



Day 10 – The Heart of the Home - Kitchen and Dining

Overview

The eating areas of the home should serve up function, style, and plenty of storage. Over the years, the purpose of kitchen/dining spaces has evolved from formal cooking-and-eating zone to multi-tasking hub of the home. The kitchen, in particular, is destined to become a center of daily activity whether your client is prepping meals, helping with homework, grabbing a midnight snack, talking on the phone, hanging out with friends or paying bills. The space needs to feel right, no matter what kind of business or task is being performed. If your client is a gourmet, the space needs to function well, with utensils and spices within reach; if he or she is a take-out junkie, you'll want a deep drawer near the phone for menus.

From a staging perspective, the deep dollars at sale are found in sparkling kitchens which are the hearth of the home. If buyers see aging or colored appliances, dated countertops or flooring, they automatically chip away at the price. What does this mean for sellers? Keep your equity and do the simple, minor remodels yourself! The 2008 Cost vs. Value Report noted that almost 80% of a minor kitchen remodel is recouped in the return on investment at resale!

“In a functional but dated 200-square-foot kitchen with 30 linear feet of cabinetry and countertops, leave cabinet boxes in place but replace fronts with new raised-panel wood doors and drawers, including new hardware. Replace wall oven and cook top with new energy-efficient models. Replace laminate countertops; install mid-priced sink and faucet. Repaint trim, add wall covering, and remove and replace resilient flooring.”

For redesign, this means that the minor improvements your clients were considering should be done now for their personal enjoyment, and will only serve to provide an excellent reinvestment in the future! For both staging and redesign, these minor improvements don't have to cost much but make a DRAMATIC difference in the overall look and feel of the kitchen.

I personally believe it's a waste when homeowners finally make minor improvements to create the kitchen they have been longing for only when it comes time to *sell*. It's far better to make those small changes now and actually enjoy them. So buckle up, because it costs less than you think and reaps big rewards both personally and at resale!

Again, since the kitchen and dining rooms are usually where the homeowner's distinctive interests and style are continued, I'm going to approach this module in terms of redesign and decorating BUT add "For Staging" at the end of each section when applicable.

Finally, since each room-by-room module will be filled with redesign and staging activities to consider, feel free to take these ideas and incorporate them into your existing Client Action Plans in order to tailor them to your staging and redesign business.

Five Steps to First Impression Assess the Kitchen and Dining Areas

Remember my *Five Steps to Assess*, so you can always keep these in mind as you approach each space. This is your *First Impression Assessment* in the 8-step, F-E-E-L H-O-M-E approach. I'll dig deeper into each one for practical purposes in this kitchen/dining module, but again, I think you'll find that these steps will goof proof your design whether redesigning or staging almost any room in the home:

- ❖ **PURPOSE** – *Who* are we decorating for and *what* is the purpose of the space to them for both the kitchen and dining areas? Form follows function in both staging and redesign, so this room needs to work within the constraints of the owners OR buyers needs and preferences depending on whether you are staging or redesigning.

- ❖ **SPACE AND EMPHASIS** – *How* is the space shaped and *what* should the focal point be in both the kitchen and dining areas? The elements of the space must be in harmony with the architectural style of the room. There is a focal point--preferably a dominant architectural element that pulls everyone toward the same center. Let's identify and emphasize it!

- ❖ **BALANCE, FLOW, PROPORTION AND SCALE** – *Where* should we put the large pieces in the room to create balance, flow, proportion and scale? The room should be balanced from every angle (particularly the entries) and visual weight taken into consideration. In the kitchen and dining areas this is a relatively easy step!

- ❖ **RHYTHM, REPETITION, STYLE AND LINES** - *Where* should we put the smaller pieces in the room to create rhythm, repetition, style and good lines? Is there is repetition and rhythm to the room in the form of pairs of objects, colors, shapes, style and textures? Does this room have style? Is the room true to the style and integrity of the home?

- ❖ **OBLIGATIONS** - Rooms have plenty of lighting, are organized, clean, well repaired and have good air circulation. For home owners, this is an obligation they owe to themselves in order to relieve the stress, chaos, stuffiness and nagging, mental "to do" list in each room. For sellers, this is an obligation they also owe to themselves in order to avoid getting "short changed" on the sale price of their home. This is especially true when it comes to easy updates!

