



# Depersonalizing & Decluttering a Home for Sale



Last week I was hired for a “Decluttering/Staging” job - My first job since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak. My Aunt and Uncle placed their home of twenty years on the market and were asked by their real estate agent to stage the home in preparation for a virtual tour. This house is like many in a small town setting: Large and in charge. It has five bedrooms, two bathrooms, a ton of living space, a balcony that could host 25 people and storage GALORE.

I walked into the house with my mother and we toured the space with fresh eyes (or prospective client eyes). The walls were filled with memorabilia and, though she’d worked tirelessly to keep the space clean and tidy, the sheer quantity of items showcased made the space seem smaller than it really is. My initial reaction was actually unexpected, as I remained quiet for the majority of the tour. I felt protective of the space and the changes that we were about to make. I felt fiercely protective over my Aunt and Uncle’s feelings. Protective of a home that had hosted me since childhood. This house was them. Every room was a memory, a story, a piece of these four incredible people. It’s been a shelter in the tough times and an oasis from the harsh winters. It’s been Christmases and birthdays. The good, the bad and the ugly. I was suddenly reminded of the bravery that is necessary when downsizing occurs. Change is terrifying, this is a huge deal, and no one can prepare you for the emotional rollercoaster that comes in waves as prospective clients tour your home, and think of how they can change it to make it their own.

These moments are slow moving, deeply emotional and draining. They were left with very little guidance from their agent and lacked instructions on the methods they could use to help make the task less difficult. They watched as their home became less and less their own, piece by piece, to let others see the space as it was prior to their personalization. Although this can be cathartic to some, it can also be a very emotional process. Allowing anyone into your home can be overwhelming, especially when they're openly judging the space - your space - An extension of everything that you've cultivated and created.

My first piece of advice when it comes to prepping your home for a sale is to remember that this is not personal. This is the way of things. Prospective clients are often unable to see past the customization of a home. As each person is different and it is human nature to nest, it is also important to remember that your personal style may not be the same as someone else's. Sometimes so much so, that it can turn potential clients off if they are unable to see past the personalization within. There is a reason why stagers often use minimalism as a tool. White, stark walls showcase the natural light of a space. Less furniture allows the prospective clients to see the space they will be working with. It is far easier to see themselves in a space that has been de-personalized. When I speak of this with clients I often reference hotel rooms or Airbnb's, which are spaces that still have the necessities and allow you the comforts of home, but are not overwhelming with personal belongings and paraphernalia.

Secondly, you want to come through the space as objectively as possible. Imagine if you were a client. What are you paying attention to? What is going to turn you off? The answer is usually clutter, colors, and updates that could have easily been taken care of prior to the listing of the home. I know the common mentality is “why would I invest into a home I’m selling”... The answer? **BECAUSE YOU’LL MAKE IT BACK.** I am not asking you to go and spend thousands of dollars updating everything you see that could be a potential issue, but instead, suggesting that you spend a few hundred dollars to help streamline your home. A home is one of the only investments you make that doesn’t depreciate the second it becomes yours. If you invest in a can of paint, some magic erasers, maybe a grout pen or two, people will see the efforts you made and the care put in. In this scenario I asked my Aunt to remove the majority of her family photos, as well as all of the stickers my cousins had collected and stuck on their walls, furniture and doors. Any items that could be removed, including dressers, shelves and cabinets, were placed into storage containers and closets to create a tidy appearance. She also took the time to colour match in the main living space so as not to distract prospective clients with mismatched paint, and filled the many holes left over from decor and photographs.

The next thing that I can not stress enough is that not all agents are going to help you through this process. The lack of information that my Aunt and Uncle were given prior to their virtual tour was astounding to me; All the Agent said was “Stage it”. Well, gee... thanks sir. That could mean 100 different things to someone. It is important to remember that agents are taking a percentage of your sale and if they are asking you to stage your home, they should be giving you the resources to do so. This should include a list of updates they recommend you make, some suggestions to help maximize your space and rooms to focus your energy on. Some agents offer rental furniture, some work with stagers. This is the least they can do to help you (and them) make the sale more profitable. Don't be afraid to ask for the assistance of people who know what clients are looking for.

I could go on for days about the strange and difficult emotions that come with downsizing, decluttering and depersonalizing. This is something that I find is lacking discussion and I think it's hugely important to point out the raw uncomfotability that comes with all of these steps. I want to scream from the rooftops, “YOU ARE NOT ALONE. THIS IS TERRIFYING. THIS IS HARD, THIS IS SCARY.” But, I always want to remind you that this is a step of growth. You will move into your new home and feel the clean slate, the opportunity to downsize your belongings and take stock of your ecological footprint. It's change and personal growth in the most beautiful way. It's a fresh start and it represents opportunity and new chapters of life.

Remember:

A physical home is not the same as memories that you've created there.

**You can do this y'all.**

**I promise.**

**Let's take your living space from Hot-Mess to Freaky Neat.**