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Local Living



Kelley
Proxmire

6

secrets of home stagers

Upgrades you'll love even if you're not selling. **Page 6**

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AFTER

A townhouse in Southeast Washington's River Park was staged by Tyler Whitmore with the homeowner's furnishings. Work included thinning out books, adding a new light fixture and removing an entertainment unit.



BEFORE

ANCE HOAGLANDER, TOP; TYLER WHITMORE, ABOVE

INSIDE A STAGER'S EYE

Why put your home in its best light for someone else to love? Pros reveal six tricks to make a perfect space — all for you

BY JURA KONCIUS

Home stagers are the people who sweep through homes going on the market and make them look uncluttered and cozy without a huge investment of time or money. † What's their secret? † Stagers have a bag of design and organizing tricks that can be useful even to someone who has no plans to sell. They look to make a house or condo desirable to potential buyers and maximize price. They have practical ideas to refresh your stale living room or pump up your curb appeal. Stagers cast a critical eye on everything. They remove things. They group like items together, rearrange bookcases, toss out lumpy pillows and frame children's artwork previously hanging from magnets on the fridge. They might gather all your scattered framed family photos, edit them and display them on one shelf or tabletop. † Here are six ideas from four local stagers to get you started on an intervention in your own home.

BEFORE



AFTER



DEBBIE LABONSKI, BEFORE PHOTO: TYLER WHITMORE, AFTER PHOTO

CREATE A LIGHT AND AIRY BEDROOM

"Lots of bedrooms are small and have few windows," says Tyler Whitmore, owner of Bethesda staging and design firm Ta-da! Homes. She suggests painting walls a light color and bringing in a neutral rug. Beds are the largest piece in the room, so linens shouldn't stand out too much, she says. On a recent job at a Bethesda Cape Cod, Whitmore replaced a dark navy bedspread on a mahogany sleigh bed with a cream coverlet. The navy one, Whitmore says, "created a big black hole in the middle of the room." Replacing chunky, mismatched nightstands, she installed matching pedestal nightstands, reusing the existing crackled-glass lamps. She put a pair of framed European prints over the bed as a focal point. "It feels calm in here now," Whitmore says. "It's the retreat everyone is looking for."

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Chat Thursday at 11 a.m. Tyler Whitmore of Ta-da! Homes joins staff writer Jura Koncius for our weekly online Q&A on decorating and household advice. Submit questions at washingtonpost.com/home.

Meet the experts

Those who offer staging services come to the business from a variety of professions, whether decorating, organizing or even selling real estate. Their skills might include creating room settings, de-cluttering or accessorizing. Some staging jobs involve fine-tuning existing rooms; others, filling vacant houses with furniture and accessories in a stager's inventory. Stagers charge by the hour (about \$75 to \$200) or by the job, which would include fees for renting furniture.



Roslyn Ashford, of Ra ReDoes Rooms, a Silver Spring home staging firm, started her business in 2004 after taking a design course by Lauri Ward, the founder of Use What You

Have Interiors. Ashford is quick to emphasize the importance of the purge in the staging process. "We go through our clothes closets more frequently than we do the other stuff in our homes," she says. "When you've lived somewhere 10 or 20 years, you have to de-clutter all the rooms on a regular basis." www.rarooms.com



Laura McCaffrey, a real estate agent with Evers & Co. in the District, started including staging as part of her services as a listing agent about 10 years ago. "When I've finished staging

a house, so many people say things like, 'I wish I'd done this three years ago. Then I could have enjoyed it myself.'" McCaffrey, like many stagers, keeps a warehouse full of furniture and accessories she can dip into. But a lot of her work involves low-budget improvements such as rearranging an art wall or upgrading a dated lampshade. www.lauramccaffrey.com



Kelley Proxmire, who has been an interior designer for 30 years, added staging of high-end properties to her Bethesda design business in 2009.

