



CHAPTER 1

FROM THE BEGINNING

Staging is selling your space, not your things.

—BARB SCHWARZ

I started Staging houses and condominiums 35 years ago. At that time, I discovered what you will find today: It works!

For a good number of those years, I traveled around the country speaking to real estate professionals about the benefits of Home Staging. I estimate that I addressed more than a million people in those 14 years. You cannot speak to more than a million people and expect that the word won't get out! I believed wholeheartedly in my message and the need to convey it to real estate agents across the country. Because of this, the good news about Staging has spread. People are Staging houses from coast to coast. Television programs about selling real estate are often about Staging, whether the producers identify it as such or not. Magazine articles and web sites tout its benefits. Real estate agents suggest that their clients stage their properties, and with increasing frequency, sellers request that their houses be Staged.

All this is extremely gratifying to me, as I came up with the

term decades ago when I developed the concept. Back then, I had no idea of the impact Staging would have on the real estate market, but recent years have shown that it has changed the real estate business forever.

WHY STAGE?

The most compelling reason sellers should agree to Stage their home is to get the best price for the property. Getting top dollar is a win-win situation for everyone involved: The homeowners can afford “more house” when they buy their next property, the real estate agent’s commission is higher, and the Stager can add another successful job to the resume and a rewarding deposit to the bank account.

You might argue that the only people in the equation who do not win are the home buyers, but that’s not so. Even they benefit because they have bought the house they want. The Staging enabled them to see exactly what they purchased, so there are no surprises come moving day. They also learn firsthand the value of Staging, which means that when they decide to sell they will be receptive to the idea and, in turn, will get a high price for the same house.

I get feedback from ecstatic sellers all the time. Recently, Sharon from Illinois wrote to tell me her Staged house had gone on the market on Wednesday. She said, “On Friday I had two offers for more than list price! Obviously, your service worked, despite skepticism from many family and friends, who all thought I was nuts.” Or how about this from a seller who asked that I not use her name: “I told you I would let you know when we sold our house, so here I am. We sold it today. It was on the market for six days! I will enthusiastically recommend [Staging] to anyone I know selling a home.”

I hear success stories from Stagers, as well. Two Stagers named Rahul and Melissa sent me an e-mail about a couple who had decided not to Stage because of the cost and because they had an

active toddler. They assured their real estate agent that the house was “neat, very well kept.” But it sat on the market for three months without a single offer. Then they called Rahul and Melissa for help. As they tell it, “While we were there helping hang pictures, rearrange furniture, and clean out the china cabinet, a real estate agent called and wanted to show the house right away. We worked furiously to Stage it and after only one and a half hours of work, they received three offers in two days.”

The process of Home Staging is a never-ending circle—one that revolves around a desire to help people do the best they can with what, in most cases, is their most valuable asset. This is why I created Home Staging years ago—it was an act of love. And if you’re uncomfortable with that idea, perhaps you should put down this book and think about another profession!

WHAT IS HOME STAGING?

During the more than 35 years that I have been in the real estate and Staging businesses, I have Staged and sold thousands of houses. When I started, I made every mistake in the book, but gradually I learned. Because I wanted to share what I knew with others in the business, I started teaching fellow real estate agents in greater Seattle, Washington, where I then lived. The idea slowly began to catch on, and today I am proud to say that with the concept of Staging, I am working to change the economy of real estate both in the United States and around the world.

Okay, okay. Enough about me! What is Home Staging? It is converting a home into a house that can be merchandised as a product. It is very much part of the real estate industry and not, as many believe, the decorating business. It’s all about preparing the house for sale so that the client prospers.

Even so, Staging has nothing to do with the condition of the house. By this I mean that if the house needs a new roof or furnace

or has a cracked foundation or sagging front porch, it needs more than Staging. These major concerns fall to the listing agent to discuss with the client. Once they are addressed, the house still needs to be Staged.

