Dressed to impress: Ten decorating tips for home sale
By Erin K. Witt

You never get a second chance to make a first impression—and this philosophy is especially true when trying to sell your home.

Homeowners must take pains to present their house at its very best to potential buyers. Curb appeal may get them in the door, but a home that is disorganized, dirty or poorly decorated will do little to impress most buyers.

There are many ways sellers can accentuate the best features of their home through decorating. Here are some tips from the Web site Real Estate ABC.com, and from International Real Estate Digest.

Tip #1: Get inspired. Go tour model homes in new developments. They will show you great examples of tastefully (but sparsely) furnished homes that anyone could live in. There may be "personality"—but no person.

Tip #2: Make your home anonymous. You want buyers to view your home as their future home. When a potential homebuyer sees your family photos hanging on the wall, it may momentarily shatter their illusions about living in the house themselves. Put away personal items, such as family photos, sports trophies, collectible items, knick-knacks, and souvenirs.

Tip #3: Rethink and rearrange your furniture. Rooms easily become overcrowded. If you had planned on discarding any furnishings before moving, do it before your home goes on the market. If you simply have too much furniture, move it to the basement, garage or put it in storage. This will free up the room and make it seem more spacious and airy—an appealing selling point. Well-placed furnishings can also open up a room. Avoid lining furniture along all four walls. Instead, try placing a piece or two on an angle. In the living areas, include an area for cozy conversation or an out-of-the-way corner for reading.

Tip #4: De-clutter. Since you want potential buyers to be noticing the house and not your belongings, this is the perfect time for significant collections such as knick-knacks, trophies, and books to be boxed up for the move. Also, clear small appliances, little jars, bottles, and any clutter off kitchen and bath countertops to create a feeling of spaciousness in a room.

Tip #5: Use aromatic appeal. Just as certain smells can trigger memories in a person, the scent of your home can leave a lasting impression on a potential buyer. For this reason, avoid cooking strong-smelling foods such as fish, liver, garlic, onions, or anything fried or spicy before showing your home. Open windows and doors to let in fresh air. Baking a frozen loaf of bread, cookies, or pie can create an inviting fragrance. And though you never want to over-perfume your home, you may want to light a candle as a quick and aromatic remedy. Stay away from sharp floral scents and stick with a vanilla or cinnamon fragrance.

Tip #6: Put your home in the best light. If heavy drapes, curtains, or blinds block appealing views, leave them open. Natural light makes a room seem bright and cheery. For evening showings, turn on all possible lights for a warm glow.

Tip #7: Don't neglect details, like linens. Stained, dingy towels are a no-no for a home showing. In the kitchen and bath, consider setting out guest towels and soaps. Inevitably, a visitor or two will need to use your facilities during the showing. Throw rugs and carpets should also be in good condition—and if they are not completely necessary, they should be removed altogether. Never place a rug over carpeting. Tattered or worn bedspreads should be removed, and beds should always be made.

Tip #8: Bring the outdoors in. In spring and summer, potted plants or a lush hanging planter are appealing and can add a lot of impact. If your house is going on the market early in the season, consider purchasing mature plants rather than starting from scratch. A home's interior can benefit from flowers and greenery, as well. A simple vase and bouquet can brighten up any room of the home.

Tip #9: Pay attention to appliances**.** This is especially important if appliances are built-in, or being sold with the home. Ovens, stovetops, and range fans should be well cleaned and grease-free. If drip pans have burnt-on grease and are unsalvageable, they should be replaced with new ones. Clean out the refrigerator fan grate, which can collect a lot of dust. It is easy to remove and may be cleaned with a damp cloth.

Tip #10: De-emphasize pets. Not every potential buyer will be an animal lover. If you have pets, keep cages, dishes, and litter boxes clean at all times. Pet hair should be frequently vacuumed. Dog droppings should be scooped up from the front lawn and disposed of. And always cage or kennel pets when your house is being shown.