PURPOSE

Who are we decorating for and what is the purpose of the space to them?

Remember, for both home staging and redesign, we need to take a close look at who lives in the home, what their needs are for the space and what they love/dislike about the space. For buyers and staging, we need to examine who typically would be attracted to the neighborhood, what their needs for the space would be, and what they typically like to see or not see in the space. See the difference? Let's tackle our redesign clients and kitchens first.

The kitchen performs so many different functions for each client, so it's important to critically assess the different functions and make sure the room accommodates them. The primary functions of the kitchen are undoubtedly: meal preparation area and family gathering spot. That's why the kitchen is called the hearth of the home and is so critical to a buyer's decision about making an offer.

Secondarily, it could be a place for homework, bill paying, telephone calls, computer use, and entertaining. Below are some quick questions to ask your clients before jumping into redesigning the kitchen:



Client Lifestyle Questionnaire for Kitchen and Dining Areas

Who in your family, primarily uses these rooms, how often and for what purpose? _____

Do you cook gourmet meals or do mostly easy food and takeout? _____

Do you eat together as a family? _____ How often? _____ How many guests? _____

Casual or Formal? _____ Cooking/Dining Notes: _____

Special Activities/Interests/Family Time/Homework Time/Bill Paying Time/Coffee Area:

What are your favorite things about your kitchen/dining and why? _____

Least favorite: _____

Do you entertain in this room? How often and is it casual or formal? _____

Style: (Circle answer that most applies)

Do you respond to neat and organized space OR being surrounded by lots of accessories?

What do you consider your style? (Circle those that appeal and see *Home Style Sheets*)

Contemporary Traditional Rustic Lodge Old World Elegance Country French
Southwest Asian Modern Eclectic/Collected Pottery Barn Mediterranean

What mood do you want to create overall? (Circle those that apply)

Elegant/Formal Modern/Classic Sophisticated Worldly Casual/Relaxed
Lively/Bright Cool/Understated Cozy Spacious Hospital Clean Romantic

Do you have any magazine or book pictures that are favorite looks? _____

Please list favorite colors: _____

Colors you dislike: _____

Comments and Interior Visions to share:

Your Six Goals as the Design and Stylist of the Kitchen and Dining

Now that you have assessed the client's primary functions, lifestyle, favorite things as well as the style of the kitchen and dining areas, you can get to work! Translate the lifestyle questionnaire into a goal sheet for yourself as the designer. Here are some things to consider in translation:

- 1. Bring convenience to the function of the space** – This is especially critical in a kitchen which is a heavy duty work horse room of the home! I'll give you my easy tips for creating space that it is convenient and functional. Later, in the obligation section, we'll discuss a checklist for convenience and function around every appliance. When it comes to dining areas, **MAKE SURE** that they serve that purpose and not another one (functioning as office, kids area or junk room).
- 2. Bring comfort to the function of the space** – Always allow for a seating area where someone can keep the cook company! Whether it's a barstool at a counter or small table and chair, make it easy for others to hang out in the hearth area. Be sure to carve out a "special spot" for the cook: a quiet corner or desk area to plan meals and the calendar of events.
- 3. Bring meaning into the form of the space by highlighting the client's favorite functions and possessions** – For example, I get warm and fuzzy all over when I think about having my morning coffee. In fact, the ritual preparation of my pot of coffee is my morning calming routine. I have a beautiful, updated coffee maker, an heirloom sugar and creamer set and my favorite coffee cup and saucer (hand painted by my two boys) on a tray in the corner of my kitchen.
- 4. Bring emotion into the form of the space by incorporating as many of your client's personal possessions without damaging the function or feel** – Surrounding your client's with personal mementos of love like photos, treasured books and accessories helps to bring warmth, life, personality, emotion and harmony to a space. The dining space is a fantastic place for family heirloom and history!
- 5. Bring emotion into the form of the space by incorporating a color scheme suitable to the feel your clients want, as well as the colors they prefer** – See our Color Design Module for details
- 6. Bring vision into the space by fulfilling some of your client's wish list for the function of the space** – Similar to staging, owners have a vision of what they want for their families too! Usually this vision will have something to do with how to update, organize and clean the space easily. Your clients are not aware of the easy ways they can update their kitchen and organize to create space and function. Brainstorm with your clients about what that vision looks like and create an action list to help fulfill it currently and in the future.

