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(Selling a) Home for the Holidays

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Deck the halls with boughs of ... moderation: Those selling their homes this holiday season may want to go this route.

When it comes to decorating a home for Christmas, Chanukah, or Kwanzaa, area realtors say less is more. "I advise sellers to do what makes their property look the best," the vice president of sale for DJK Residential, Phyllis Pezenik, said. "A little holiday flair can certainly give a home a welcoming quality."

Making a home festive is fine, as long as it's done tastefully. "When a buyer comes to see a property, they like to see a warm and happy environment," the director of sales for Bond New York, Michael Signet, said. As is true year-round, it's not about the four walls or that amazing view of the Hudson that

"gets" people; it's about that feeling upon walking in the door. "Having a home that looks as though its owners are happy and comfortable adds to the intangible value of the property," he said.

"A home shows better during the holiday season," a senior vice president at Prudential Douglas Elliman, Lisa Maysonet, said, pointing to the fact that many places are typically dressed up and decorated for entertaining this time of year.

Ms. Pezenik concurs, but cautions sellers to plan their decor wisely. "You don't want buyers to be overwhelmed or distracted by decorations," she said, adding that overdecoration can make the space actually appear smaller.

As to whether sellers should have overtly religious decorations — a nativity scene, for example — or even a menorah or Christmas

tree on display, most realtors feel it's perfectly acceptable. Mr. Signet said he believes any holiday décor that's not over the top works fine, and should not deter a potential buyer from purchasing a home. "I cannot imagine a buyer ever saying, 'I love this apartment, but won't buy it because I didn't think it was appropriate to have a Christmas tree or a menorah,'" he said.

Tastefully hanging decorations is essential, as is knowing when to pack up the tinsel and all the trimmings once the season is done. Ms. Maysonet recalled one seller who kept her Christmas tree up until April — a big no-no.

"I always recommend sellers keep it simple and elegant and once the holiday has passed, remove the decorations immediately," Ms. Pezenik said.

For sellers looking to create a

festive atmosphere more subtly, real estate agents offer their suggestions for alternative décor, such as putting up flowers such as poinsettias, or baking cookies so the scent will invitingly waft through the living space.

"I knew a seller who would always put an apple pie loaded with cinnamon in the oven prior to any buyers coming over. Greeting cards hung on a window or refrigerator also hint at the season without going overboard," Mr. Signet said.

If the season comes and goes without an offer, that doesn't mean sellers should quickly abandon the idea that the home will sell. Agents said keeping a home neat and tidy is just as important year-round as it is during the holidays. That means no dishes in the sink or overflowing garbage pails, lights on, and blinds or curtains open to let in the sunlight.

"Everything has a place and a place for everything is my motto," Ms. Pezenik said.