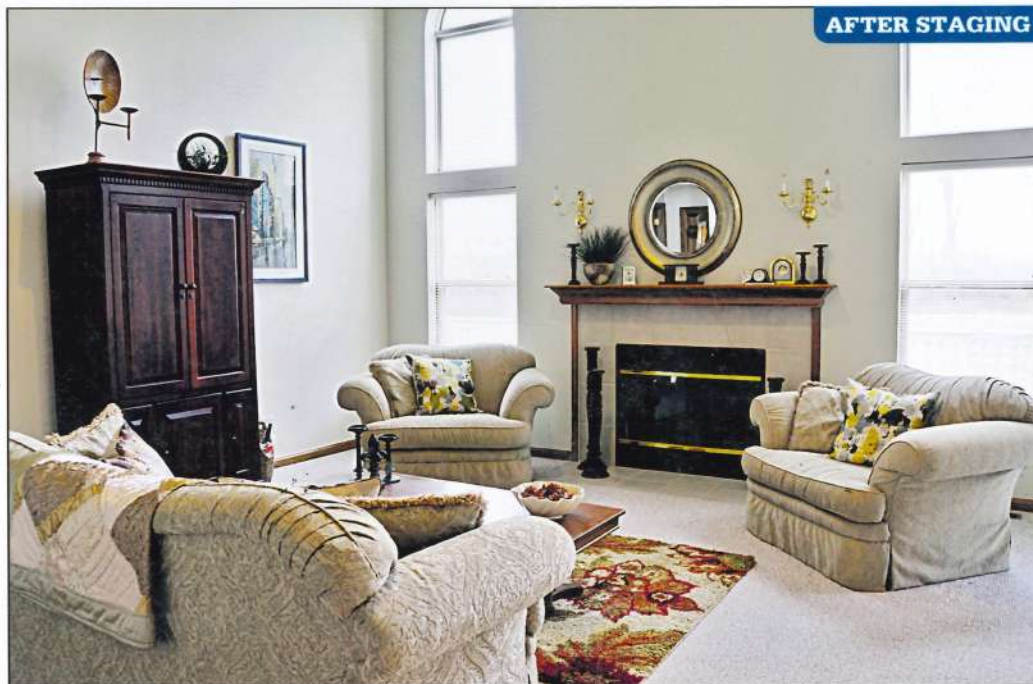


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 Paper reused in fun, funky decor items / H5  
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# At Home

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AFTER STAGING

Height and color are added to a living room with an armoire, a rug, artwork and throw pillows.

MICHELLE KIDD DESIGN PHOTOS

## IMAGE IS EVERYTHING

Sellers should make sure their house looks good in pictures and in person

By Jim Weiker • THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

**A**fter the decision to sell comes the next question for homeowners: Is the house camera-ready?

More than 90 percent of home shoppers rely on the Web as their primary search tool, according to the National Association of Realtors.

And the No. 1 thing shoppers want to see online?

Photos.

"Buyers are looking first on the Internet," said Michelle Kidd, owner of Michelle Kidd Design, a Columbus home staging company. "If the house doesn't look good in pictures, you won't get people to the house."

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BEFORE

The living room previously had an overly neutral color scheme personalized with family photos.

## Wedding burnishes legacy of old barn



Old House Handyman  
 Alan Miller

As I stood outside the barn aglow with twinkle lights and the smile of a bride dancing with her groom, I wondered what her great-grandparents would have thought.

My generally stoic but occasionally playful grandparents couldn't have imagined it — a century-old barn so clean, tight and bright that it could host the wedding reception of their great-granddaughter.

They couldn't have imagined 120 people seated on the main barn floor at tables with white linen and candles, dining on pulled pork and chicken. They couldn't have imagined that the barn built by my great-great-grandfather could house anything other than horses, cows and pigeons. But they would have relished this night.

Barn weddings are common among the Amish, but little did we know when the bride picked this spot for her wedding that barns have become popular with others. We've heard from a number of friends who have attended weddings in barns or were married in one.

The popularity is driven by the rustic ambience, said barn preservation consultant Pamela Whitney Gray of Mount Vernon.