Fulfilling the Kitchen's Universal Purpose

A universal necessity for all kitchens (for both staging and redesign) is the need for space, storage, convenience, function and light. In fact, the kitchen should be the lightest and brightest space in the home and usually is! I'll address convenience in the obligation and organization step but before we can organize, we need to create space, function and light!

Creating Space

Critically look at the counters and what's atop them. I like to play the ideal vs. practical game with sellers for every item on the kitchen counter. I hope to clear them off completely so I can dress them up to create a vision for buyers! This technique works the same in redesign because appliances clutter the work space, which eats into our function. Even if the seller/owner uses an appliance on daily basis, surely we can find a spot to store that item in a cabinet directly under its counter space, so it's convenient to them.



Note: An easy way to create cabinet space is to ask your clients where they store their Tupperware AND plastic cups. Invariably, these cabinet areas are the ones that become the most unruly in any kitchen and desperately could use editing thus creating space for counter appliances.

For staging and redesign, attempt to create at least 2 feet of counter space for every appliance/staging tray grouping. Especially keep the area above the dishwasher and around the sink and cook top clear for prepping, cleaning and unloading purposes.



Danger: Never allow for items on top of the refrigerator! In staging, this is a clear "red flag" to buyers that space is an issue. For redesign, it makes an already tall piece in the lines of the room unnecessarily taller.

Pay close attention to the area around the telephone which usually is filled with notes, paper, bills, pens, keys and junk. Create an organized space by emptying the drawers below the phone or desk area and inserting drawer organizers for each of these items. The only things next to the phone should be a pad of paper and possibly a Day-Timer or Calendar. In the cabinets below, have a basket for each member of the family for homework, supplies and various other items that accommodate the ways they use the kitchen area.

Below are some visual examples:

Functional Kitchen Desk Spaces



<<**Kitchen Area Desk** A comfortable chair and cookbooks close at hand are essential for meal planning. A bulletin board, chalk board, white board or cloth board (at right) are great place to post reminders, messages and notes.

Framed photos of loved ones are always good to have close in our special planning areas. A baby monitor or other critical electronic fits well by a phone area.



Don't forget the light!
Bring in a lamp for task lighting when you have a desk space.

I love how Robin Rosen of Stageffect created a cozy sitting area for buyers to imagine sipping coffee, while reading a magazine and planning their day.>>



Fulfilling the Dining Room's Universal Purpose

Dining areas are for family gathering, sustenance and special occasions, so they are memory makers and should be decorated for those special times. Personally, I believe that in all cases (especially in staging) a dining room should always be a dining room (not an office or play room). Not only do buyers love to see a dining area that is separate from the nook, it's critical that they have a formal place for special occasions and family gathering. This may seem like a waste, but really, do kids need their bedroom and a dining area to play in?

Also, since the dining area is usually one of the first areas visible in a home, it's important to create an environment that is elegant and welcoming for buyers and visitors.

Creating Space

Typically, people tend to shove chairs, furniture and small items in the corner of the dining room which is unnecessary and distracting. If the room is small, consider taking a leaf out of the table, but try to keep six chairs (usually the magic number for entertaining) around the table. Resist the temptation to stuff extra chairs in the corners. Rather, use them as a desk chair in the kitchen and/or side chairs in the entry, bedroom or even in a master bathroom for rhythm.



Note: An easy way to create space and light in the dining area is to replace bulbs and clean or update the chandelier, which is part of the room's overall focal point. Many china cabinets can be broken up in two pieces which really helps to create space in the dining area as well!

For staging and redesign, make sure there is adequate walking space around the table. Typically, there should be at least 2 feet around a chair that is occupied.



Danger: If at all possible, try and avoid using a table cloth on the table, as it serves to visually eat up space. Keep the table clear with only an anchored centerpiece as a focal point.

