

# TO STAGE OR NOT?

These days property staging is a big deal, says Louise Richardson. So, what is it? And should you be signing up for professional services or doing it yourself?



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**NEWSPAPERS AND NEWS WEBSITES** are full of it. Even outside of Auckland, house prices are a seemingly endless talking point as homeowners watch their property values soar, while those who long to get on the housing ladder despair of ever getting the chance.

So, why, currently should you invest money into DIY or professional home

staging when you put a property, rental or otherwise, up for sale?

The answer is simple. Despite our runaway market, or even because of it, buyers always look for the best value possible. With a few handy tricks, you, or your paid home stager, can create an environment in which the new owner can imagine living comfortably – and the rewards can be many times the amount

you've paid to have it done.

The idea of home staging is to turn the house into a tasteful, neutral dwelling that presents, essentially, as a sort of show room. Many home stagers – especially in the currently busy apartment market – aim to reflect the styling of a discreet, stylish, luxury hotel.



Some staging experts set the dining table to encourage buyers to think of the space as an entertainer's dream.



Fresh flowers or a pot plant on the kitchen table is an absolute must.

spruce-up before the staging process begins and Karen Warman, marketing manager at Resene, agrees.

“A fresh paint job can modernise a room and help it feel newer and higher quality,” Warman says. “Aim to use a low sheen finish, such as Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen, on walls, a semi-gloss finish, such as Resene Lustacryl, on trim, joinery and doors and a flat finish, such as Resene Ceiling Paint, on ceilings. The semi-gloss finish on doors will make it easier to wipe away fingerprint marks and keep the doors in good condition.”

## DIY

If finance is an issue and you've decided on a DIY approach, once you've cleared out any unnecessary furniture, very personal paraphernalia such as books, children's drawings and other general clutter, the job can be surprisingly easy, as long as your existing furniture is tidy and understated. Send anything superfluous to a storage unit or to charity and aim to start each room with as little in it as possible.

If you need to buy new furniture, go for cheap and cheerful rather than high-end. You could add the new furniture into the deal for your buyers for an extra few hundred dollars, which will cover your costs.

## ENTRANCE

Starting right here and continuing throughout the house or apartment, the key to success lies in simplicity. Take out any coats and shoes that may have assembled by the front door. The very most you want to leave in this space is a simple hall table, perhaps with a vase of fresh flowers and a couple of tasteful ornaments. Here is where potential buyers form their first impressions of the property so it needs to be a good one. If they can see elsewhere in the house from here, make sure that their view is clear and unimpeded.

**Top tip: Paint the front door as it's the first thing buyers will see.**

## LIVING AND DINING

The key in these spaces is creating an effect of coolness in summer and cosiness in winter. Again, careful layout of furniture is crucial because you need to emphasise the amount of space that's available. Something like a large, very solid coffee table can spoil that effect completely, breaking up the room – so try and find a smaller one and avoid loading it up with lots of accessories. Large, punchy canvas artworks are the way to go on walls and strictly no family photographs. You want the room to be as 'neutral' as possible.

## WOW FACTOR

The cost for professional home staging covers a large range. At the bottom end, you can get away with \$2000-\$3000 or less for a small dwelling while staging a large property in an affluent neighbourhood can cost up to \$10,000 and beyond.

Chris Davis of Smart Staging says that he and his team aim to add the 'wow' factor to the homes they work with.

“We don't leave until we, the owner, and the agent are satisfied that the place looks its absolute best,” Davis said.

He explains that by using professionals with access to the very latest furniture and accessories you can be sure of an outcome that's right on-trend.

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market and constantly looking out for new, different, products.

“We have a quality control process that's a bit like a production line and because we're a small family business it works really well and you don't have to worry about a thing.”

## TOUCH UPS

Davis suggests giving interior paintwork a



Some stagers like to set dining tables to invoke thoughts of happy dinner parties while others see that as unnecessary clutter.

**Top tip: Wall-mounted TVs take up less space than freestanding ones.**

## KITCHEN

Arguably the most important room and certainly the hub of the house. Even a dated kitchen can be made to seem surprisingly attractive and workable if you add a few clever touches.

A big bowl of fruit is appealing and buyers like to see items such as a coffee machine – but try and conceal other appliances if space is at a premium. Even a cookbook on a stand, opened to a luscious recipe can be very evocative. Bearing in mind that visitors to an open home might be nosy enough to look in the cupboards and pantry, pare their contents down to a bare minimum and arrange everything neatly.

**Top Tip: Use a light colour scheme. It may be worth having cupboard doors resprayed and adding new handles for a fresh new feel.**

## BEDROOMS

It's surprising how much furniture you can squeeze into a bedroom and equally surprising to see how much better it looks when you don't. If you've been checking out other people's open homes – a good idea if you're a DIY stager – you'll have noticed that very rarely is there anything other than a bed, bedside cabinets and perhaps a chest of drawers in situ. Bedrooms – even those billed as doubles – can be quite small, relatively, to the rest of the house so remember, more is always less!

**Top Tip: To get that showroom look, stand pillows up rather than lying them down and add cushions for a pop of colour.**

## BATHROOMS

No matter how fancy your bathroom is, if it's dirty, prospective buyers will be turned right off immediately. Invest in professional cleaning services if you possibly can. Once the space is clean, and surfaces and shower doors are sparkling, put only the bare necessities back in, remember to hide away such personal items as toothbrushes and combs.

Chain stores have regular 50% off towels in their sales so invest in some bright new towels and add in a plant – an orchid maybe, plus some quality flowing soap by the basin. Don't leave children's bath toys lying around.

Top tip: Think 'zen' and make the bathroom look like a luxury spa. There are lots of ideas on Pinterest.com.

## BASEMENTS/UTILITY ROOMS/ATTICS

Many houses have a remarkable amount of extra room – and often it isn't well utilised. If there's room in the basement

for a gym, then hire a treadmill so buyers can imagine themselves working out there. When you're lucky enough to have a self-contained laundry keep it clean and neat with no baskets full of washing – clean or dirty! Garages should be clean and uncluttered and attics should be similarly well organised – especially if you're using yours to store items you've removed from down below.

**Top Tip: Even if you don't usually use the garage for cars it could pay to do so when you're on the market.**

## HOME OFFICE

It's common these days to have a home office or at least a bedroom set up as one. The usual rules apply here. No piles of paperwork, only tidy surfaces and any books should be filed

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away neatly on a bookcase.  
**Top Tip: Keep valuable computer gear out of sight.**

## OUTDOOR SPACES

These are often regarded as a room in their own right, especially when we're talking about a deck or patio that's essentially part of the house. Indoor/outdoor flow remains a number one priority on potential buyers' checklists so add in furniture i.e. table and chairs and – if there's room, couches to showcase this important spot. Inexpensive garden furniture can be found at chain stores such as Kmart and The Warehouse.

**Top Tip: Throw a party in your outdoor room before listing and ask friends what they think of it. ■**