

Robin Wilson has nothing against Norman Rockwell but the iconic painter's artwork **wasn't doing her home seller any favors.** Wilson, a REALTOR® and home stager, says today's buyers are looking for homes that reflect a **clean, modern atmosphere,** not a slice of Americana.

So Wilson surveyed her client's home with a discerning eye, pulling down old paintings and photographs, packing up outdated lamps and furniture and clearing out the clutter. The goal was to freshen up the home and depersonalize it so that prospective buyers could imagine themselves there.

"It's not really a home anymore once it's put on the market. It's a product that's competing with every other home that's out there," says Wilson, a broker with Baird & Warner in Highland Park. "It almost needs to present itself as a hotel."

That house with the Rockwell print? It's been freshened up to project more of a Pottery Barn or Crate and Barrel feel to prospective buyers.

Barb Schwarz, president and CEO of StagedHomes.com and a nationally known staging expert, says the idea is to make a

home more visually appealing so that it will sell faster and for more money.

"It used to be location, location, location. Now it's staging, staging, staging," she says. "In a good market it will make it sell for more. In this market, it's the very thing that will get it sold," Schwarz says.

There isn't a lot of statistical research on home staging, but a study by Coldwell Banker Realty several years ago found that staged homes sold faster and for more money. In a 2008 survey, Stagedhomes.com found that homes staged by its Accredited Staging Professionals spent 80 percent less time on the market than homes that hadn't been staged. The Real Estate Staging Association recently released its latest statistics and found that even in 2008's slower housing market, staged vacant homes spent 85 percent less time on the market and staged occupied homes 89 percent.

Betty Cunningham, a REALTOR® with Re/Max Unlimited Northwest, is a certified home stager in Palatine who calls herself "The Staging Lady." She worked with a client whose house had been on the market for a year and a half. She staged it, listed it and within 29 days had a contract on it.

"You only get five seconds to make a great first impression and if you can't wow them at the curb and then keep

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Staged and SOLD

By Stephanie Sievers,
Associate Editor

“It's not really a home anymore once it's put on the market. It's a product that's competing with every other home that's out there.”

— REALTOR® Robin Wilson

wowing them as they walk in the front door, then it's history,” Cunningham says.

Experts say home staging has been slower to catch on in the Midwest, where the average cost of staging can run between \$1,300 and \$1,800, says Schwarz. It's not uncommon for home stagers in the Chicago area to charge a couple hundred dollars for a consultation and then around \$100 per hour for the staging work.

A common concern of sellers is that staging is going to cost a lot of money — something that would be a hard swallow in today's economy, but Anne West, a home stager and owner of the Redesign Doctor in Wilmette, says projects are scaled to the seller's budget. Some may stage the entire house, others just key rooms like the kitchen and living room.

West says many of the elements of home staging—like clearing out the clutter, rearranging the furnishings the home seller

already has and creating little vignettes like setting the kitchen table—can be done at little cost.

Many REALTORS® who double as stagers like Robin Wilson, offer it as a free service to sellers who list with them and use it as a marketing tool to set themselves apart from other REALTORS® in their area. Wilson has her own warehouse of staging accessories that she uses in her clients' homes. To get the look she wants for a client's home, she's been known to replace the seller's photographs with pictures of her own family and haul her own coffee table into the house. It all goes toward making the house more enticing to buyers.

“In this environment that we're in today when we're totally on the seesaw end of the housing market and it's so much a buyer's market, sellers are working an uphill battle to make themselves look great and stand out from the crowd,” Wilson says. ☺

Staging expert Barb Schwarz of StagedHomes.com has **THREE BASIC RULES** that should be tackled when it comes to staging a home for sale.

1. CLEANING — A seller's home should be Q-tip clean from top to bottom because it tells potential buyers that the home has been well-maintained. That means getting clients to clean walls, shampoo carpets and eliminate pet odors.

2. CLUTTER — Most homeowners have way too much stuff, Schwarz says. That may be fine for their daily life, but when they put their home on the market, some of it has to go if they want a sale. Clutter eats equity.

3. COLOR — Neutral tones may make a house move-in ready, but using color on well-chosen accessories can make the house stand out to buyers.

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