

TOP TIPS FOR SELLERS FROM PROFESSIONAL HOME STAGER TORI TOTH

By Julia Troy



In 2009, Tori Toth decided it was time for a change. The former Emmy-nominated broadcast journalist was in-between jobs when she happened to catch a special on CNN about the booming home staging industry and instantly felt that it was the right path for her. By the end of 2009, she was a certified stager running her own company, Stylish Stagers Inc. She experienced tremendous success until Superstorm Sandy hit in 2012, destroying the first floor of her home and office.

No stranger to reinvention, Toth decided to take a different path once again, this time aiming to empower people to stage their homes on their own. She wrote the book "Feel at Home: Home Staging Secrets for a Quick and Easy Sell," and designed an online home staging video course to teach anyone how to stage like a pro. Since then, her work has been touted by real estate mogul Barbara Corcoran and featured everywhere from Real Simple Magazine to CNN, where her dream began. We recently spoke to Toth to learn some of the top tips and tricks of the home staging trade.

On your website, you mention that home is not a space, it's a feeling. Can you elaborate a bit on that?

The way I look at it, a house is simply a structure, and a home is what we create that property to look like. The more livable things you have in your home, the more care you put into that space, that's what creates that welcoming, comforting home feeling.

What are some of the top mistakes you see people making when they stage their home?

The first mistake many people make is not removing enough of their personal items. You need to focus on the "80/20" rule - meaning you should be taking 80 percent of your things out of the space so buyers can really visualize the potential of the home and see what they're going to be putting into it themselves. At the end of the day they're not buying your things, they're buying the space.

Cleaning, or more accurately not cleaning, is another mistake I often see sellers making. I understand that with everyone's tough schedules and the stress that comes with selling a home it can be tough to clean things, so I do my best to keep my clients on an every other day cleaning schedule, even if it's just sticking to the simple things like regularly taking out the trash and vacuuming. This way, the house looks a lot cleaner for a longer period of time and you're not forced to jam all of your cleaning into one day.

Another mistake is the furniture arrangement. A lot of the time people just don't know how to arrange furniture to maximize traffic flow. Furniture should be arranged in a way that directs people's eyes to show off the main, permanent features of a room such as the focal wall.

What's your favorite, simple design hack that can make a major difference in the look of a room?

One simple thing that you can do is work to more properly utilize the height of a room. Highlighting the height of a room with a large piece of wall art, or floor-to-ceiling curtains, or even just a shelf can maximize the functionality of that space.

What room in a home do you think is the biggest challenge to stage and why?

The kitchen, if it's outdated. It can cost a lot of money to get a kitchen up to date, but there are some simple, cost-effective ways to upgrade it. For example, just getting new cabinets can instantly change the entire look of a kitchen, and the same is true for updating the backsplash.

Another room that can be a challenge is the living room, especially when it comes to layout. People want to still be able to watch their TV and spend time in their living room while their home is on the market, so they may be reluctant to move the furniture around. However, I recommend editing out as many pieces as possible so the room can still be functional while looking its best for potential buyers.

As you know, the NYC housing market is very unique. What specific advice do you have for NYC residents looking to stage their apartments before selling?

When it comes to staging apartments, it's all about functionality. You have to give each one of your rooms a dual purpose so you can maximize space in even the smallest areas. For example, have an open floor plan in your living room where you can sit and entertain, but also try to have a separate small desk area to highlight that the room can be used for entertaining, relaxation and working. Then, try to analyze how you can add little things to other rooms to maximize their functionality, like shelves. The key is to think of spaces creatively so you're utilizing every square inch.

Are there specific brands or vendors that you prefer when staging a home?

It all depends on the type of style of a room or house. There are some really cost-effective stores I turn to to get updated trends without spending a lot of money, such as Home Goods, Ikea and Pier One Imports. If you're comfortable spending a little more, Crate and Barrel and Pottery Barn are also good options.

For more design tips and to learn the best ways to stage a home, be sure to check out Tori's website.