

Ready to Sell

With the right preparation, anyone can sell their home at a fair price—even in a down housing market.

Most news headlines these days proclaim what a terrible time it is to sell your home. With so many homes on the market, sellers are forced to slash their home's price for the smallest chance at a sale. But with a little bit of effort, it is possible to sell your home without losing your investment.

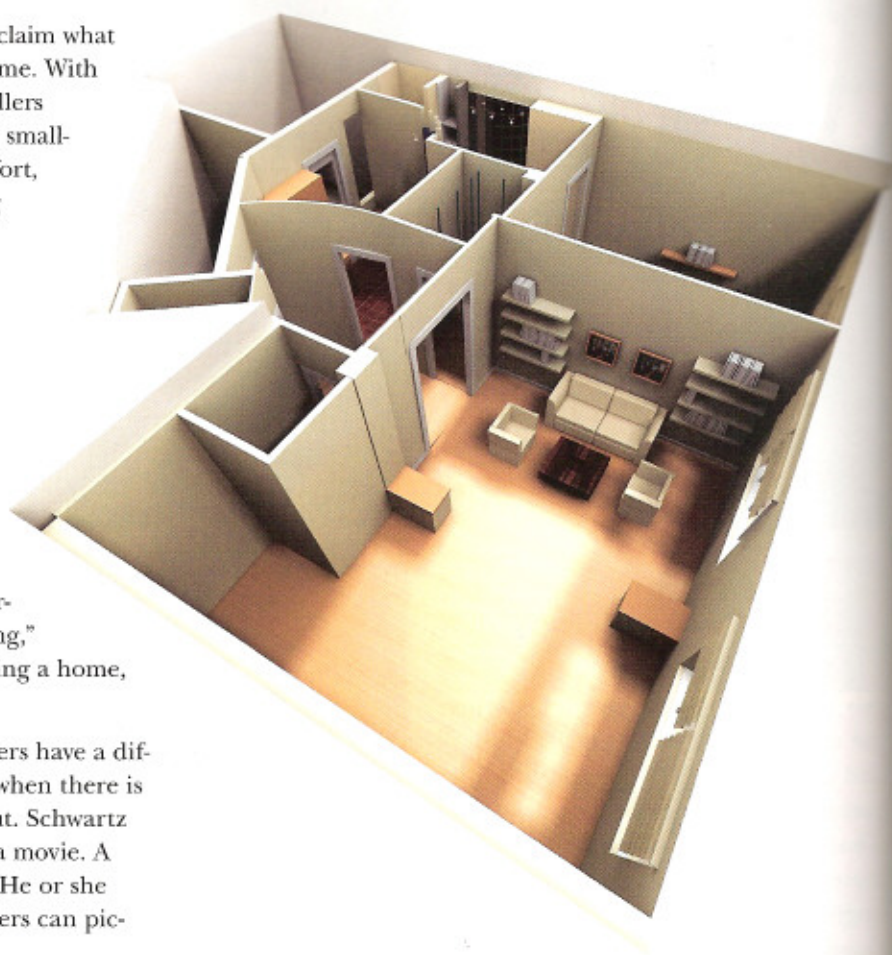
In 1972, Barb Schwartz created The Staged Home Concept. Since then, she has taught millions of people about home staging, and operates offices in Seattle and Chicago as well as Northern and Southern California. The practice of home staging has become widely known and has even become the topic of popular shows on HGTV.

Simply put, home staging is the act of preparing a home for sale. "Staging is not decorating," Schwartz clarifies. "Decorating is personalizing a home, and staging is de-personalizing a home."

The fact of the matter is, potential homebuyers have a difficult time imagining themselves in a home when there is too much personal stuff scattered throughout. Schwartz likens home staging to setting the scene for a movie. A home stager's role is that of the set director. He or she must create an environment where homebuyers can picture themselves living.

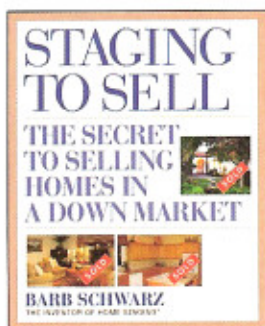
"Staging is a communication tool," Schwartz explains. "Your home is sending a message to all the agents and buyers." Even the outside of the home must be set to entice people to see the inside. This means keeping the landscaping and outside of the home looking well-kempt.

While there are simple things any seller can do to increase the attractiveness of their home, some things may be best



left to the experts. Across the country, accredited staging professionals have undergone education and accreditation to offer consultations and home staging report plans. The average fee for such a service begins at about \$350 for a report plan or up to \$1,800 if you want the ASP to actually do the maintenance for the seller. To find a nearby ASP, ask your realtor or visit www.iahsp.com. Before selecting an ASP, Schwartz recommends interviewing several candidates.

Getting Started



In her most recent book, "Staging to Sell: The Secret to Selling Homes in a Down Market," Barb Schwartz offers home staging strategies to help anyone sell their home. Here are 11 tips Schwartz suggests for getting the inside of your home ready to sell.

1. Clear away all unnecessary objects throughout the home.
2. Rearrange the dining room furniture to create more space.
3. Clear away unnecessary objects from the kitchen countertops, refrigerator and kitchen table.
4. Remove all unnecessary items in bathrooms.
5. Rearrange the furniture.
6. Take down or rearrange pictures or other objects on the wall.
7. Paint any rooms that need it.
8. Clean the carpets or drapes.
9. Clean the windows.
10. Eliminate any odors.
11. Clean the fireplace.

In the meantime, Schwartz offers her three Cs to get your home ready to sell:

1. Clean

When prospective buyers are visiting your home, it needs to be "Q-tip clean," Schwartz says. Often people aren't able to see their own dirt, and this is one area where an outsider, such as an ASP, can help you see what areas need the most attention.

2. Clutter-Free

"Pick it up, and put it away," Schwartz says. Either find somewhere to store all that extra junk, or give it away. When looking at higher end homes, people want to see an empty garage. People are more accepting of those extra tools and lawn equipment taking up space in the garages of lower-end homes. However, regardless of the home's price range, the inside should always be clutter-free.

3. Color

Buyers want a neutral background. "Neutral colors unify a space to make it appear larger and give a good flow," Schwartz explains. Instead of painting the walls bright red, have fun with color that is moveable—bedspreads, towels, area rugs, artwork, etc.

The biggest mistake Schwartz says she sees people make is leaving too much out for buyers to see. Decorate the home with the bare minimum. Schwartz believes three is the magic staging number. For instance, a living room should have three pieces of upholstered furniture and three pieces of wood furniture, such as a coffee table or end tables. On the tables, should be three items of varying heights—a tall lamp, a silk flower arrangement and a book, for example. If it's a small table, limit the items on top to just one. In any room there should be no more than three paintings hung on the wall, and



the outside of the home should have no more than three colors of paint.

Another problem Schwartz witnesses are people who have become accustomed to their home's smells, such as pet odor, cooking odors, the smell of must and mildew, etc. Buyers are going to notice these smells instantly, so it's a good idea to have an outsider take a whiff and let you know of any odors you need to take care of. To reduce odors, Schwartz recommends a product called Pure Ayre. It eliminates odors, rather than covering them up, and it's made of plant enzymes so it's 100 percent safe.

In the end, remember that staged homes sell more often and at a higher price than non-staged homes. Take the time and effort up front to make your home move-in ready, and you'll be glad you did.