

To make your house feel like a buyer's home, experts rely on staging

By T.J. BANES, The Indianapolis Star



Home stager Julie Preston (left) advises Jennifer Huff on how to best display her home's potential. The Indianapolis Star/STEVE HEALEY

The first time Neil and Megan Bloede peeked through the windows, the [house](#) was empty. When they came back for a tour, the 1924 Colonial Revival was dressed up with period furnishings and accessories. It had been staged -- a concept becoming more and more popular with homeowners and real estate agents.

"I joked with my wife that I liked the Revolutionary period portrait hanging over the fireplace so much that I wanted it put into the offer," says Neil Bloede, a lawyer. They didn't get the portrait, but they did buy their first [home](#).

With the glut of houses on the market, a staged home will sell while others linger, says Nyla Clark-Kurtz of Enhancements by [Design](#) in Indianapolis.

While real estate agents can offer advice on how to de-clutter a home, professional stagers take the space to the next level, offering potential buyers a vision of how it can best be used.

"The first thing I do is ask the homeowners if they are willing to put their home into pristine condition to bring the highest amount of money or if they just want it to look good enough to sell," Clark-Kurtz says.

Next, she asks whether they will complete the work themselves or hire contractors.

Julie Preston took one look at the living room of Daniel and Jennifer Huff's ranch home and knew where she wanted potential buyers to look first.

"I rearranged the furniture and added an area rug so we had clean

lines, neutral colors and an emphasis on the ornate tile fireplace," says Preston, of Design to Sell Enterprise.

"When you stage, you look for the 'wow' factor when you first walk in," Preston says.

Steve Sterrett's home was ideal for staging after it remained on the market and unoccupied for nearly four months. Sterrett, his wife, Betty, and their two teens had lived in the home for seven years when they put it on the market.

They took the 20-year-old home off the market long enough to update the floors and [countertops](#), and add coats of neutral paint to the walls, but the house didn't show well empty.

"I had been reading a little bit about staging, and we opted to give it a try. Literally, within a week of staging, we had an offer," Sterrett says. The couple did what the experts suggest -- they concentrated on the entryway, master bedroom, [kitchen](#) and living room.

"When you walked in, there was a small table and pictures on the wall. It wasn't rocket science, but it was enough to help the potential buyer recognize the potential of the home with something in it," says Sterrett. He signed a 90-day agreement, averaging \$700 to \$800 a month, to rent and set up furniture and accessories for the staging.

"I wasn't getting anything from a vacant home. I needed it to move, so I invested a little more to make it happen."

It doesn't take a lot to make a great first impression.

When the Bloedes walked into the three-bedroom home that would become their own, Neil Bloede was taken in by the slate floor in the entryway, polished hardwood in the living and dining areas and the modest furnishings. They had toured about 20 empty and occupied [homes](#).

"It kind of helped us see where furniture would go and what size would work in certain rooms," Bloede says.

"So many homes we went in looked like they had hurried to throw things under the beds and left their shoes sitting out. It felt like we were invading their space. This seemed more homey but not lived in. We could picture ourselves living there."

Home staging tips

Some of the suggestions professional stagers give to homeowners include:

- Add furniture.
- Take away unnecessary appliances.
- Add fresh flowers to the countertops.
- Place towels in the master bath.

- Hang [art](#) on the walls.
- Paint rooms.
- Install new flooring.
- Replace cabinetry.

The Indianapolis Star



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Story reprinted in *The News Journal*, February 7, 2008