Staging is not decorating. Decorating is a way to personalize your living space, to announce to everyone who walks through the front door who you are and what you like. Staging is the opposite. It's the act of depersonalizing, taking the home out of the house without leaving it sterile or uninviting. It's the process of organizing any home inside and out so that buyers can see what they are getting and can, after a simple walk-through, start to imagine their family living inside those walls. If you keep in mind that when you decorate you are personalizing your home but when you Stage you are *depersonalizing* it, you will never confuse the two.

WHY STAGING WORKS

Time and again I have witnessed a house that is not Staged sit on the market for months or even years and then, once it's been Staged, sell in days—and very often for the full asking price, or more.

Staging works because it allows buyers to see the house as it really is, without the distractions of the homeowner's clutter, collections, and, in some cases, extreme taste. A house shines when it is Staged. I mean this both literally and figuratively. Literally, the windows twinkle, the walls are free of scuff marks, the appliances and countertops sparkle, and the lamps glow warmly. A clean, clutter-free house welcomes everyone so that, regardless of the furniture, artwork, or color quirks, the buyers can really see what they are getting. The polish Stagers put on the property reassures the buyers about making the enormous financial commitment a house demands.

Trained Stagers create additional wealth for home sellers, which is why I always explain that Staging is an investment. And in

nearly every case where trained Stagers are involved, it's an investment that pays off handsomely.

As I tell all the students who sign up for my three-day ASP Staging course, I experienced the benefits of Staging firsthand once again when I went back to selling real estate after 15 years away from it. During that time I had been a traveling speaker who addressed real estate agents around the country on the subject of Home Staging, but after all those years, I felt I had been called back to real estate. I have always found it best in life to follow my intuition; I have learned that if I don't, I run into brick walls. Long ago I gave up the fear that often accompanies decision making and determined to follow my instincts, and I did so this time, too. They led me directly into an industry that helps others—Home Staging. I urge you to do the same. Intuition is a gift from God, a sixth sense that links you to the energy in the universe.

It was 1998, the Seattle market was sound, and I was excited about getting back to the business of selling one-on-one. Nevertheless, the first house I listed had been on the market for 18 months and the second house had been on the market for four years. I Staged them both, and both of them sold to the first customers who saw them. Had I needed convincing that Staging still worked, those experiences would have done the job. Statistics prove that these two instances were not flukes.

STAGING STATISTICS

The way a house is prepared for sale is a significant factor in how much it sells for and how long it takes to sell. Independent studies as well as our own internal StagedHomes.com surveys confirm these assertions.

My company, StagedHomes.com, conducted a nationwide survey of houses Staged by ASPs during a two-year period between 2004 and 2006. About half of these houses were Staged before they

went on the market and the rest were Staged *after* they had lingered without offers for an average of five and a half months (163.7 days). The results were remarkable and should convince any doubters to sit up and take notice.

The first group, the houses that were Staged before they were officially on the market, sold in 8.9 days on average, or three times faster than comparable new listings that were not Staged. They sold for an average of 100.3 percent of the asking price. In some markets, the houses sold for as much as 150 percent of the asking price, which in the high-end markets represented half a million dollars.

The second group, houses that had been sitting on the market for months before being Staged, sold in 13.7 days on average once Staged, or 13 times faster than otherwise. They sold for an average of 102 percent of the asking price, and like the houses in the first group, in some markets the percentage was as high as 150 percent. See Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1.

Table 1.1 Nationwide Trends and Staging Statistics

Type of Home	Average Days on Market	Average Days to Pending Status after Staging	Equity Increase
<i>Homes Listed for Sale Prior to Staging</i> These homes were not Staged for sale but were listed and did not sell. They then were Staged and sold quickly.	136 days (4.5 months)	7.6 days—up to 20 times faster than un-Staged homes!	3% minimum or \$26,000 average (as much as 50% or \$500,000 in some markets)
<i>Homes Listed for Sale after Staging</i> These homes were Staged and then listed for sale.	32–42 days (for un-Staged comparable homes)	6.8 days—2 to 3 times faster than un-Staged homes.	3% minimum or \$26,000 average (as much as 50% or \$500,000 in some markets)