Proxmire uses spray paint to rejuvenate lamp finials and rescue old planters. She hunts down soup tureens from closets and fills them with hydrangeas for the dining room. She is also in the middle of her own de-cluttering project, holding a sale at her Kensington warehouse Sept. 6 to clear out sofas, chairs, tables, pillows and lamps she's used in projects. Details of the sale are on her site. www.kelleyinteriordesign.com



Tyler Whitmore has owned Bethesda staging and design firm Ta-da! Homes since 2008, staging mid-century modern houses, Colonial-style and more. She also has a background in

graphic design and theater production. Whitmore advises customers to take a critical eye to every room in the house and "think like you're going to sell the house, even if you're not." She has a consignment store, Tyler Whitmore Interiors in Kensington, where she can sell pieces her clients no longer need. www.tadahomes.com

BEFORE



AFTER



PHOTOS FROM MIRACLE METHOD

GIVE THE BATHROOM A FACELIFT

Laura McCaffrey, a real estate agent and home stager with Evers & Co. in the District, sees lots of unusual bathroom tile color combinations in Washington's 1920s and 1930s houses: yellow and black, gray and maroon, pink and green. Yes, it's retro, but with age, tiles crack and bathtubs chip. Many homeowners don't want to shell out big bucks to gut their bathrooms. So to update them, she swears by Miracle Method, a service that sprays an acrylic, usually white, coating that bonds to existing tile and tub in a layering process not unlike painting techniques used in the automotive industry. Broken or cracked tiles can also be repaired and sprayed. According to Mary Ann O'Hara from Miracle Method's Kensington franchise, a standard bathroom tub and tile surface refinishing costs about \$1,900. You can add a new vanity, a medicine cabinet and hardware for an additional charge. New floor tiles can be laid on top of existing tile. And then you don't have to hunt for yellow and black towels or shower curtains.

HOME TIPS CONTINUED ON 8

Adopting a pro's view

HOME TIPS FROM 7



Laura McCaffrey

Give the front door an unexpected color, and consider carrying it into the room it opens up to, professional stagers say.

MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Your front door and shutters welcome people to your home and should be painted regularly to look fresh and polished. Front doors are traditionally painted colors such as glossy black, barn red, forest green or white. Whitmore also likes the idea of painting the front door in a color that will hint at what is inside.

McCaffrey is fond of giving the front door an unexpected color. She encourages clients not to match the colors of shutters and front doors. In one project on a brick Colonial in Washington's American University Park neighborhood, she found a front door and shutters both painted a sage green. McCaffrey chose a darker green to paint the shutters so that they stand out.



Kevin Allen

Kelley Proxmire had carpet cut specifically to fit the space in her own dining room, making it look larger. Proxmire uses lots of green plants in her work, and is adamant that they look healthy.

UPGRADE RUGS

If your rug needs replacement, don't just buy a standard 8-by-10 or 9-by-12 and plop it into your room. Kelley Proxmire, a Bethesda interior designer who added staging to her design business in 2009, suggests buying a wool remnant and getting it cut to perfectly fit your space. She often finds a good selection at Carpet Palace in Bethesda. She likes to have carpet sized to fit around fireplace hearths or bay windows. This makes your room look bigger and neater, she says. If you can't afford new carpet, use small Oriental or area rugs you might have stashed in a closet or basement on top of an existing rug to personalize your look. Layering a small rug in front of a sofa can be an especially smart idea if kids eat snacks there.

GIVE YOUR HOUSEPLANTS A ONCE-OVER

Plants, whether succulents, ferns or rosemary topiaries, add to the look and energy of a room. Yet many people seem to be running plant hospitals, Proxmire says. "I see forlorn sticks in dusty old pots scattered all over the place," she says. Proxmire advises looking over your plants on a regular basis; she does it every Sunday. "Be brutally honest. If the plant really doesn't look great, get rid of it." She isn't totally heartless: She has created an orchid revival area on a deep windowsill in her home, behind some indoor shutters, where she can keep an eye on dormant orchids without putting them on public view.

SEPARATE MATCHING SETS OF FURNITURE

"Lots of people go to a furniture store and buy matching sofas and loveseats and put them in their living rooms," says Roslyn Ashford of Ra Redoes Rooms, a Silver Spring staging firm. "They stay there forever." Ashford says many Washington living rooms aren't big enough for two sofas, and a loveseat rarely is sat on by more than one person. She often replaces a bulky piece with a chair that takes up less space and makes the room seem larger. In bedrooms, Ashford finds sets of matching massive wooden beds, side tables and dressers. Eight-drawer chests with mirrors are often jammed into a corner. "Most bedrooms can't support that much furniture. Take the chest and put it in a hallway, dining room or an office, or any room you need storage." She suggests putting a small dresser in a bedroom closet to save floor space.

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Roslyn Ashford

Roslyn Ashford finds that many people have too much furniture crammed into small rooms. A rehabbed Shaw rowhouse that she staged illustrates how using a simple chair or two is a better idea than a heavy loveseat.

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