Doing a Successful Makeover

Home Staging

BY CAROL E. LEVY

If you are contemplating selling your home, you probably know that the residential real estate market in New York City has rebounded dramatically since last year. However, to ensure the most successful sale in any market, it's important to never lose sight of the importance of a home makeover.

Making the First Impression

Home "makeovers" or the art of "staging" is exactly what it sounds like; putting your home on a stage for your audience of buyers.Whether your property requires a minor staging, a major renovation, or something in between, the best presentation to the public is essential.

From the initial moment when a buyer enters a property, a first impression is immediately formed as to whether they would be excited to call it their home. As they continue to tour the entire residence, purchasers imagine themselves and the possibility of living there. If you are properly guided by an experienced broker who has expert vision and knows the best and widest audience to target, the additional effort to improve your home through staging can increase its market price by 10 to 30 percent. The ratio between your investment and return can vary widely, but the money spent to "makeover" a home can yield a return of 10 to 100 times the cost.

Selecting Your Target Audience

The New York market is unique, and a skilled broker will know how to tailor the right setting to the widest audience of intended buyers, while also being sensitive to your budget. From the deliberate color choices to the style of the décor and placement of the furniture, expert staging is imperative, even though the choices may not necessarily reflect your personal taste. For example, when targeting families, a room set up as a home office would be better staged as a bedroom that is more useful for couples with children. When appealing to a more affluent crowd, an important focus is creating an upscale and formal entertaining space. By focusing on the aesthetics of your home, as well as its livability, you will enhance your property's value in the minds of the targeted market.

Modest Makeovers, Maximum Returns

One recent example that underscores this point involved a two-bedroom Manhattan apartment that was valued at \$1.275 million. Just a couple of weeks before putting the property on the market, I convinced the sellers to allow me to redesign the layout into a three-bedroom, which required only minimal effort.

Increasing the room count almost always increases the value of any given property, as long as each new room is at least 70 square feet and has a window. Therefore, on behalf of my clients, I hired an excellent, affordable, and expeditious contractor to construct a wall to divide the huge master bedroom with windows on opposite ends of the room in half. The result? Each of the two new bedrooms created from the master had windows, and both were still of ample size.

Next, a fresh coat of linen-white paint over its original dark grey color made the entire apartment appear brighter and larger. New stainless steel appliances replaced the outdated white ones, new cabinetry handles were added, and luxurious new bedding and shower curtains were put into the bedrooms and bathrooms. We also decluttered the entire apartment, rearranged the furniture for better flow and had the windows professionally cleaned. The entire transformation took only 1 ½ weeks for a total cost of approximately \$15,000, and the apartment listed for \$1.5 million. After only two weeks on the market, a bidding war ensued and the unit sold for \$1.55 million. The \$15,000 makeover increased the apartment's value by \$275,000 over its original market price of \$1.275 million, yielding a return of over 20 times the makeover cost, or in other words, over 20 percent additional profit.

A Budget Makeover

Of course, some sellers do not have the time or capital to spend on their homes prior to marketing them. When that is the case, and when even a quick paint job to freshen up the apartment is out of the question, it's still amazing how a nominal amount of effort can result in a big payoff. As a general rule, decluttering, possible furniture rearranging to achieve a more spacious feel, a thorough scrubbing and cleaning that includes the windows and rugs, changing low wattage bulbs to high wattage, and adding fresh flowers as a finishing touch take only a day or two to complete and can still boost value by double-digits.

One cannot emphasize enough the importance of the art of staging and renovating a home in order to achieve the highest price and generate the shortest marketing time. And, luckily for New Yorkers, the real estate market has rejuvenated and now is an excellent time to sell. It is also critical to hire a professional who has the expertise to guide you through the makeover, at whatever level is undertaken, to ensure the right decisions are made that effectuate a more marketable property and yield the highest results. For what may amount to relatively minimal effort, one can tremendously maximize the value of their residence. ■

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