Usually people cram all of their collectibles into a china cabinet. Remember our rule of arranging: cherished pieces have a more dominant place in an area's space. Edit the cabinet using our ideas below and consider using symmetry in pairs or matching sides for rhythm and harmony. For staging, you can get make a lot of space in a china cabinet simply by having your clients pack away the items in the cabinet (i.e. holiday china) that they won't need in the next six months anyway.

Below are some visual examples:

Edited China Cabinets



For staging, an easy way to fill space in a cabinet, as well as add rhythm, is to prop gorgeous china plates up on plate holders.

In the absence of a china cabinet, a simple hutch with a mirror or large print above works just as well for visual interest>>



FOR STAGING

Staging means we are decorating for what the typical buyer for that neighborhood would be looking for. Every neighborhood is different, so it's always a good idea to become familiar with what kind of buyer typically buys in that area, as well as what the competition looks like. The best ways to ascertain that information are simply to ask the agent, look at the home owner, and go to www.realtor.com to view the kitchens in homes for sale in the same area and price range. If it's standard for the kitchen to have stainless steel appliances and granite, then the seller needs to know this.



Hands On Exercise – Go to www.realtor.com and look up the neighborhood you imagine you will be staging quite a bit. Go through a couple of price points and find the common denominator kitchen niceties in homes for sale there.

The kitchen is usually the easiest space to “clutter”. By the phone there are usually stacks of bills and bric-a-brac; on the refrigerator an array of children’s artwork, pictures and magnets; and on the counters all of our favorite appliances. All of this is fine in a home that is NOT for sale...in fact, it's what makes our homes, home to us. Homebuyers respond to “open and clean” kitchens, which mean the unnecessary clutter should be packed away. Below is a list of what a buyer does NOT want to see in the kitchen or dining area of a home they will place an offer on. Take every precaution to remove these things:

- The counters should be completely cleared off except for items that serve to create a vision for the buyer.
- Get rid of practical items like sponges, ant spray and dishwashing liquid and store them under the sink leaving only one sponge ideally in a sink tray.
- Remove everything from the refrigerator and wipe it down to a sparkling clean.
- Clean or replace burner lids.
- Make sure the trash can is out of sight completely. If sellers have a large stand-alone can that won't fit under the sink, have them purchase a cheap, smaller one to hide under the sink and empty out often (which reduces odors).
- Remove anything hanging from the ceiling.
- Remove valance or swag style window coverings that are blocking the sun or are outdated.
- Remove screens completely to let in maximum light
- Remove busy or bold wallpaper
- Remove family photographs that don't fit our “Good Life” test (See Art of Arrangement Module)
- Remove paper items that tend to clutter around the phone area. Create a clean area on all surfaces
- Remove dated, brass, broken or battered hardware and replace with new nickel
- We want all counter tops, tables and surfaces to be cleared in both the kitchen and dining area, so that we can creatively place items that serve to create a vision buyers can aspire to!

A Word about Easy Kitchen Updates

Now that you have a clean slate, critically review the pieces that you have to work with, particularly in the kitchen. We already know that the kitchen carries a lot of weight in the decision to make an offer, so it's imperative to invest some extra dollars in this space to compete and sell in the price range the seller is hoping for!

Easy Cosmetic Updates to Consider in a Kitchen

- ❖ Replace linoleum with glueless tile or peel and stick vinyl tiles that mimic the look of natural stone.



Note:

Glueless Tile - Vinyl tiles that install with your choice of adhesive tabs or spray adhesive. Glueless tiles are sold as a system including the tile, a roll-out underlayment that has a premarked grid pattern that assists with the installation, and the adhesive tabs or spray adhesive. Glueless tile is easy to place down and easy to pick up again.

Peel 'n Stick - A term used for self adhesive tile that does not require adhesive for installation. Tiles have a peel-off backing that, once removed, uncovers adhesive on the tile's underside. These tiles are easy to stick to the floor, but once placed, can be difficult to remove.



Tip: The 12" x 12" EuroStone Beige Sand Vinyl Tile at Lowe's for 88 cents each is one of my favorites but there are other wonderful slate looking styles as well!

- ❖ Replace old, chipped and dirty tile with a granite-looking laminate countertop which is VERY budget friendly.