"A lot of them are decorated so that it's a neat environment," she said. "And there is a movement away from the pomp and circumstance of the traditional church wedding."

Ohio barns, she said, are very much in demand for weddings, family reunions and other events. It's a good thing, too, because they have become less popular with farmers as family farming has shifted from animals to crops.

"I'm glad to see barns being used this way so that so many people can enjoy them," Gray said, noting that she especially appreciates when the owners relay some of the history of the place to their guests to explain the importance of barns in the settling of Ohio.

She mentioned the Barn in Knox County and Meadowood Centre near Bellville as examples of popular meeting and wedding sites.

Dan Troth, president of GreenTech Construction near Powell and a board member of Friends of Ohio Barns, said old barns "are the icons of our

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**Pictures**

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Kidd is so convinced of the importance of photos that she walks through a house snapping pictures after she has finished designing the rooms.

If a photo doesn't look right, she changes the room.

Not only must the photos exhibit proper technique — be in focus, well-lighted and so forth — but the room must also be appealing.

Below are 10 ways to make that happen. The advice also holds up just as well for making the home shine in person.

**Declutter it**

This is rule No. 1 from real-estate agents and professional stagers.

"Clutter gives the impression that there's not enough room in the house, so it's all about overcoming that objection," said Susanne Casey, a RE/MAX Impact agent who often hires professional stagers for her listings.

Remove extra pieces of furniture to make a room seem larger, but also tidy everything from side tables to closets.

"People have more of what they need of everything, from the tchotchkes to furniture," said Linda Ayers, a partner with Nancy Edwards in First Impression Home Stagers in Columbus.

"Pack up the little things. Have no more than one to three items on a surface and eliminate the furniture so people can see the house, not the stuff."

**Paint it**

There's no magic wall color that makes homes sell, but sellers should avoid the two extremes that can help it *not* sell: too bland and too bold.

Homeowners should aim for



**BEFORE**  
A wet bar cluttered with wine bottles, glassware and liquor bottles is transformed with colorful artwork and a minimal display of liquor.



**AFTER**  
COLUMBUS HOME STAGING PHOTOS

something "between a crayon box and a tan box," quipped Suzanne Byrd, owner of Columbus Home Staging.

"You need a variety of color. When buyers are looking online, they might remember the house with the green kitchen or red dining room or blue bedroom.

"It's fine if it's mostly a neutral shade, but I like to see at least two or three rooms a different color, ideally a decorator color like a soft blue or green."

**Depersonalize it**

Buyers want to see themselves in the home — not you.

"A few family pictures are OK, but if every room is a shrine to your children, it's time to rethink that," Casey said. "Buyers . . . need to take ownership of that home in their mind."

Potentially off-putting accessories, such as political or religious items, should be set aside. Sellers should also consider eliminating children's names in decals or paint, Kidd advises.

**Size it right**

Just as important as the right

amount of furniture is the right size of furniture.

A few small chairs in the corner of a massive great room could make buyers worry that the room will be hard to furnish. An enormous sectional in a tight living room suggests that the home is too small.

"Furniture should be scaled to the room," Byrd said.

It also should apply to the room, Ayers noted.

"Sometimes, people don't have a definition of a room," she said. "They might have a desk in their bedroom or toys in the living room. We even had a pool table in a living room once."

**Clean it up**

This may be the easiest but most often overlooked part of preparing a home for sale.

"It's a great opportunity and often missed by sellers to clean the home in a very, very detailed level — not just running a vacuum," Kidd said. "Bathrooms and kitchens in particular should be clean. Remember, buyers will look in your cupboards and even your refrigerator. Is the molding clean? Is the caulking clean?"

Although cleaning mostly benefits home tours, it can also make a difference in photos.

"Remember to put the toilet seat down when taking a photo," Kidd said. "Or the trash can — get rid of it or get one with a lid at least."

**Get artsy**

This may be the biggest challenge for many homeowners.

Like furniture in rooms, art on walls should be rich without being cluttered. The right art can make a home seem modern and tasteful without detracting from the architecture.

"The most common issue is not having enough or the right kind of art or accessories," Byrd said. "You can make a big impact with art."

