

THINK OF YOUR HOME AS A MODEL

"Staging" homes for resale has joined the real estate lexicon in no small part thanks to Roger Hazard, a personable Houston native, Texas A&M graduate and current design expert on A&E's popular show "Sell This House."



Hazard and crew ventured to the Big Easy in April to help a couple of local homeowners spruce up their houses for the market. The first of those episodes airs Sunday at 4:30 p.m.

Meanwhile, in a telephone conversation last week, Hazard had these staging tips for sellers:

NEUTRALIZE THE HOME. "Ninety percent of purchases are made for emotional reasons," said Hazard. "Buyers react to what they see." You want a hotel-type neutrality, so that prospective buyers can imagine themselves in the space. Style magazines show houses that anyone can imagine themselves living in; that's the effect you're seeking.

MAKE IT LOOM LARGE. You're

selling square footage, so maximize the space — or the perception of space — by breaking down furniture to essential pieces and getting rid of clutter. Do you really need five TVs in five rooms? Store four of them. Hot climates like New Orleans,

Hazard said, are particularly susceptible to clutter: People stay indoors because of air conditioning and tend to accumulate a lot more things.

CAMOUFLAGE THE BAD. These include pet smells, dirt and mold and outdated carpets. "A house is never as clean as we think," said Hazard. Pull open curtains or uncover windows for a sense of light, which makes a room "happier."

HIGHLIGHT THE GOOD. Architectural details sell, and New Orleans has lots of them. Candles and flowers help the mood.

TARGET YOUR CUSTOMER. Is the prospective buyer a young couple

just starting out, or an older one down-sizing? "Staging started with model homes, which were designed to target young, upwardly mobile couples" with bolder colors and contemporary decor, said Hazard. "The biggest mistake people make is pushing their own lifestyle on someone else, because they think their stuff is great. How you live is not how you sell your house."

COLOR IT SIMPLE. Break down your decor to a simple two-color palette and use it throughout. Slipcover highly patterned furniture; throw a coat of paint over the old, bold one.

MAKE IT FLOW. "You want two people to be able to walk side by side through the entire house without hitting a single piece of furniture."

THROW A PARTY. "If you have a few friends, invite them over to help, and you'll be amazed at what you can accomplish in a day and a half," said Hazard. "Sell This House" keeps the cost to \$300 or less to freshen up a worn environment. And it, says this expert, works.