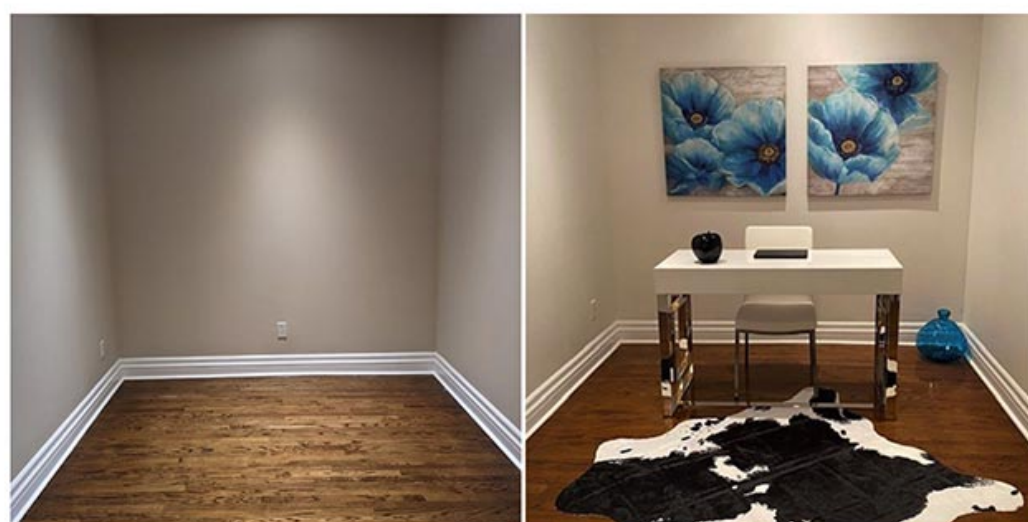


# Should you stage your home when selling?

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Professional stager Heather Johnson just finished staging a condo that had a little empty alcove near the entrance. It was transformed into a home office and now can appeal to a professional who is working from home.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOUSELIFE SERVICES

Despite some headlines touting a slightly subdued real estate market, sellers continue to be in the driver's seat with record low inventories re-accelerating housing prices across the country.

According to the Canadian Real Estate Association (CREA,) the number of newly listed homes dropped by 8.8 per cent in July compared with June 2021, with declines led by big Canadian markets such as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Vancouver, Montreal and Calgary.

Sellers may be asking themselves why they should bother with the time and expense of home staging when homes seem to be selling themselves. Dawn Chapnick, principal designer and owner of Dawn Chapnick Designs, believes staging a home in today's market is more important than ever.

"Staging continues to be an important way to help buyers visualize the potential of a space they may not have otherwise considered and, ultimately, earns sellers top dollar for their home or condominium," Chapnick says.

The seasoned stager and interior designer studied her craft at the International Academy of Merchandising and Design in Toronto and has since worked in the business for more than 17 years. For Chapnick, staging is a form of art.

"Staging a home is not just about moving furniture around. It's a creative process that can help accentuate the positives of a difficult layout or offer that 'wow' factor sellers are looking for."

According to a 2020 survey of 13,000 staged homes conducted by the Real Estate Staging Association, a professional body that serves staging professionals across North America, a whopping 85 per cent of those homes sold for 5 per cent to 25 per cent over listing price. The study also showed that staged homes sell faster, averaging just 25 days on the market.

Heather Johnson, owner and founder of HouseLife Services, says staging is even more important in a seller's market.

"When more homes are selling in your neighbourhood, staging will help make your home memorable to buyers," she says. "For example, we just finished staging this amazing little condominium residence. It was empty and it had this quirky little alcove when you walked in. We completely transformed it to a home office and it's a showstopper. I can see it appealing to the career professional who is working remotely. The office is the first thing people will see and I am convinced that it will sell that residence," she says.

Johnson has incorporated her years of experience working in media and marketing with a keen sense for how demographics drive decision-making. She has amassed a team of professionals, all stay-at-home moms, who understand the various stages of their clients' lives.

Her work includes a staging crew, painters, electricians, project planners, movers and even her own inventory of furniture and accessories.

"It's a turnkey approach with flexibility," she says. The flexibility comes with pricing for various stages in the event clients don't feel they need the full suite of services.

Like any business in the real estate sector, the staging profession has had to grow and change amid COVID-19 lockdowns and travel restrictions. Companies such as Toronto's Digital Entourage Media Production help stagers navigate a new world where buyers take in virtual tours and monitor Instagram posts for images that capture their eye.

Maya Merchant, digital marketer and principal of Digital Entourage Media Production, says more staging professionals are creating a presence online.

"One of the strategies that is proving successful for home stagers is posting before and after shots on Instagram and other social media," Merchant says. "This type of content is very engaging and can be effective in demonstrating the professional skill set of the stager."

Here are some tips to staging from Chapnick.

- **Pay attention to proportion.** You may want to display a stunning piece of furniture but if it's not the same height and depth of your other pieces, it can be distracting for the buyer. Instead, you want to emphasize what's interesting about the space, such as a fireplace, higher-than-normal ceilings or entranceways.
- **Highlight storage areas.** While you are decluttering, save some items to display neatly in your closets and on shelves.
- **Cater to your target demographics** by creating a space that appeals to them and their lifestyle.
- **Make rooms look larger than they are.** The use of paint colours and placement of furniture in certain spots forces potential buyers to look and walk around a space in a certain way. When you think of a retail store, there is a reason why certain products are displayed in certain spaces. Placement sells.
- **Clean and refresh inside and out.** Repaint walls and doors. Add new door handles. Make sure plants in front of the property are healthy. Consider mixing quality faux plants with real ones. Put your garbage away. You want your property to stand out from the others on the street.
- **Create welcoming spaces.** For condominium owners, add flowers to the entrance, incorporate a fabulous mirror, a piece of wallpaper, or carpet. Change the light fixtures. When in doubt, ask your condominium corporation. Many don't realize that part of their home is the entrance of the building.