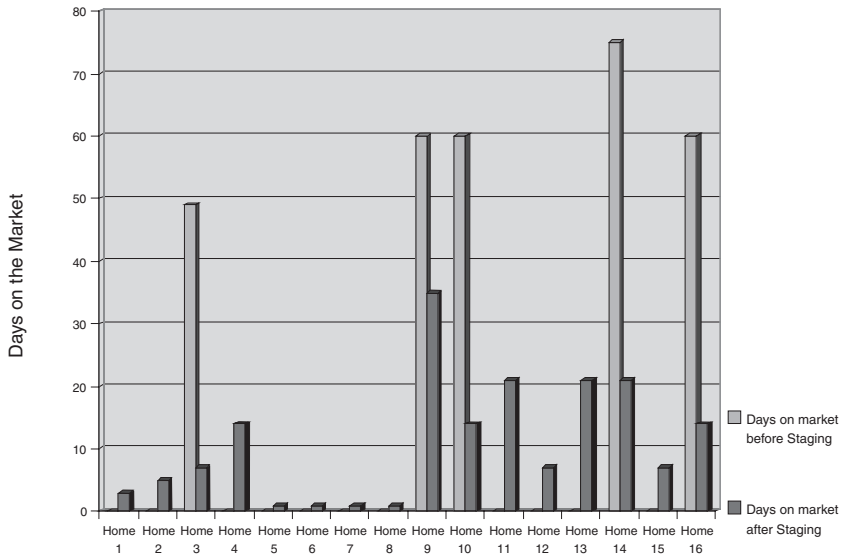


Figure 1.1 *Staging helps homes sell faster.* Some of the houses we surveyed had been sitting on the market for weeks or months.

STAGING SUCCESSES

Anecdotal evidence is even more impressive. The ASP Stagers I have trained frequently contact me with success stories, and every one of them warms my heart, even as it sustains my conviction that Staging is the most important change to come to real estate in generations.

Leigh Kendall-Lazarus, ASP, IAHSP, Staged a vacant house that had been on the market for seven months. After Staging, the house sold in three weeks for \$530,000, the full asking price. Annie Pinsker-Brown, ASP, wrote me about a condominium in Reseda, California. “I did a very detailed consultation for the client and he did all the work,” she said. The real estate agent told her the seller followed her recommendations to the letter, and the condo, which was, in Annie’s words, “a real bachelor pad without any feminine touches,” sold in the first five days on the market for \$335,000. The list price? \$324,000.

Jennie Norris, ASPM, deserves bragging rights because she

Staged a house that had been slated to be listed at \$310,000. Once Jennie worked her Staging magic, the real estate agent raised the price to \$317,000. There were five offers in five days, she says, and the house sold for \$330,000. Jennie says the best part for her is that the agent is now singing her praises all over town and the sellers are “smiling all the way to the bank.”

My student Donna Tanfani, ASP, sent me an e-mail saying that her client fired his first real estate agent. When he contracted with a new agent, that agent brought Donna on board. She Staged his vacant house, which by now had been on the market for more than two months, and it sold in 12 days. Both Donna and I raised our eyebrows in amazement when we heard that the first agent had told the homeowner that the house “did not need Staging.”

Massachusetts broker Melissa Even told me about a property that had had 20 showings and five open houses for the public, but nary an offer. Melissa knew the price was right, so she decided to Stage the property. Success! Two of the first four parties to tour the house returned for a second visit, and one made an offer that was accepted. (The other interested party asked to be notified if the first deal fell through, and a third potential buyer asked to be apprised if the property came back on the market.)

THE ASP DESIGNATION

As you read in the introduction to this book, I had a vision for the Home Staging industry. I have realized my dream, and today the industry operates with a set of standards and a high level of professionalism. I have worked hard to bring my vision to fruition and create the Staging business. I did not want to see it grow in popularity without any controls to guarantee that homeowners would get their money's worth and that home buyers would be treated to a fair representation of what they were purchasing.