Tip: I recommend the Travertine Laminate top at Lowes which is only \$105.00 for a ten foot section. I recommend going light, so that it fades as a background feature in the kitchen and blends well with the EuroStone Beige Vinyl Tile.

- ❖ Paint and refinish kitchen cabinets. Painters can do amazing things with cabinets, from moving the hinges inside to glazing them with a furniture finish.
- ❖ Change the hardware. – This is an easy fix for old, 70's hardware that spells d-a-t-e-d to buyers.
- ❖ Change the sinks and faucets. If you're going to change out the counter top, it makes sense to update the sink with stainless steel and add a more decorative faucet (see below)

Bigger Budget Fixes that May Not Have a Return on Investment Unless it's a Luxury Home

- ❖ New stainless steel appliances look great and can even be taken with you to your new home (refrigerator), but are costly.
- ❖ New cabinets or quartz, marble, granite countertops.

An Easy Kitchen Update - Case Study One

Case Study One – This 4500-square-foot home was priced at 750K with no bites. When the competition was viewed, this kitchen did not compare! This is a classic example as to why price point percentage needs to be taken into consideration; remember, statistically a seller who spends from 3-5% of the value of their home in updates usually reaps an 8-10% return on investment.

BEFORE

Dark, cluttered, dated and boring would be words buyers used to describe this room which was supposed to be the hearth of the home! As stagers and redesigners, we have to prioritize which cosmetic changes are going to make the greatest difference in each room. Paint is usually the obvious choice because it is inexpensive, easy, and changes the whole mood of the space (see Comprehensive Color Guide). What do you think is the second obvious choice? If you guessed changing out the fluorescent light box (and removing the hanging pots), you're right! This island is the focal point, which makes that light box a part of the focal point. In this particular home's case, spending a bit more on new countertops would be an obvious third choice because of the high price point of the home.



No joke, this photo was taken on the open house day! It's hard to view the redeeming qualities of the room amidst the junk, tile, fluorescent lighting and hanging pots!

An Easy Kitchen Update - Case Study One

This seller spent 4K on painting the entire interior of the house, doors and trim. They spent another 6K on granite for the kitchen counters, which was a standard feature of homes in the area and price point. They spent another 3K on updated electrical, recessed lighting throughout the home, and decorative chandeliers (as seen in kitchen), fan lights for the bedrooms and nickel bathroom lights. They spent another 1K on a stainless steel stove top and new sinks and faucets. All in all, the sellers spent less than 2% of the value of the home on updates but look at the difference in the kitchen alone!

AFTER



This room looks like a completely different kitchen! Now the room has an updated feel with the addition of the chandelier over the island and granite throughout. The cabinets and flooring are now warm and neutral. A nice addition would have been new hardware, but these sellers so loved this new space that they didn't sell even though the agent was ready to put it back on the market for 850K. A nice lesson for both redesign and staging!



Tip: When redesigning a home, give the owners that same cosmetic priority list that you would give in staging. Too many times owners don't realize how little it takes to completely change the way a room feels and looks to them!

An Easy Kitchen Update - Case Study Two

Case Study Two – This 1100-square-foot home was priced at 250K with no bites. While the competition looked almost as bad, there were so many on the market that the agent did not even want to represent this home because he knew it would just sit. We needed to make this kitchen stand out among the competition! Remember, statistically a seller who spends from 3-5% of the value of their home in updates usually reaps an 8-10% return on investment.

BEFORE - Dark, stark contrasts and boring would be the words that buyers would give this room!



What does your priority list for this room contain, knowing that the clients have a much smaller budget than in case study number one? We know we should start with paint, and I'm thinking the cabinets will need a few coats (see Comprehensive Color Guide). What do you think is the second obvious priority? If you guessed flooring, I would make the argument that once you paint the cabinets, the flooring might blend with the help of a throw rug. Keep in mind the flooring is tile, which is hard to remove and needs a more substantial replacement (Glueless tile won't work here.)

From another angle, we see the dated light fixtures and beat up cabinets. There are some nice open shelves flanking the kitchen sink but with the dark green paint, it's impossible to notice them. It's also apparent that the small, square area at the end of the galley is for dining, but it would be very hard for a buyer to imagine fitting a table there. Let's leave nothing up to the imagination.



