

Selling A House Quickly Takes More Than Baking Cookies

Regina Cole



Irene Kerzner and Heidi Wells of Concierge Home Sales do it all, from ironing to carpentry, while preparing a listing for the market. — Margaret Lampert

A realtor's trick for making a house more appealing 20 years ago was to introduce the smell of freshly baked cookies. Those were the quaint old days. Today, every real estate agent knows the value of staging a house. "Staging," a term for decluttering and neutralizing, usually consists of cleaning and fixing obvious problems. The house is stripped of excess personality and stuff, and re-arranged to show off its best features. It might include painting and carpentry, or new linens and better lighting.

But how much does this actually affect the listing's sale price, or how quickly it sells?

Quite a bit, as it turns out. Since starting Concierge Home Sales, a Boston-area real estate sales and staging company, Heidi Wells and Irene Kerzner have worked together on 55 properties, 95% of which have sold for at least the asking price after the first weekend of open houses.

"The average is about 10% over the asking price, but it has gone considerably higher at times," Kerzner says. She brings the property sales expertise to the partnership, while Wells' firm, Silk Purse Design, heads up staging from a 9,000-square-foot, two-story warehouse where home furnishings are organized and stacked to the rafters.

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“Sometimes, people feel that they should not have to spend any money to make their house more salable,” Kerzner says. “I try to show them that a house that is well prepared sells for more, faster.”

“In the warehouse we have a washer and dryer, a carpet cleaner, a big sink,” Wells explains. “We are very hands-on. We refinish furniture, do upholstery ... if I don’t have it, we can make it.”

Karen Landry, a broker at RE/MAX Destiny in the Greater Boston and Metrowest areas believes that every property offered for sale requires staging.

“Every home is a ‘redo.’ There is emotional space that needs to appeal to the buyer in general. Because 93% + of the buyers searching for a home first shop online, the photos of a home must grab the attention of the consumer.”

She adds, “Decluttering is the number one focus of preparing any home for sale. Personal items detract from the showing experience since buyers need to psychologically place themselves there. A home well presented with staging will almost take the place of a newer constructed home since it will give the impression of a ‘remodeled’ look.”

Production fees for Concierge Home Sales services usually range from \$2,500 and \$5,000.

“People who have seen the greatest gains spent \$10,000 to \$20,000,” Kerzner said. “Those were big projects and cost far more than the norm. But in those cases, the sellers realized sales prices of \$100,000 more than they were asking.”

In 2016, their collaboration helped to sell a single-family home in Newton, Massachusetts that had languished on the market.

“It had been a two-family and still had that setup. The second floor had an identical layout to the first floor, and now there was an extra kitchen in the house,” Wells says.

Concierge Home Sales converted the upstairs kitchen into a crafts room and used some of the extra space to create a beautiful closet for the master bedroom. The home, which was listed at \$1.25 million sold for \$1.378 million.

Another property discouraged buyers with its red lacquer kitchen and adjoining dark brown dining room.

“There, all we did was to paint the kitchen bisque, which pulled the colors together,” Wells said. “After that, it sold right away for more than the asking price.”

A former carriage house in Newton was “beautiful, but very quirky,” she said. “The only way to get up or down stairs was via a metal spiral staircase. Spiral stairs are always a bit awkward to negotiate, and this one felt precarious. We carpeted the metal treads to make the staircase feel less slippery and more secure. That was all it took. The house was listed at \$1.295 million; it sold for \$1.6 million.”

No baking was required.



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I learned about historic houses from the best: owners who lovingly preserved and restored them, and preservationists who shared their knowledge. When I first began to write about old houses, I depended on the generous help of people who care about the past, and about how we can learn from it. They taught me the difference between timber and balloon framing, Greek Revival and Italianate house styles, and the unrivaled value of old-growth wood. That led to a career as a freelance design writer with a specialty in historic architecture and the history of the American and European decorative arts. After two decades of writing about historic architecture for a number of publications, I have yet to be bored, either by old houses, or their owners.