With my creation of the Accredited Staging Professional (ASP)

designation, I am seeing my dream come true. Stagers and real estate agents who can add those three letters to their names are held in high regard throughout the industry.

The only way to earn the ASP designation—and the very best way to learn how to Stage—is to complete my three-day course. I teach the course, as do a group of superbly qualified trainers, through my company, StagedHomes.com. Upon completion of the course, students receive certification declaring them ASPs, which entitles them to use the designation after their name.

During the course, they learn the rudiments of Staging and get advice on setting up their own business. The three rigorous days consist of two and a half days of classroom instruction and a half day actually Staging a house for sale. After this training, the newly certified ASP Stagers are ready to take on the real estate market in their own regions.

But there's more. ASP Stagers are not sent from the classroom back to their home towns without ongoing support. StagedHomes.com offers help at every turn. This means that not only do the Stagers gain knowledge, skills, and personal empowerment from the ASP class, but they also have access to all that the company offers. These are some of the benefits:

- An ASP certificate at course completion.
- A copy of the ASP Stager manual and ASP Stager supplemental materials.
- An ASP Stager Career Book and Career Book DVD or video.
- The ASP Stager Marketing Portfolio.
- An ASP Marketing CD album.
- My DVDs (or videos) *How to Stage Your Home to Sell for Top Dollar!* and *How to Price Your Home to Sell for Top Dollar!*
- An ASP apron and ASP lapel pin.
- An information listing about themselves posted on the StagedHomes.com web site.

- Access to the web site where Stagers can post pictures of the houses they have Staged.
- Their own ASP feature page on the StagedHomes.com web site.
- Access to Staging University (more on this later).
- Permission to use the licensed Stage trademark.
- A one-year membership in the International Association of Home Staging Professionals (IAHSP).
- ASP continuing education courses as long as they remain ASP members in good standing.
- My best-selling book *Home Staging: The Winning Way to Sell Your House for More Money*.

ASP Stagers can easily further their education and attain an ASPM, which is a master's designation in Staging. To achieve this level, in addition to the ASP Stager course, they must complete a five-day, hands-on course working in the field with me. This intense period of instruction incorporates the latest ideas for marketing and building your business, as well as the most up-to-the-minute tips I have developed for Staging houses. We also go shopping to preview the newest Staging accessories and supplies. The Master's course requires students to prepare and present a bid and a consultation to me in front of other students, which I then critique. This is extremely beneficial because the students must learn to communicate more effectively. And, of course, good communication skills are key to becoming a top producer.

Real estate agents, too, can earn an ASP designation by attending the first two days of the Stagers' three-day course. This means the real estate agent invests half a day in Staging a house that is poised to go on the market. Real estate agents who earn the ASP real estate agent designation can help homeowners properly prepare their houses for sale and, most important, sell the houses quickly and profitably. These agents realize the value of Staging when they see it up close and experience it in action.

STAGING UNIVERSITY

I believe that education is all-important. I started my adult life as a schoolteacher, and although I moved into other fields, teaching has always been in my blood. For this reason, I founded and have expanded the Staging University, which is the only such institution of its kind. All ASP Stagers and ASP real estate agents have the opportunity to continue their education at the StagedHomes.com university.

Staging University is a rich resource for all ASPs. Their clients benefit, too, because the ASPs have access to the most up-to-date materials, forms, and education available anywhere. ASPs post Staging ideas on the university web site, as do I and my staff.

Becoming an ASP entitles you to read the latest issue of our monthly ezine, “B Stage,” download important legal and business forms, and surf through page upon page of before-and-after photographs. As you browse the online university, you will find new information with every click of the mouse, and you can count on my staff and me to update this information constantly. Staging University is a vital part of keeping the Home Staging industry on the cutting edge.

