

CENTER STAGE

NAMED ONE OF THE
"TOP 10 LUXURY STAGERS"
IN THE COUNTRY,
LEIA T. WARD BREAKS

DOWN HER METHOD
FOR SUCCESSFUL
HOME STAGING
AND STYLING.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY
ANDREA CARSON

PERUSING REAL ESTATE listings has become, for many of us, a joyful hobby. (Even *SNL* got in on the action with a "real estate porn" parody ad for Zillow.com.) But much like the design projects we feature, there's a lot more that goes into the listings than a few photos and a price.

Leia T. Ward is a home-staging expert who's known for her careful attention to detail. Her clientele, which includes celebrities like Bruce Willis and Emma Hemming, turn to Ward knowing that the right staging can increase a home's perceived value and ultimate sale price.

Ward self-funded her business, LTW Design, four short years ago. She's staged some of the Northeast's most exclusive homes, ranging from \$1M to \$20M, and her business is worth seven figures. (Who doesn't love a good success story?) Even if you're not in the market to buy or sell a house, there's a lot to learn from the art of professional home staging. Ward shares her wealth of styling secrets, from choosing the perfect white paint (she prefers Benjamin Moore Chantilly Lace) to telling your home's story with accessories.

TIP NO.

1

**STAGING IS NOT DESIGN.
STAGING IS MARKETING.**

The home becomes a product that we market to sell. What works functionally for interior design does not work for staging a home. Buyers are in a house very briefly and know within seconds if they're interested, so every decision we make is to create that instant emotional connection, so they fall in love with the space.





TIP NO.

SHOW OFF THE HOME, NOT THE FURNITURE. We very strategically select pieces that will play off the architectural details or the “bones” of the home to intentionally highlight them for buyers. We never want the furniture to distract from these elements, but rather highlight them. For example, our equestrian estate was a huge vintage farmhouse with exposed original beams. We purposefully selected pieces that were modern, monochromatic, and had curves to juxtapose the straight beams above. The combination of vintage architectural elements and new modern furniture widens the pool of potential buyers.

TIP NO.

3 SELL A LIFE-STYLE. Everything we do is intentional and with purpose. We are creating a story of how the potential buyers would live if they bought this home. We manage how they will “experience” the home. We want to create a lifestyle experience by designing floor plans that enable an easy walk-through experience, by blending and layering different textures to create depth in the rooms that are inviting and aspirational. I even choose coffee table books that are in line with that experience, like Athena Calderone’s *Live Beautiful* or Nathan Williams’ *The Kinfolk Home*.



TIP NO.

4

USE WHITE PAINT EVERYWHERE! I have seen missed opportunities because one room was painted gray, and the buyer disliked gray. Nobody wants to lose a sale over a can of paint! We cannot expect buyers to have a vision. Rather, as stagers, it is our job to spoon-feed and deliver exactly what we want them to see. White creates a clean palette and a blank canvas that highlights views and doesn’t distract. It makes a space feel much bigger and brighter!



TIP NO.

5

CHOOSE ART WISELY.

Large scale black + white photography, especially on white walls, creates an art-gallery effect that instantly elevates any space. (Anouk Masson Krantz is a great place to check out!)



TIP NO.

6

LAYER TEXTURES TO CREATE DEPTH.

This works wonders, especially in homes with high ceilings and lots of windows that can make them feel empty. Adding textures that contrast and have unexpected curves have an incredible impact and warm up the space.

TIP NO.

CHANNEL A SENSE OF CALM.

Life is busy enough. When we come home, we want to feel a sense of serenity. We purposely create this feeling by highlighting two very key selling points: natural light and square footage. Take down the curtains and shades, remove all the extra small furnishings, and let the light in. Negative space is so important, yet people tend to feel that, if there is an empty space, they need to put something there to fill it. They really don't! It's also important never to push your sofas against the wall. This is the biggest mistake I see almost daily. Even just pulling it off the wall 10 inches helps. It really lets the room breathe!

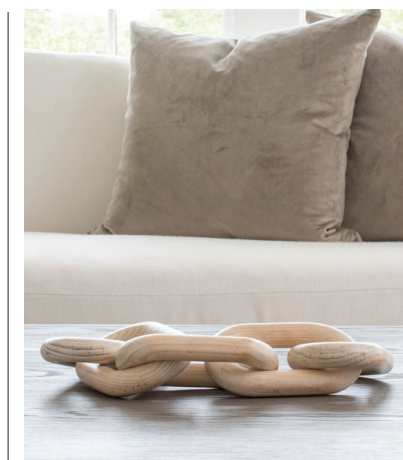


THE FINISHING TOUCHES



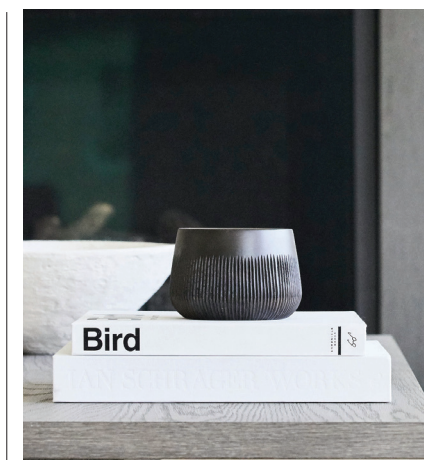
Greenery

We always bring a mix of fresh and faux greenery to add a natural element to the home. It's important to know that all faux greenery is not created equal; we love using Bloomist.



Large Objects

I love using this oversize wood chain link because it adds some texture to any coffee table or console. West Elm and Industry West are great resources for home accessories.



Books

Shoes and bags don't do it for me but coffee table books...yes, please! The size, texture, content, and color palette all matter.