

# HOMES & RENTALS

EDITOR: KENDRA HOGUE  
503-221-8318  
KHOGUE@OREGONIAN.COM

APRIL 29, 2012

## Sellers, get ready for open season

### Real estate agents, stagers offer expertise to show your home in its best light

By **CONNIE POTTER**

SPECIAL WRITER

**K**eller Williams Realtor Cathy Mankus has guided dozens of clients through getting their homes ready to sell. But in putting her own house on the market, she experienced how tough it can be to follow her own advice.

Take decluttering. It's essential to keep the buyer's attention focused on the house and not the furnishings. But even after two large garage sales and selling additional items online, Mankus found she still had too much "stuff." She cleared out more possessions and brought in a few colleagues to evaluate what she'd done. They all agreed that more had to go.

The problem, said Mankus, "was that I kept on thinking of it as my house, and I can't think of it as my house anymore. It's a house for someone else to buy."

She ended up bringing in professional stagers who could be more detached in deciding what needed to stay and go.

"They took almost everything down off the walls and rearranged my furniture," she said. "It looks great — not in the way I would have done it, obviously, but it shows so much better."

The five-bedroom home, at 15610 N.W. Graf St. in Portland, is now on the market for \$374,900.

Getting a home ready to sell involves more than just a good cleaning and hanging a "for sale" sign in the front lawn. With so many homes to choose from, it's critical to make a good first impression, said Joanie Elliott-Barclay, a broker with Coldwell Banker Seal. Often, that involves bringing in a stager to emphasize the good features of the home and help prospective buyers better visualize themselves living in it.

Elliott-Barclay recently listed a three-bedroom home at 4246 S.W. Vesta St. in Portland where the sellers brought in professional stager Maureen Bray of Room Solutions Staging. Bray went through the house room by room, making specific suggestions. In the dining room, for example, she recommended taking out a large rug to better showcase the beautiful hardwood floor. She also suggested painting an accent wall in a more neutral hue and reducing the clutter in a large bookcase to show more space.



JOHN M. VINCENT/THE OREGONIAN



Photo courtesy Maureen Bray

**BEFORE & AFTER** | A three-bedroom home at 4246 S.W. Vesta St. in Portland underwent a transformation in preparation for its sale. After furnishings were removed from the house (left), Maureen Bray of Room Solutions Staging repainted walls and equipped the home with eye-pleasing furniture and accessories. Two days after the house went on the market, the sellers had an offer.

Similar suggestions in other rooms totally transformed the home, said Elliott-Barclay. The home was staged on a Thursday, listed on Friday, and the seller accepted an offer on Sunday.

"Staged homes just sell better than homes that aren't staged," she said. "They're warm, they're inviting. It emphasizes the good features of the home."

Stagers generally charge between \$150 and \$200 for a consultation, where they will walk

through each room in the house, offering specific changes the seller can make.

Hiring a stager to do the work can cost between \$150 and \$800, depending on the size of the home, said Bray. Stagers can work with the client's own furniture and artwork or can bring in pieces to specifically fit a space. Vacant homes usually cost about \$1,500 to \$2,500 to stage,

Please see **STAGING**, Page H10



JOHN M. VINCENT/THE OREGONIAN

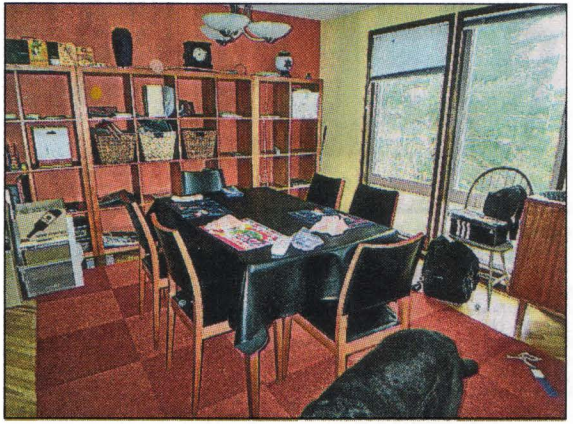


Photo courtesy Maureen Bray

**BEFORE & AFTER** | The dining room above in a home on Southwest Vesta Street had great potential, but after decluttering, repainting, switching out furnishings and removing a rug, the room at left looks significantly brighter and more inviting to buyers.

# Staging: Don't overload prospective buyers' senses

Continued from Page H1

fully furnishing the main rooms of the home, Bray added.

In return for their investment, clients usually find their home sells quicker, said Bray. She added that the homes she staged in 2011 had an average market time of 29 days, compared to about 135 days for the Portland metro area in general. The homes she staged sold on average at 97 percent of the list price.

"We know it's a marketing tool that really works," she said.

Whether you hire a professional stager or do it yourself, Bray said there are some essential steps to follow. First, start at the curb because most people form their impression of a house as they drive up. Mow and edge the yard, sweep away the cobwebs from the front porch and set out a pot of colorful flowers.

Fresh paint can work wonders, especially in rooms that have bold colors that may not work well with all furniture.

"When buyers see deep purple walls in the dining room, the first thing the wife says is, 'Honey, we're going to have to repaint this room,'" said Bray. "Then they start adding up in their mind how much they'll deduct from the offer, if they even make an offer."

Stacey Finnerty of Realty Trust Group suggests packing away anything you can live without for 3 to 6 months. That includes extra dishes, knickknacks, the kids' soccer trophies and family photos.

"The thing I find is if there's so much there to overload their senses, they won't pay attention and will see all this stuff and not the house," she said. "You can have a little personal touch but not all over the place."

To help buyers visualize the possibilities in a listing she has in West Linn, Finnerty set up an easel with a color interior design sketch. The 2,444-square-foot home, at 2594 Bronco Court, is listed for \$394,500 and will be held open Sunday, April 29, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Michele Gila of Roots Realty advises sellers to make sure smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors are working and that the wood stove is certified. Savvy buyers will also look to see if the gutters are clean, she said, and that there's no moss on the roof.

Gila has a listing for a 2,682-square-foot home at 3706 S.E. Lincoln St. in Portland, priced at \$495,900. As with all of her clients, she worked with the seller to minimize the furnishings and follow a checklist of "do's and don'ts" to get the house ready for sale.

Sometimes very little things make a big difference, she said.

"You'd be amazed at how much a new welcome mat transforms a home," she said.

*Connie Potter is a Portland-based freelance writer. She can be reached at [compotter@comcast.net](mailto:compotter@comcast.net).*

## RESOURCES

- **Cathy Mankus**, Keller Williams Realty Professionals, 9755 S.W. Barnes Road, Suite 560; 503-705-8795
- **Joanie Elliott-Barclay**, Coldwell Banker Seal, 2275 W. Burnside; 503-869-2929
- **Maureen Bray**, Room Solutions Staging; 503-246-1800; [www.roomsolutions.com](http://www.roomsolutions.com)
- **Michele Gila**, Roots Realty, 628 S.E. 58th Ave.; 503-232-2475; [www.rootsrealty.com](http://www.rootsrealty.com)
- **Stacey Finnerty**, Realty Trust Group, 600 A Avenue, Lake Oswego; 503-488-1013