An Easy Kitchen Update - Case Study Two

Case Study Two – The seller painted the entire house, trim and cabinetry for a completely fresh and updated look and a cost of 2K. The counters were replaced with my favorite laminate for under \$250. The light fixtures, hardware, a sink and faucet were replaced for \$350. The staging of accessories to highlight the open shelves, dining area and countertops makes a world of difference!

AFTER – Light, bright, updated and sunny would be a buyer's new description



In a depressed market filled with short sales and foreclosures, this home sold within 30 days for 265K--over 15K above the original price point where it wouldn't budge at all! The seller ended up paying about 5K (2% of the value) in staging but recouped that money and sold a home among many in a depressed market!

TIP – Staging is all the more imperative when the competition is short sales and foreclosures! Why? Because it is the move-in-ready home with a model look that buyers will be more willing to pay a premium for. That clean, updated and livable look is what makes the home stand out among the battered, empty and neglected foreclosures.



SPACE AND EMPHASIS

How is the space shaped, and what should be the focal points in the kitchen and dining areas?

While there is not much you can do with the various shapes of kitchens besides “work with them,” shape is important when it comes to dining areas! Since the table is invariably the focal point of the dining area, the shape of the table should coincide with, and work well with, the shape of the room.



Tip: For a rectangular room, go with an oval or rectangular table. For a square room, make a round table your first choice and a square table your second choice.



Tip: In a galley-shaped kitchen, paint the far wall a darker color or place a mirror at the end in order to reflect space and bring the far wall in.

The Dining Area Focal Point

Obviously, the focal point of the dining room should be the dining table. It's where people sit for meals and entertainment, so naturally, it's the first place they look when entering the room. If you're able, set the dining table so it's always ready for entertaining and make sure that the centerpiece is worthy and to scale with the table and its settings!



The Kitchen Area Focal Point

This may surprise you, but I believe the focal point of a kitchen should always be the island if there is one. Secondly, it should be the hood (if it is worthy) and thirdly the kitchen sink area. Why? Because these are the elements that people usually notice first in the room.



The island becomes the clear winner despite an attractive hood.



A gorgeous hood like the one above stands out on its own.

BALANCE, FLOW, PROPORTION AND SCALE

Where should we put the large pieces in the room to create balance, flow, proportion and scale?

In a kitchen, there are not a lot of large pieces that are being placed, but in a dining area we have the table and hutch to consider. Feel free to break up the china cabinet by removing the top portion and lightening the space.



Note: If you place a large china cabinet on one side of the room, watch for “tipping”! Try to balance the other side by placing it across from entry doors or a large window (architectural feature). If it can’t be balanced by an architectural feature, then choose two large prints or a mirror (as in the picture below) to hang directly opposite for visual balance.



Tip: If you have a separate, formal dining area to work with, consider setting the table for a ready-to-entertain appearance! This may seem “contrived” but from a marketing perspective, it works! See the photo examples below.



More Visual Dining Room Examples



As you can see, it's all in the details!

This is a close-up of the creative place setting from the table above. As you can see, it's made up of simple household items (wine glass, plate setting, simple round placemat and napkin). Put together those simple pieces, add a shell and a creative place card, and now you have invited the buyer to take a seat for the dinner party!

TIP – Simply pinch the very middle of a napkin and rubber band it to create this look.

In a more casual setting, it's best NOT to set the table, so don't overdo it. Go for a more casual look: create a true focal point by using a staging tray as a centerpiece. On the tray, display some of the owners nicer things, following our Arrangement Rules.



RHYTHM, REPETITION, STYLE AND LINES

Where should we place the smaller pieces in the room to create rhythm, repetition, style and good lines?

In a kitchen in particular, the placement of our small pieces will determine what buyers or visitors will notice first. Color on counters naturally guides the eye because of the cabinet “white space” that comes with a kitchen.



Tip: Consider anchoring your accessory groupings by using staging trays and simple placemats, as in the photos below.