**Fix it up**

Selling a home means it's time to finally get to all those repair projects. A tilted kitchen cabinet or missing cabinet pull can jump out of an online photo. And even those items that can't be seen in a picture will be noticed in person.

"Do a maintenance checklist," Kidd said. "Go through your house and replace

burned-out light bulbs, make sure where you have handles that aren't working or other minor repairs, get those fixed. Buyers will think, 'If they didn't keep care of that, what else didn't they take care of?'"

**Mow and trim**

The outside of a house is just as important as the inside. Pack up bikes and toys, and get out the mower and hedge trimmers.

"This is especially important for those who might look on the Internet and then drive by the house," Kidd said. "That's their first impression."

"Keep your lawn neat and cut; trim the bushes, especially if you can't see the front of the house; make the mulch fresh."

**Lay out the welcome mat**

Although most homeowners enter through the back or garage door, visitors enter through the front.

"The front door is the most overlooked part of the house for the homeowners," Casey said. "Make sure it's freshly painted; maybe put a potted plant next to it. Create a nice welcoming entrance."

**Hire a pro**

Good real-estate agents can help homeowners prepare a home for photos and show.

Those who want to take the extra step can hire a stager. Most stagers charge for an initial consultation that might take an hour or two and cost \$150 to \$250. For that, they will walk the homeowner through advice on decluttering, furniture placement, window treatments, wall hangings, paint and floor coverings and anything else that catches their eye.

Homeowners can then hire a stager to remedy the problems or tackle them on their own. [jweiker@dispatch.com](mailto:jweiker@dispatch.com)

**Miller**

FROM PAGE H1

agrarian past." People forget about history, he said, but seeing the barns elicits an unrealized emotion.

"People are typically in awe when they see how they were built," Troth said.

"The reality is that these barns are being torn down all over the state, left and right, and we have to find other uses for them."

The transformation of our family barn didn't happen by accident. It was because my dad made the commitment more than 20 years ago to invest time, money and sweat to preserve it.

Although even he didn't know what its future might hold, he knew it could be more than the dirty storage unit it had become in the decades after his parents gave up farming in the 1960s. And he knew that future would not include animals, because he promised himself when he left the farm



ALAN MILLER | DISPATCH

The wedding reception in the Miller family barn in Holmes County lights up the evening.

as a young man that he would never live on a farm again or clean up after farm animals.

He held true to one of those commitments. He hasn't cleaned barn stalls for almost 50 years. But he has retained the historic character of the barn while adding modern improvements, such as a new foundation, tight siding, a met-

al roof that will last decades, and a main floor so strong and smooth that it could be in a banquet hall.

And last Saturday, it became one.

The couple said their vows a couple of hundred yards from the barn on a hilltop pasture overlooking a valley green with fresh crops and blanketed by

Amish farmsteads near Walnut Creek in Holmes County. The guests sat on straw bales loaned to us by the Amish neighbor.

And, after the pastor walked the groom and groomsmen across the pasture, this proud father of the bride delivered her and her bridal party, including my two other daughters, to the site in the 1950 Farmall tractor that Grandpa bought new and Dad restored.

Curious horses and unconcerned Holsteins grazed nearby as the wedding concluded under threatening but beautiful clouds of white and gray that shot miles into the sky like mountains from the horizon.

The rain that had come and gone and come again every day for weeks went to the east and west but avoided that site until more than an hour after the ceremony.

By then, we were all inside that bright barn on the hill, the one that my Grandpa painted fire-engine red to please his bride when they could finally afford paint for the gray, weath-

ered wood. The one that Dad decided to save and improve.

So if the bride was beaming on her special day, her grandpa was ready to burst. He said later that he didn't know what the event would be, but he had always imagined that he was preparing the barn for something big, an event that would be memorable for his family.

With help from a dedicated group of family members who spent months on detail work — cleaning, fixing, decorating — he succeeded beyond all imagination.

And the wedding preparation and cleanup was so much work in the past few weeks that it might never happen again, but those few hours of dining and dancing were a celebration of not only a new marriage but also the foresight of one man who saved a barn for his family.

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