taste-specific and less personal, and instead make it appeal to the broad range of buyers. Having said that, every stager usually has some unique decorative style.

However, what you **want to make sure of is not every home they stage looks just like every other home they stage.** Each should be decorated and accessorized for the type of home it is, the location and the profile of the buyer for this type of home.



Some stagers have their own inventory of **furniture** and others use a furniture rental company. The advantage of using a furniture rental company is that there is a wide selection in terms of both price and style.



However, some home stagers are forced to use their own furniture because there are no furniture rental companies in their area. So make sure they have an extensive inventory.

**Lesson: Beware of the cookie-cutter stager.**



Also beware of the home stager who seems to do primarily **small vignettes**, such as a totally empty room save for a corner with a chair, lamp, artwork and tiny rug. This accomplishes nothing in getting a buyer to fall in love with the home and want to live there.



**4. Education and training** - home staging as a profession has a low barrier to entry, meaning that anyone can call themselves a home stager. And don't be fooled by those home stagers saying they are "certified". **There is no universal certification or licensing of home stagers.** One thing you do want to see however, is that they did take some interior decorating or design and/or home staging education as this shows seriousness on their part and a commitment to this profession.

**Beware of the home staging hobbyist**, e.g., the wife of a friend of yours who likes to decorate. Staging involves much more than that. It's about downplaying the negative features and emphasizing the positive features of a property. It's about emphasizing the focal point of the room and making sure there is proper flow within a room and between rooms so it's easy for buyers to navigate.

**5. Testimonials and Referrals** - some home stagers' websites have testimonials from homeowners and real estate agents, but go beyond just reading them. Ask for the names and contact information of their past clients who are not listed on the website.

**Contact them and ask them these questions:**

- How did you like working with\_\_\_\_\_?
- What do you think he or she did best?
- What are some of the things you feel he or she could have done better?
- Was he or she responsive, professional and reliable?
- Was the project completed in a timely manner?
- Were you pleased with the results?
- Overall, how satisfied were you?
- Any advice for me in working with\_\_\_\_\_?



If they offer free consultations, you have to ask yourself, why would they want to give away advice for free? Is it because they are desperate for business, or are you really going to be getting any good advice?

If their bid for a vacant or occupied staging comes in much lower than others, it may be because they will be using inexpensive accessories or furniture or cutting corners to cut their time in the project.

**7. Insurance** - make sure your home stager has insurance. They should at least have general business liability insurance. Some even have professional liability insurance, also more commonly known as errors and omissions insurance. Those companies that have employees should have workmen's compensation insurance. Ask for a copy of their insurance certificate(s).

**8. Personality and Traits-** Whether you're a homeowner or a real estate agent, you want to make sure you will be able to work with the home stager.

- Do they have the type of personality you would get along with or one that might annoy you?
- Do they appear to be professional and serious?
- Have they been responsive to you so far? Did they return calls and emails promptly?
- Do they seem organized?
- Are they a good listener?
- If you are a real estate agent, how do you think they might talk to your clients when it comes to providing advice on sensitive things they need to change in order to get the home sold?

**9. Written Agreement** - an agreement in writing between the homeowner and the client will protect both parties. And it also points to the professionalism and seriousness of the home stager.



*Do you have anything you'd like to add to the list? Are there any points you disagree with?*

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**About the Author:** Donna Dazzo is president and owner of Designed to Appeal, a home staging company serving New York City and the Hamptons. Designed to Appeal helps homeowners and real estate agents sell homes quickly and profitably, by expertly creating an environment that buyers want to live in. Designed to Appeal also helps homeowners **not** looking to sell with interior redesign, which involves using mostly what the homeowner already has. Donna writes frequently on home staging and interior decorating and design topics.