

Stage right

Staging can instantly increase your rental property's value and desirability. Here's how to do it right

We're all aware of the importance of home staging a property for selling – generating maximum appeal and demand, and getting the most ROI as quickly as possible. But staging also plays a key role in securing tenants for rental properties as investors, looking to get the most from their real estate investments, want reliable, headache-free tenants who'll pay top dollar. And they want to secure them quickly. This is where rental staging comes in.

Pro stager Donna Ragona, who services from Barrie to the Waterloo and all areas in between, explains the benefits of rental staging in a handy acronym, S.T.A.G.E.:

- Stand out from the competition
- Target ideal A and B tenants
- Avoid extra expenses and mortgage payments
- Get top rent and increase cash flow
- Eliminate vacancies much faster

Like any other properties, rental pricing

is driven by supply and demand. There are, of course, fixed and variable components. While location, for instance, may be beyond your control, the condition of the unit, relative to similar properties in the surrounding inventory, is certainly in your power to change. Is it worth the effort? Well, improving the aesthetic of a unit to make it stand out from the competition is certainly a bona fide technique for creating greater demand. And with greater demand comes a boost in price, which, in turn, tends to get it occupied faster and allow the landlord a greater selection of tenants. In the real estate investment game there is one primary objective for any successful landlord: fast occupancy of best tenancy paying more money.

So how can you truly enhance a rental apartment? According to Ragona, the two key rooms for staging are the entrance and the bathroom. For the latter, adding towels, candles, prints and fake plants can really

WHAT DOES EFFECTIVE STAGING DO?



- 1 Builds an emotional attachment by creating a warm and inviting place to live
- 2 Highlights positive characteristics and focal points addressed in your advertising (fireplaces, finished basements, eat-in kitchens)
- 3 Turns a negative into a positive (use small square-footage wisely/properly)
- 4 Creates better-looking online pictures
- 5 Helps "close" tenants; now they can visualize the space better



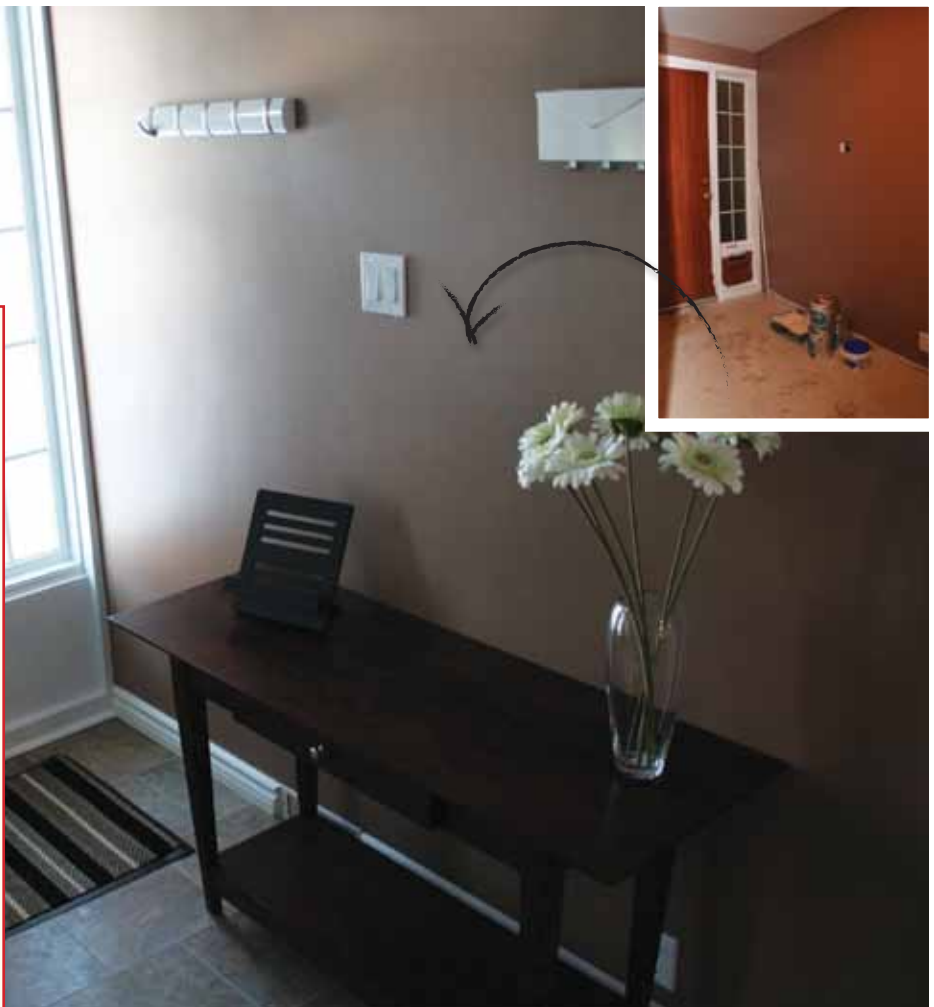
DOES STAGING WORK?