Kitchen Details





Danger:

- Don't place accessories in each corner of the kitchen
- Don't place accessories in a straight line OR place *one* accessory by its lonesome
- Don't crowd the counters with too much
- Don't place accessories in such a way that they block the view of a guest seated at the bar

Other Visual Kitchen Ideas...



Other Visual Dining Ideas...



Tip: An all white kitchen or dining room can appear sterile and cold to buyers. To combat this, add lots of texture in the form of wood or woven placemats, baskets, plant life and organic materials.

OBLIGATIONS

Do the rooms have plenty of lighting? Are they well organized, clean, and in good repair? Do they have good air circulation?

These questions are especially critical to ask in a kitchen, where the cleanly preparation of food is imperative to both owners and sellers! Again, we highly recommend bringing a cleaning service into your home for heavy, deep cleaning BEFORE the home is staged or even redesigned in order to get the most from the makeover. Here is a checklist of sorts to consider in the kitchen and dining areas as you walk through the rooms:

- Let there be light! Windows should be sparkling clean. Old screens should just be removed and stored in the garage. Light bulbs should be replaced
- Got pets? Remove any pet bowls/supplies from sight and stash away. Bring them out only when the pet eats.
- Got wood? Clean and wax your wood cabinets using a mix of Murphy Oil Soap with hot water to clean all woodwork such as, front doors, floors, cabinets and tables. Use Howard's Wax to give all the wood a great shine
- Clean and polish all lighting fixtures to a sparkle
- Clean all appliances to a sparkle
- Clean out the refrigerator, which can be a huge culprit of unwanted odors
- Clean the vents and hoods of dust and grime
- Make sure the faucet and sink have no mildew built up
- Clean the tile grout. If it won't clean up well, re-caulk or paint over it
- Make sure the floors are sparkling, and provide Swiffers so that sellers/owners can keep them clean easily
- Consider changing out your light switch plates. Over time, these easily become dirty from fingerprints, and cost next to nothing to purchase
- Clean any scuffs on the walls, plastic surfaces or vinyl using Mr. Clean Magic Eraser
- Use a hairdryer to remove dust from fake plant leaves and then spray them with pledge in order to keep them from getting re-covered with dust
- Keep lemons on hand in a bowl to cut up and place in garbage disposal on a regular basis. This helps provide a green, clean, fresh scent that is not too overpowering.

Look around the room with fresh eyes and see if you find anything that needs repairing, refinishing, touchups or "TLC." Buyers notice these things right away, and if their mental "to do list" gets too long, no offer will be coming.

Easy Kitchen Organization Tips for Redesign and Staging

Here is a checklist of essential functions that most all kitchens accommodate and easy ways to organized around each function:

- **Dishwasher Ready** – Make sure the dishes and stemware cabinets are close to the dishwasher for easy unloading.
- **Cook Top Ready** – Make sure the pots, pans, large utensils, cookbooks and spices are close to the cook top.
- **Oven Ready** – Make sure the bake ware, Pyrex and pot holders are near the oven for easy use.
- **Silverware Ready** – Make sure the drawer that you choose for your silverware is central and easily accessible. For instance, don't put the drawer next to the refrigerator because it will be hard to access while someone is looking in the refrigerator. Another good idea is to keep napkins in a drawer below the silverware, since one usually grabs a napkin with their utensil before eating.
- **Note Handy** – Keep a calendar and notepad readily available and next to the telephone. This way, any appointments or messages can easily be written down and remembered!
- **Mail Ready** – Use an upper cabinet above the phone to store a five slot file. Use the first four slots to file bills, events, activity information, etc. that needs to be addressed right away, next week, the following week and so on. Use the fifth slot for coupons.

For Families with Children

- **Eating on the Go** – Make sure that nutritious food is readily available. One way: a bowl of fruit on the counter, which is also pretty.
- **Water Ready** – For kids, be sure to keep a low drawer of plastic cups so they can easily help themselves to water from the refrigerator water dispenser
- **Homework Ready** – Dedicate a cabinet close to the dining table for baskets labeled for each child and an immediate homework box. Usually, people leave these things buried on the counters under mail and newspapers, but teaching your child the value of putting everything in its place and staying organized is a lifelong gift!
- **Art Encouraged** – Keep pens, crayons and art materials on hand for your budding artists!