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L.B. Schmidt
CREATIVE - SERVICES

Staged to Sell

Avoiding common mistakes can help sell your home fast

By Valerie Hill | Record Staff

As a professional home stager, Lynda Schmidt notes that many homeowners trying to sell their homes often make the same mistakes: too much stuff, dated flooring, dark rooms or startling wall colours.

Schmidt runs the New Dundee-based L.B. Schmidt Creative Services and is contracted by homeowners and real estate agents who see untapped potential in homes about to go on the market. "The biggest thing is clutter, too much stuff," she said, referring to the clutter as "visual noise."

With rooms filled with collections, family photos, religious icons, furniture and toys, prospective buyers tend to focus on the stuff rather than the room itself and if that first showing proves negative, chances are the buyer will simply move on, she said.

"Every potential buyer only knows what they see, not the potential (of the house)."

It's really all about first impressions

Buyers will also zero in on items that catch their eye, like that defeated old couch in the rec room. "Even though the furniture shouldn't matter, it does." Purchase slip covers or remove the couch all together. Also, think of furniture placement: in a small dining room for example, placing the chairs at two sides of the table rather than on all four sides will provide more space.

Most importantly sellers must "de-personalize" the space, which means removing all personal items, anything that smacks of the homeowner's tastes or interests.

"Painting has the biggest impact and is the cheapest," she said. "And remove old, dated wallpaper." Removing extra furniture can also make a difference: a small living room with a couch, loveseat and three or four chairs makes the room seem cramped and small.

Schmidt suggests having the bedrooms and bathroom appear unused: remove cleaning products as well as personal items such as shampoos and cosmetics. Kitchens are also an issue as homeowners tend to keep everything on the counters, from coffee makers to spice racks. Clear it off. "You're selling counter space, not the stuff on the counter," she said, adding: "Empty and organize your closets."

Repairs should be done before the first showing. Every flaw, from having to remove wallpaper border to updating the kitchen flooring, will give the buyer an excuse to "chip away" at the



price, which can mean the seller loses more in the sale than it would cost to do the upgrades, she said.

When she is hired to stage a home Schmidt rents larger items such as furniture though she has her own warehouse filled with everything from candlesticks to art work to give homes some oomph -- which could mean the difference between a quick sale and languishing on the market.

"A high percentage will pay more for a property they can move into without doing a thing," she noted.

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Selling Points: Tips to Make a Home Sale Easier

That adage you never get a second chance to make a first impression holds true when staging a home. Start by conducting a house inspection: make a list of what needs to be done and separate your personal feelings. Don't think of it as your home but rather a commodity that's for sale.

- Declutter by removing personal collections and small items such as magazines, knick-knacks, flower arrangements.
- Ensure everything is spotless: clean up the dog poop and make sure the home is odour-free (smoke outside). Schmidt does not recommend burning scented candles as some people have sensitivities.
- A house with the same coloured walls throughout will look larger but keep the colour neutral.
- Keep the air temperature comfortable: no cold floors.
- Find temporary homes for all pets and rent a storage locker if need be for the clutter.
- Edit and organize closets because buyers do open doors. You want to create the feeling of space in every room, even cupboards.
- Show the intention of the room: a bedroom shouldn't be used as a computer room nor should a dining room serve as the kids' playroom.
- Replace heavy, dark drapes and valances. Push back curtains and let the sun shine in.
- Invest in new bedding with matching pillow shams.
- Remove scatter rugs though a large area rug can help define a room space.
- Play easy listening music throughout the house.
- Fresh flowers are a nice touch.

Courtesy L.B. Schmidt | Creative Services