The following stats are from the Real Estate Staging Association (RESA) study, released Feb 2010*

- 117 vacant homes – staged before going on market – sold on average in 42 days.
- 87 vacant – not staged properties – sat previously on the market for 277 days unsold. After staging they sold within 63 days on average.

*This study includes 87 vacant homes (not staged) previously on the market an average of 277 days unsold. Those homeowners had their properties staged. Those same homes sold in 63 days on average after staging. This is 78% less time on the market.



CARDBOARD FURNITURE STAGING



Q&A with pro stager Donna Ragona on the curious (and curiously economical) technique of cardboard-furniture staging for her clients

Q How did you start staging with cardboard furniture?

I was actually doing research on (staging) alternatives and I came across this U.S. company that started this as an alternative to stagers who want a simpler and most cost-effective way to stage over using “real furniture.” I find it a great alternative since I can fit three full rooms worth of inventory in my SUV. There is no need to order the real furniture, ensure they have stock, arrange

delivery etc. I keep my entire inventory at home so there is no extra cost to me to have a storage unit. I have been dealing with the supplier over the past few months as he is interested in making more of a presence in Ontario/GTA and getting more stagers/agents/investors etc. aware of this alternative.

How does it work?

When I get a client requesting staging using the cardboard, I have my own inventory. If I end up needing more, I order through the supplier. There are different pieces depending on the pieces being used. The pieces all are collapsible so I put them in a tote bag and then set them up once I arrive at the property. The pieces are very easy to set up and come with slipcovers for the living room set, headboard covers and skirts for the beds. I have staged properties using solely the cardboard furniture as well as a combination of “real” furniture and cardboard furniture.

How does it save?

A. The savings using cardboard are amazing. An example of staging using real furniture would be a living room, which can cost anywhere from about \$350/month and up. This is for the rental of the furniture only, which includes pieces such as the sofa, loveseat, side table, coffee table, rug and accessories. Prices will vary depending on the furniture selected (more high-end costs more). The pricing for the staging will then be on top of that price. Any rental lasting over a month is charged the monthly rate.

When using the corrugated furniture, I have various pricing packages. For instance, one room would cost \$150/month and that would include the setup, accessories and take-down. I then have other packages such as \$450/month for three rooms done (plus I include other services such as the bathrooms accessorized, colour consultation, setup/take-down). I have one other package for \$850/month for five rooms done (plus I include services such as foyer and



bathroom accessorized, colour consultation, setup and take-down). My rental cost for rentals lasting more than one month is \$150. Basically for the cost of one room using real rental furniture, an investor can stage the three rooms of their rental property using corrugated furniture.

Any ancillary benefits?

Yes, since the furniture is cardboard, it is “recyclable.” I use it over and over again and it is eco-friendly.



OTHER TOP TIPS FOR DO-IT-YOURSELF STAGING:



The key is to depersonalize so that prospective buyers can visualize themselves living in your home -- so remove photos and personal items

- Seriously de-clutter (consider putting things in storage)
- Add fresh flowers
- Clean really, really, really well (including your windows, carpets, and ceiling fans)
- Use new or very clean linens, towels, shower curtains
- Instead of real candles, use battery operated
- Keep driveways/walkways clear (snow, ice, garbage)
- Keep temperature comfortable according to season (programmable)
- Keep toilet seats down and closet doors closed
- Flowers / Potted Plant / Arrangements when possible – (outside)
- Entrance – print / small plant / rug
- Bathrooms – clean white rolled towels / scented soaps or diffusers
- Kitchen – print / inexpensive accessories (fake fruit, bowls)
- Brighten by changing bulbs (use daylight CFLs/13w=60 or more)

warm up a bathroom. Make sure the bathroom is sparkling clean. There are many low-cost options for lighting that can be used if the current lighting is outdated.

As for the entrance: visitors typically have their first impressions within the first 30 seconds of entering. Make this area as welcoming as possible (small inexpensive table, prints, plant).

Going green is another key. Some renters may have sticker-shock when it comes to the additional costs involved in renting a home, namely monthly utility and fuel bills. Ensure that any modification or adjustments – such as

the addition of energy-saving appliances – are readily evident to the visitor.

Ultimately, staging makes the dwelling appear more spacious and useable, accentuates the positives and makes it look and feel more appealing. Successful staging makes applicants say: “This place is for me!” It also drives up the demand for the rental property, which typically means the landlord will have the benefit of additional motivated renters and has the luxury of accepting the most suitable, reliable and problem-free tenant – the one that best suits their criteria and can afford to pay well for the unit in question. 🏠