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HOME STAGING PROFESSIONALS

Everyone who qualifies as an ASP is automatically eligible to become a member of the International Association of Staging Professionals (IAHSP). Membership is renewable annually, and once you join, I am sure you will want to continue to belong. Why? Because IAHSP is all about community. It serves the needs of ASPs, just as ASPs serve the needs of the communities where they live and work.

Membership in the IAHSP enables you to participate in regional chapters with fellow ASP Stagers and ASP real estate agents, which

is a wonderful networking opportunity. You will receive the monthly newsletter, and you can participate in organized conference calls with other Stagers.

Opportunities for marketing are considerable with IAHSP membership. You can use the ASP logos; you can take advantage of relationships with companies such as PODS, 1-800-Got-Junk, and Linens-N-Things; and you will have access to a low-interest credit card. These benefits can be a big help to your clients, who tend to be cash poor while they are selling their property and buying a new one.

Perhaps the best benefit is that as an IAHSP member, you have access to your own featured page on which to showcase your Home Staging business. This featured page is your personal advertisement, telling visitors who you are, what you do, and why you are the best. Business will be driven from our web site to yours. The content of this page is yours to develop, although we will transfer the content from your ASP featured page to your IAHSP home page for you.

Once a year, the IAHSP Foundation, our charitable organization, hosts Staging Service Week, during which regional chapters get together and donate their time to Stage a public space as a way to serve their communities. This might be a shelter, a day care center, a hospice facility, or, as one chapter recently did, a Ronald McDonald House. Because Staging brings peace to a property, this process improves the environment for everyone involved with the Staged locale. Not only does this bring joy and beauty to a small corner of the world, it also brings Stagers together, in spirit and love, to accomplish something meaningful. ASPs contribute their time, talent, skills, and dollars in the service of others to share the gift of Staging.

PROFESSIONAL POLICIES

No one will be surprised to hear that some folks don't take Staging seriously—or at least not until they learn about its results. To head

these skeptics off at the pass, I can't emphasize enough how important it is to conduct yourself professionally as a Home Stager. Once you earn the ASP designation, it's imperative that you establish your own set of professional policies and let your clients know what they are.

I have my own policies and I am happy to share them with any ASP Stager. Yours may be similar to mine or they may be quite different, but as a rule they clearly state how you work and should be part of your written material, easily available to homeowners.

Your professional policies will establish the nuts and bolts of your business: what days you are available, when and how you can be reached by telephone or e-mail, whether you put up signs on the property announcing that it is being Staged, how you charge, and so forth.

Notice I said that the policies should state how you charge, but they not do list the fees. Those should be tailored to the particular job, although your policies will explain when you set your fees and how you go about figuring them. (Much more about this is in Chapter 6.)

I also expect all ASP Stagers and real estate agents to abide by the ASP Code of Ethics:

- I believe in my ability to help my clients Stage their properties.
- I will follow and protect this Code of Ethics for all Accredited Staging Professionals (ASPs).
- I will establish and maintain professional policies to hold my clients accountable to prepare their homes for sale and keep them in Staged showing condition until the home is sold and the inspection and appraisal are completed.
- I will protect the quality of Staging by following the Staging Criteria and only using the word "Staged" to describe homes that have truly met or exceeded those criteria.

- I will protect the Stage® trademark by including the registered trademark symbol (®) with any derivation of the word in any print advertising or marketing that I do.
- I will protect the Accredited Staging Professional™ trademark by including the trademark symbol (™) with any marketing or print advertising that I do with the ASP™ designation.
- I will honor the Staging University by not releasing my password to the university to anyone who is not an ASP member.
- I will display and market my ASP designation in my Staging marketing materials to inform people that I am an Accredited Staging Professional.
- I will educate my clients and the public as to the meaning and origin of Staging to enhance the ASP designation for all ASPs.
- I will bring credit to the ASP designation through my honesty, my integrity, and by honoring my clients and myself.
- I will honor all ASPs with the dignity and the respect of the designation for the greater good of all.