

I Love My Job: Cathy Hobbs, Home Stager

By [Carol Berman](#), Posted May 3rd 2011 @ 5:57AM



Courtesy of Cathy Hobbs

The U.S. housing market drags on like a ball and chain is attached to its leg. But life goes on, and sometimes a move is unavoidable. Downsizing empty nesters, a job relocation, or even fortuitous circumstances all require a buyer and a seller.

The problem for sellers is, it's a buyer's market. According to the [National Association of Realtors](#), in 2009, the average home stayed on the market for 10 weeks. But that time can potentially be cut by 50 percent percent with the help of a certified home stager.

What is a home stager?

Home stagers help prepare a home for sale by making it look more appealing to potential buyers. Staging can result in simple decor changes to total redecorating. [Cathy Hobbs](#), a New York-based interior designer and home stager, says that her work isn't just decorating -- it's marketing the home. For sellers, 94 percent of homes that are staged sell in an average of 29 days or less, according to [StagedHomes.com](#).

"Most home buyers lack vision," Hobbs tells AOL Jobs. "It's hard to walk into an empty space and see the potential. To see that my queen-size bed will fit."

That's where she comes in. With her business, [apherea](#), she brings four elements for successful home staging:

- 1. De-cluttering.** You're going to pack anyway, Hobbs points out, so pack early.
- 2. De-personalizing and neutralizing.** The key is that a potential buyer needs to see it could be their home with their stuff.

3. **Furniture arrangement.** Space and flow should be maximized.

4. **Styling.** These are final touches including art, plantings and towels to make a home look inviting.

Becoming a successful home stager



Courtesy of Cathy Hobbs

Hobbs spent 20 years in television news, working her way up from small towns to New York City. As a young reporter in the 1990s, her minimum-wage salary didn't leave much extra to furnish her apartment. Later jobs led to "modest" increases -- salaries of \$15,000 then \$29,000.

"I didn't have money to furnish my apartments. I would go to thrift stores and hand-sew pillows and shower curtains. Friends told me I had a knack at this," she says.

She also knew that a job in news wouldn't last forever and wanted a plan B. She worked nights in New York City at a local station and took weekend design classes at the [Fashion Institute of Technology](#). After seven years and 11 semesters, she earned a bachelor's degree from the college (she already had one from the [University of Southern California](#)) and launched her company, [aphereä](#).

First she designed interiors for developers of new buildings, but after the housing bubble burst, she began looking to home sellers. While home staging is not a licensed profession, she is certified by [stagingtraining.com](#), accredited by the Real Estate Staging Association. Hobbs is about to start teaching courses on home staging through the Certified Staging Professionals academy.

"The great thing about home staging is that I do great in down markets and I do great in up markets," she says. "Now that it's a challenging market, sellers need an edge. Home staging is like preparing a product on the shelf for market. People choose a product in the store based on how it looks."

Ditch the ugly couch



Courtesy of Cathy Hobbs

Hobbs isn't going to come in and pack your stuff or move your furniture. For \$375, she'll provide a consultation and suggest things to make your home sell faster. For \$1,800 a day, she and a crew will do the work. Those are New York City rates; national averages run more like \$175-\$400 for the consultation and \$85-\$250 an hour for the work.

People can often be attached to their stuff, and part of Hobbs's job is to help them detach.

"At this point, it's no longer your home. It's a product on the market," she says. "You have to release all the emotions. Staging is not about living, it's about selling the property."

While people may wonder if home staging is worth the expense, Hobbs says that a home is most people's largest asset and staging secures the equity. She says she took a property that didn't sell for six months, staged it, and it sold at full price in less than a week.

"I simply love the transformation," she says. "I am always amazed when I see drab, dreary spaces shine up like a new penny! I have control over the process and always go the extra mile to help sell all my staged properties!"