

# Staging gives sellers the edge

In today's market, buyers can afford to be choosy, and it's up to sellers to make changes

By PATRICIA GRIFFITHS

After her Beaverton condo languished on the market for a year, Harriett Smith decided to fire her agent and hire a stager — a company that specializes in decorating houses for sale.

Her condo sold a few months later at the list price, which was more than \$40,000 than she had expected in the 2008 real estate market.

"I think it's because of them it sold for more than \$169,000," says Smith, referring to the staging and remodeling company, Imagine Interior Home Staging & Finishes in Beaverton. "I thought I would get \$125,000 because the market was so bad."

Staging isn't a replacement for a Realtor — Harriett Smith did hire a new one. But an increasing number of Realtors and sellers are convinced of the value of this ephemeral form of decorating, especially in a down real estate market.

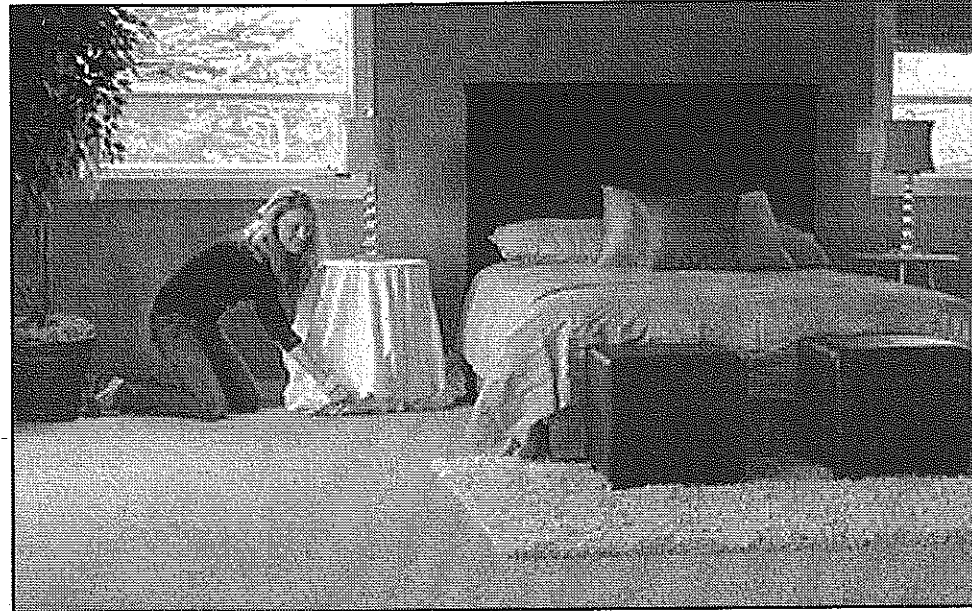
In Smith's case, she spent \$1,850 on staging to rent furniture for her 800-square-foot condo. "It sure did help sell it," she says.

About the owners of Imagine, Lisa and Lenny Shipley, Smith says, "Lisa did a fabulous job; she made my condo seem bigger.

"Lenny's always working," she adds, "he's really good about backyard and electrical stuff."

For sellers like Smith, this market is pulling a one-two punch — price reductions and longer time on the market. In fact, the national Real Estate Staging Association has measured just how hard these punches hit.

According to Mary DeBella, a regional RESA vice president and owner of Northwest Staging & Redesign in West



**CAUGHT STAGING** — Lisa Shipley, of Imagine Home Staging & Finishes, puts the final touches on a home on Barnes Road in the West Hills listed by Cristina John, a Realtor with Keller Williams.

Linn, "In 2008, unstaged vacant property (in the study) was for sale on the market an average of 190 days. These were then staged and relisted — they sold within 28 days. That's a national statistic."

The RESA study also indicates vacant properties nationwide that were staged before being listed sold in an average of 33 days (see [www.realestategingassociation.com](http://www.realestategingassociation.com)).

Closer to home, in March 2009, there were 1,129 active listings in Beaverton that sat an average of 113 days on the market, according to Cristina John, a Realtor for Keller Williams. For Tigard, Tualatin,

Sherwood, and Wilsonville in March, she reports 1,186 homes have sat on the market more than 126 days on average.

For homeowners living these statistics, paying for staging may mean putting up money when they're already financially stretched. Knowing how to use that money most effectively is key.

The most important items for creating an impact are "de-cluttering, fresh painting and curb appeal," says DeBella.

Specifically, Imagine's Lisa Shipley says, "Make sure the lighting fixtures are updated. Have everything sparkling clean. Make sure the house smells good. Put all personal

effects away, so buyers can envision themselves there. Make sure there are clean open spaces."

For additional tips to sellers, Shipley says, "To make a room look bigger, angle a carpet or bed." Conversely, she adds, "to make a large bedroom look more intimate, I pulled loveseats and ottomans together, along with a vase and teapot and a rug. It looks like a great place to escape the kids, a great retreat after a busy day."

Staging this way, Shipley explains, appeals to the emotions and senses, "It's a subliminal thing. You're creating a lifestyle. You have to use all the senses, sight, smell, feel (maybe some plush carpeting), hearing (a certain type of music) for the homes. Have the fireplace going."

But the most powerful advice may be from Cristina John, who pays for Imagine to evaluate her clients' homes room-by-room. "You can't change the location. You can change the condition. You can change the price," she says.

John anticipates future difficulties for sellers who opt out of staging.

"If they're not spending that money initially, then I have to go back and talk about a price reduction — perhaps \$50,000 or more. And what's easier, a \$50,000 price reduction or have Lisa and Lenny come in and work for an hour or two? I prefer to pay the consultation fee out-of-pocket and at least they (the sellers) know what to do. It's their choice if they decide not to do it.

"And if they choose not to do it," John adds, "then I also have to decide whether or not I want this client."

For Harriett Smith, the choice was clear: "I would definitely stage."