

DEB LIGGETT

## What to Keep

The stager was a pleasant but brutal woman named Marilyn. We paid her to help make our home more attractive to a buyer. She swept in wearing a belted trench coat and heeled boots. Black slacks and a silk top completed her look. She wore just the right amount of makeup. I was wearing fleece pants, a sweater with a paint smudge on it, and Birkenstocks. The gray showed in my hair while she had a nice dye job and cut. Later Jay would wonder, “How could such a nice lady wreak such havoc?”

Marilyn loved our windows. “You have to emphasize the view out.” Our kitchen counters were appliance-free except for the espresso machine. The kitchen was the only room to get the okay. “You could think about some vanilla scent to cover up any unpleasant odors and to make it smell like someone baking.”

Three of our four double bookcases needed to go. Most of the reading lamps and half our furniture needed to go. Personal photographs needed to go. All of my African, Peruvian, South American, Palestinian, and Persian textiles needed to go. The reading room needed to go back to being a dining room. “And turn this space into a family room—somewhere the kids could be seen by the mom fixing dinner.” The television could stay in the living room.

Jay and I had each been using an extra bedroom as an office. These rooms had to go back to being bedrooms, each with a twin bed. Each with a plain bedspread. In the master bedroom the small American quilt made by my mother-in-law could stay. “In fact, put the quilt up above the oak rocking chair because it says ‘family.’” Ditto on the solid-colored bedspread.

“Make the bathroom feel like a spa.” I was to have white towels. I was to remove the scale. “Perhaps some artificial flowers or cute soaps, that kind of thing.”

We were not to put artwork on narrow walls. We were to emphasize space. Our plain cream-colored walls were perfect. “Set the dining room table for two. You are creating a fairy tale.” Even if a couple with kids bought the house, Mom and Dad would be able to sit down together for dinner.

I got the picture. We were to make the home generic and impersonal. We were marketing a home for a nuclear family although we weren’t and never had been. I was to make the home smell like baking although it has been at least twenty-five years since I baked anything. If anyone does any baking in the family it is Jay, and he does it well.

The television was okay, but apparently we weren’t supposed to read much. I removed books that smacked of politics or religion. Out with *The Book of Mormon*, the King James version of *The Holy Bible*, and Karen Armstrong’s book *Islam*, lest anyone’s belief system be challenged. My complete twenty-one-volume set of *The Oxford English Dictionary* could stay. The bison rug in the entryway came down. The shadow boxes with presidential political buttons came off the wall. It’s not like I am just trying to sell the house to Democrats. The process brings out the worst in me, and I want to go buy sex toys and leave them lying around. Or place the *Anarchist’s Guide to Bomb-Making* on my bedside table.

I cleared away shells, rocks, driftwood, tiles, and pictures. I wrapped and boxed them carefully. No one is interested in beaches, rivers, or mountains. No one is interested in memories. I am the only one who will remember.

Strangers will paint their own stories. I leave them a clean canvas. Our home now has the charm of a chain hotel. If I have family or friends they are now invisible. I have no visible personality. I am something fake. I am an American caricature.

Essayist and poet **Deb Liggett** has published work in *Pilgrimage*, *Cirque*, *Arctica*, *Albatross*, and the anthology *Fifty Poems for Alaska*. She lives in Tucson, Arizona.

CRISTINA SAYERS

*Begonia Star*, 2013  
collage with vintage fruit labels, found paper  
and sewing patterns, 12 x 12 in



courtesy: the artist