

SELLING HOUSES: CYNTHIA HOCHSWENDER

Why It Helps To ‘Stage’ a House If You Want To Sell It

It used to be that, to find their dream home, buyers would settle into the car of a real estate agent and drive around looking at properties with “for sale” signs on them. COVID and the internet have pretty much (although not completely) put an end to that. Most people now search for homes on internet sites such as Zillow, and already have a fairly good idea of what they’re interested in before they contact an agent.

Someone recently said to me that people treat real estate websites in much the same way as they treat dating apps: They look at one or two photos and quickly swipe left or right.

Thus, if you’re trying to sell your house, even in the super hot real estate market of the last year and a half, it is essential to have attractive photos.

Dawn Trachtenberg is the founder and stager-in-chief for Staged Ryte, one of the major staging companies in the Tri-state Region. She says that there are three stages of staging, so to speak: There is fluffing, staging and interior design.

Most people will not (and should not) completely redesign their home before they put it on sale, Trachtenberg notes.

Fluffing by adding flowers, putting crisp linens on beds and tidying up clutter is very helpful, but assumes that a house already looks fairly spruce.

Staging is the middle ground. It’s a relatively new practice for real estate agents. Back in the 1980s and 1990s, owners of new luxury apartment buildings used to create a “model” apartment, often decorated by a famous designer. Potential buyers could step into the model apartment and imagine more easily how dreamy their life could be if they bought a residence in that building.

Staging a house for sale is a similar concept. It requires, for the most part, an unoccupied house, however.

“There are people who do ‘occupied staging,’” Trachtenberg said. “But it’s harder, because you’re integrating new and older furnishings.”

Occupied staging, she explained, is when the owner still lives in the home. Staging it requires using their furniture and accessories, and bringing in updates such as fresh towels, sheets and throw pillows — while predominantly keeping the owner’s furnishings.

And then of course there are the challenges of people and pets living in a house that’s been neatly and perfectly designed. Usually, Trachtenberg said, when she finishes staging a space, she leaves and no one comes into the house again until the photographer is ready for the glamour photo shoot.

In this modern world of real estate sales via photos, Trachtenberg believes



PHOTO BY CYNTHIA HOCHSWENDER

Dawn Trachtenberg invites clients to her 5,000-sq-ft home furnishings warehouse in Ashley Falls, Mass., to help find the right design elements to “stage” or design their home.

that not every corner of a house needs to be documented for the property’s social media posts (although people generally do like to see all the rooms, even if they’re empty, once they start to get serious).

And certainly, Trachtenberg advises, rooms don’t have to be renovated in order to be attractively photographed. The goal is to create a mood for a room that a potential buyer can tap into.

Staged Ryte charges a fee based on the number of rooms that will be furnished; and what kind of furniture and accents will be brought in. Antiques cost more than newer

items (Trachtenberg feels that a mix of older and newer items often works best). Generally the furnishings remain in the house until it has sold (which in this market can happen within weeks).

Trachtenberg does not advise sellers to bring in furnishings just for the photo shoot. People want to see the house “from the photos” when they show up at the actual location.

The staging process can be fairly quick with Staged Ryte, thanks to the massive warehouse of furnishings that Trachtenberg recently moved into on Clayton Road in Ashley Falls, Mass. Interior design usually

requires weeks (or, more often, months) of waiting for pieces to become available, to be upholstered or finished and to be shipped to a location.

Trachtenberg can also provide interior design services. In those situations, she invites clients into her warehouse to discuss the look for their house; then everything can be trucked over and put in place fairly quickly.

Of course not everyone can move out of their house or afford to have it staged. Trachtenberg shared a few quick tips that can help sellers to at least “fluff up” a house so it can look its best when it’s

time for its closeup.

EDIT!

“Too much big furniture in a room is not a good thing,” Trachtenberg said. “Two recliners and a huge leather easy-sofa might be comfortable for you and your friends but it won’t help you sell your house.”

LET IN THE LIGHT

“Take down the window treatments. It lets in more light, which is important.”

