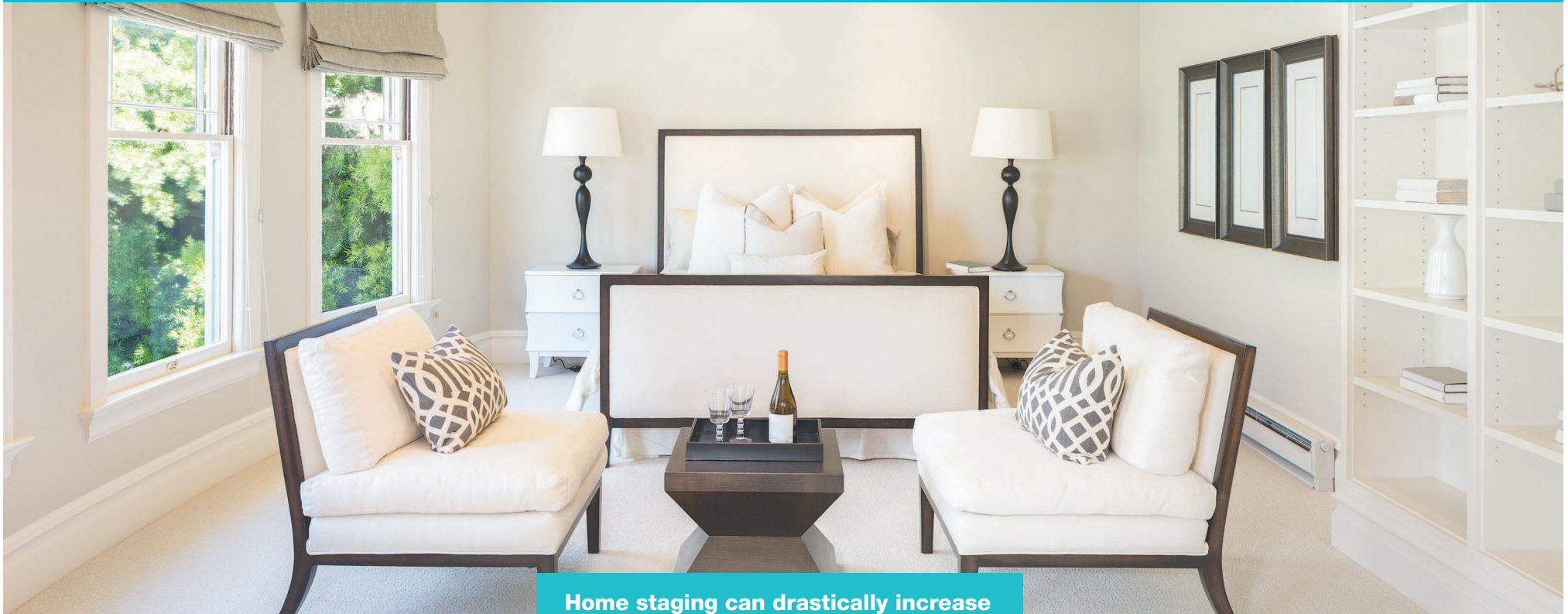


STAGING ON A BUDGET



Home staging can drastically increase a home's chances of selling and even boost its sales price. But there are some less drastic steps you can take to set the scene inside your home during showings and open houses.

Home staging can range from less than \$1,000 to \$5,000. According to Kiplinger, the average home-staging service costs \$1,800 and includes bringing in furniture, neutralizing the decor and priming a home to look its best in person and in photos. If staging isn't in your budget, here are some less pricey ways to put your home's best foot forward.

Exterior

Any good agent or seller knows all about curb appeal, yet sometimes this crucial first impression still isn't a good one. Keep it simple by mowing, trimming bushes and pulling weeds. Porches tend to accumulate junk, so clearing out unused items can help provide a clean aesthetic. When setting a scene on the front porch, consider the setting. A simple table with two chairs set with coffee cups and saucers can show off the potential for relaxation on a porch overlooking a large lawn, while a beach house might benefit from a decorative surfboard propped in a corner and shell-themed pillows on Adirondack chairs.

Interior

Professional stager Melissa Barronton told Forbes magazine that even an inexpensive

welcome mat can give off a cozy vibe as potential buyers walk through the front door. Her other under-\$40 suggestions include mirrors that reflect light and give the illusion of more space, a fully set table showing off a home's potential for entertaining, craft store art used in place of family photos, a bathroom made inviting by clearing clutter and hanging fluffy white towels, and vignettes staged on dresser tops and bookshelves, incorporating decorative items of varying heights.

Think about incorporating all the senses: a crackling fire that beckons to potential buyers to kick off their shoes and get comfy on the fluffy rug in front of the fireplace, the smell of freshly baked cookies or rays of sunlight streaming in the laundry room window, brightening a typically dark space.

Trends

If your home is empty and has nothing but bare walls, floors and ceilings to show, a virtual stager

can digitally add furniture and décor, helping buyers get an idea of the space's potential. This can be done for less than \$200, providing at least an online dress-up for your home that might draw in viewers.

For a home that needs only a few accessories, you might be able to negotiate a package of lamps, rugs and the like for a small fee. Even simply rearranging furniture in a way that better shows off a room's features, such as a fireplace or kitchen island, is a free upgrade, while toning down the lighting with lower-wattage bulbs can set a peaceful scene on the cheap.

Pop-up staging is a new, budget-friendly option that involves staging a home with props similar to stage productions. Slipcovered cardboard furniture that looks like the real thing, while being strong enough to hold the weight of a buyer who plunks himself down for a sit, comes in packages starting around \$1,000. The pieces are shipped from a central location, where the ease of folding them up and storing them helps with affordability, and they can then be assembled by the agent or seller for do-it-yourself savings. Pop-up staging is ideal for small apartments and condos but might not reflect the quality buyers want in higher-end properties.