



Styled for SUCCESS

Have you ever walked into a house open-for-sale inspection only to think “no way,” and walk straight out again? How many properties have you seen on the market that look tired yet top dollar is expected? Rooms appear tiny as oversized furnishings and ‘interesting’ decor overwhelm your senses and distract you from its good points. Now, have you ever walked into an open-house and thought, “Wow, this place is lovely!” The exterior is well maintained, the home is tastefully decorated and what about those great wall colours? The entire atmosphere has a welcoming feeling, so you swallow your excitement, and put on your best Oscar-winning performance as you wander around the property remaining cool and aloof all the while thinking to yourself, “I really want it!”



The big question when selling a home is just how to create that ‘I want it’ vibe. “Presentation is paramount,” says Karen Muller, Colour Designer and Interior Stylist for Real Living Interiors. Many factors influence the sale of a home but with guidance and a few handy hints you can easily enhance the look of your property. Just remember, as the saying goes, first impressions count! Here Karen uses a recent project to highlight some hints on property styling.



My initial impression of this 1970s white double-brick house was that it looked like a small, rather modest home in a leafy, wide street. How wrong could I be? This family home was actually deceptively large with four bedrooms, three bathrooms, separate dining, three living areas – with one set up as a billiards room complete with its own bar – a study, masses of storage, two garages, and let’s not forget the swimming pool for Sydney’s hot summer days. And the bonus for the golf fanatic? It’s in walking distance of a course!”

Externally the front garden needed tidying up; and internally the carpet, although in good condition, needed a steam-clean. As the property was well-maintained, it would be overkill to do anything more. With the owner’s cooperation our mini-makeover began.

Hint 1: Be subjective – look around your property with fresh eyes. Imagine how your home could look if you gave it a quick makeover. Tidy up those overgrown gardens, paint outdated wall colours and get help to fix the obvious handyman jobs you’ve neglected for years.

As I walked around I looked for original features I could highlight. For example, the beautifully curved entry walls that are echoed in the master bedroom, the original kitchen that was still in fantastic condition, a brick feature wall in the family room, and textured wallpaper which the owners placed throughout the home when they bought it in 1976. Taking away from these great features, though, was the feeling that some rooms were sparse and lacked personality without furniture, while others needed a good de-clutter and tidy.



My brief from the listing agent, Hylton John from McGrath Lindfield, was to furnish a few rooms for photos and give them a homey feel. “It’s harder to sell a home without furniture as some buyers can’t visualise what a house can look like,” Hylton states. “If left unstyled, marketing campaigns can be longer and the offers lower, therefore more costly to the vendor in the long run.” Knowing the target market was likely to be a family, my mission was to evoke a relaxed mood and style suited to the age of the home. With limited time up my sleeve I needed to move fast.

Hint 2: Space manipulation – does your home look cluttered? Is the bookshelf overflowing, and is the furniture squeezed into a room making it appear smaller or, on the other hand, empty and lifeless? Are doorways clear, and are there easy-flow traffic areas through rooms? Do you need to borrow or hire furniture to make the space appealing or give the room an instant update?

Hint 3 Realisation – if you’ve engaged a selling agent, understand the timeframes you’ve committed to. Can you do all the work you want to before the marketing campaign begins, or do you need outside help? Can you be subjective enough to tweak your home to maximise its appeal to the buyers?



In the corner of the lounge room was a lovely curved nook. Wanting to draw the eye around the room and show how space can be used, I put a study desk and chair in this area and decorated it with an elegant lamp with modern fittings to lend an eclectic touch. Simple, yet effective.

As first impressions count I wanted to set a harmonious feeling upon entry. The formal lounge and dining room are visible from the foyer so, picking up on the existing palette in those rooms, I was guided by the teal blue curtains, wallpaper and neutral-toned carpets, as well as the dark-framed aluminium door that leads out to the sunroom overlooking a national park – calm, harmonious and serene. To maximise the space I chose a softly striped couch with rolled arms complemented by two single armchairs, all in keeping with the colour scheme but with a small amount of red to lift the room. The dark-framed prints repeated the colour of the doors, while the coffee and side tables reduced the formality and added a contemporary feel.

Hint 4: First impressions count – I can't repeat it too often. The exterior of a home can make a buyer want to walk into it or walk away. Similarly, the first interior room can set the feel for the entire house.



Hint 5: Draw the eye around a room through furnishings. Clever placement of furniture and decorative pieces will allow the viewer to discover the home's best features.

As the dining room was located on a split-level landing, consideration was given to what was in view of that area such as the panelled ceiling in the entry, the visual link to the formal lounge, and direct access to the kitchen. To repeat the colours of the panelled ceilings and the tables in the lounge room, a dark wooden table was sourced, and complemented by the less formal and more family-orientated high-back rattan chairs. The focal point of the room is the table centrepiece that's highlighted by the backdrop of a beautifully soft curved wall leading from the entry.

Hint 6: Be aware of adjoining rooms. You can create a sense of flow through the house and link the various rooms by echoing distinctive features.





In the family room I wanted to embrace the quirks of the original kitchen with its visible copper rangehood and the brown-brick feature wall – not shown in the photos. Modular furniture just wouldn't look right in this room so I chose to go with neutral two-seaters with side and coffee tables in the same stain as their legs. The soft furnishings were chosen specifically to complement the existing substrates, and my personal favourite – the cowhide bar stools – just had to be on display. I found these gorgeous seats with their heavily engraved wooden legs tucked away downstairs in the owners' billiard room. Set lazily under the Chianti bottles that swung from the ceiling over the built-in bar, the cowhide stools added a sense of fun that wouldn't be matched otherwise.

Hint 7: When styling, give consideration to the era of your home and add focal pieces of interest. You'll get best results working with the style of the house and adding subtle contemporary elements rather than going all-out with jarringly modern pieces.

I wanted to create a restful space in the bedroom and chose crisp white linen to convey a contemporary feel. Soft coffee colours and neutral tones were brought in to pick up the detailing in the curtains and this, coupled with the textured wallpaper, created a classic backdrop. Silver-framed prints hang serenely on the walls, a far cry from the wild artworks of the era this home once would have been part of.



Hint 8: Neutrals never date. Add coloured accessories to create the feel you're after. Never underestimate the power of a few well-chosen cushions, lamps and rugs to give an individual look or update the basics.

At the time of publication this home was for sale. To receive further information on the property please contact Hylton John of McGrath Lindfield Sydney on 0418 117 517 or email hyltonjohn@mcgrath.com.au



Preparing a home for sale can be a time-consuming and stressful process. It's important to surround yourself with a solid team that can support you. If you're time-poor, allow a professional to take away the stresses of pre-sale styling for you. Stylists can offer ideas, then it's up to you to decide what suggestions you want to take on board, how you implement them or if you choose to outsource them.

Hint 9: Choose your agent wisely. It's important to deal with a well-qualified agent you can trust, and one who knows your local area will have an advantage in selling your property.

Good luck selling your home!

Hint 10: For the time-poor or those who simply need advice to get them started, consider using a stylist who can get you underway. By getting a quick sale and better price you'll be well ahead.

For information on Real Living Interiors, Interior Styling or Colour Consulting services, Karen can be contacted through Real Living Interiors; website www.reallivinginteriors.com.au or mobile 0411 850 264.

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