The curtains or shades can also dominate the way a room looks and feels. It’s possible but unlikely that a potential buyer will want the same window treatments as the seller.

DEPERSONALIZE

“The wall of family photos and awards is too much. The buyer needs to focus on imagining themselves in the space, not be distracted by your diplomas.”

MAKE IT CLEAN AND FRESH

Buy new white towels and new shower curtains. Use fresh new bed linens (and iron out any wrinkles or creases).

Many bestselling house photos show stark white rooms, often with black trim. Trachtenberg feels that might be getting overdue.

“How many people want to live with all-white walls?”

White does look pristine, however. To warm up a white room, Trachtenberg will “use pops of color, eclectic furnishings and decorative pieces, collections of objects on shelves.”

“You want to draw people in.”

To learn more about staging and Staged Ryte, go to www.stagedryte.com; email dawn@stagedryte.com; or call Trachtenberg at 917-543-4590.

POST-QUARANTINE: CYNTHIA HOCHSWENDER

Dipping a Toe Back into City Life

Someday life will be normal again or at least normal-ish and at that point I will return to Manhattan. I’ll have to memorize the streets and subways again, and figure out how to buy a Metro-card.

I was the happy recipient a year or so ago of Cornwall, Conn., resident John Tauranac’s “Manhattan Block by Block: A Street Atlas,” updated and published in 2015 (\$16, you can find it at Amazon and sometimes at the Wish House gift shop in West Cornwall). If I take the train down for my virgin return visit to the city, I guess I can study Tauranac’s book on the trip down (in the unlikely event that I don’t run into someone I know and strike up a lively conversation).

Anyone who’s nervous about returning to the city might want to dip a toe in by taking a tour. I’m not ashamed to say that on many occasions I have taken bus and boat tours of cities I’ve visited. They’re often fun and informative, and they usually take me to a place I wouldn’t have

gone to on my own.

If you feel that you already know how to find the Empire State Building and Rockefeller Center (although I bet you’ve never been to Coney Island), consider taking a tour that helps you locate your favorite fictional characters within your favorite city. A company called On Location Tours has returned, feeling that the pandemic is sufficiently over (and that, apparently, the omicron variant isn’t important enough to worry about).

The Sex and the City tour is available again, with stops in Greenwich Village, the Meatpacking District and SoHo. Everyone who takes the tour gets a cupcake from Magnolia Bakery, and anyone over 21 with legal ID can get a drink at O’Neal’s bar and restaurant on Grand Street.

To find out about other tours including the New York Super Heroes tour and the Marvelous Mrs. Masel tour, go to the website at www.onlocationtours.com and click on New York Tours.

ARTISTS INVITED TO SHARE WORK THAT DEPICTS LIFE IN SHARON

The Sharon Historical Society & Museum on the Green in Sharon, Conn., is seeking entries for its upcoming show in Gallery SHS. “Depicting our Town,” a juried in-person exhibition and sale running from Jan. 22 through March 4.

For many, the last two years have been about a renewed commitment to home and community. This show invites artists to share that commitment by submitting works depicting their home or community, whether it be landscapes of the area, the people who make up the community, or an expression of what it all means to the artist. Only recent work (completed in the last two years) should be submitted.

There is a non-refundable entry fee of \$25 for up to two works of art, and \$10 for each additional

submission.

The show’s judge will select the art to be exhibited and award cash prizes of \$100, \$75 and \$50 to three pieces. In addition, guests who view the exhibition in person will have the opportunity to select their favorite work of art for the “SHS Crowd Pleaser” award.

Submissions must be delivered on Saturday, Jan. 15, between 9 and 11 a.m. Provide high-quality

images of the work at that time, especially if the work is behind glass, so that they may be posted to the Gallery SHS web page.

The Prospectus, Entry Forms and detailed Terms and Conditions are available on the Art Gallery page of the Sharon Historical Society & Museum’s website (select the Gallery SHS menu at www.sharon-hist.org), or can be picked up at the Historical Society during regular hours.

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