

# Home makeover sparks fast sale, new lifestyle

**T**ALK about a no-win situation. My stepson, Brett, and his wife, Tara, put a down payment on a new house. The place has more space and better schools, and will shorten their commutes. Now, they just needed to sell their current house.



AT HOME WITH  
**Marni Jameson**

I knew what was coming. I braced. “So ... Brett and Tara want to list their house,” my husband, D.C., said, letting that statement sink in before adding, “They would like your help staging it.”

The kids’ house was, I cannot say it any other way, a mess, a cluttered, toys-everywhere, beds-unmade, laundry-on-the-floor mess. Two working parents, long commutes, two kids under 4, and two dogs had conspired to push housekeeping far down the priority list to somewhere below a good night’s sleep, which also didn’t happen. And, as many of you know, once havoc takes root, it overtakes.

“You see the problem, don’t you?” I said to D.C.

You don’t need a family therapist to tell you that having your stepmom and step-mother-in-law bossing you around your own house, telling you to pick up your things, declutter, donate, redecorate, and generally pull the house together is not a recipe for family harmony.

“Given a choice between a good relationship with the kids and having their house meet my standards, the relationship comes first,” I continued.

“They need help,” he said. “I don’t want to offend them,” I said.

“I will talk to them.” I don’t know what D.C. said, but I imagine he said something, like, “Listen to Marni. She knows what

she’s doing. She might come in like Chainsaw Al, but trust her.”

He may have reminded them of his experience five years ago. We were planning to get married, but first he wanted to sell his house, so we could buy one together. He asked for my staging help. Or maybe I insisted. (I was motivated!) We walked around his house. He took notes on a legal pad as I fired out a to-do list. Though I needed to issue CPR a few times, he followed my advice. The first buyer who walked in bought the house for the asking price.

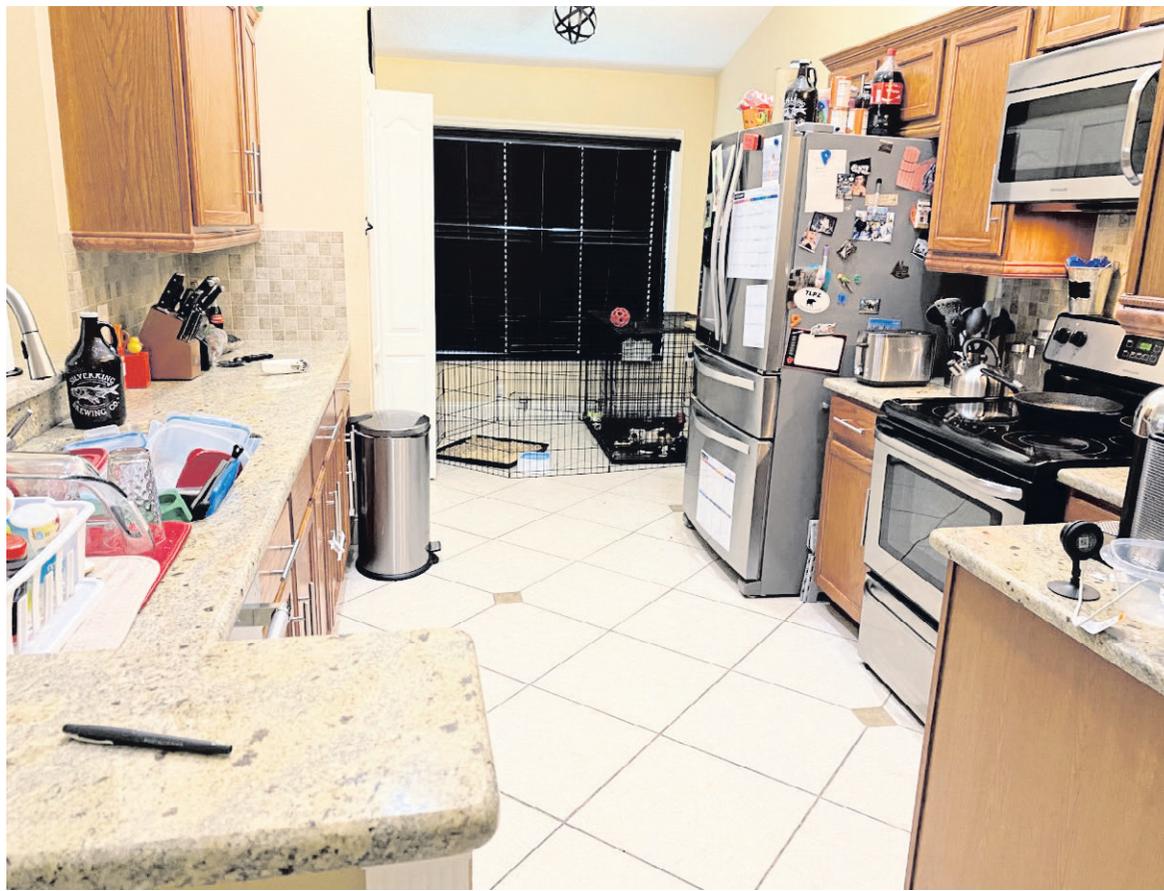
Whatever he said, the kids were primed. We started with a Zoom-by-room call. I was frank. They took the advice well, which was basically: “Get rid of 60% of what’s in here.”

“And put it where?” Tara asked. Their two-car garage was already packed to the point that they had to park outside.

“In the garage,” I said, “for the garage sale you’re going to have.”

“Garage sale?” They groaned, but to their credit, the next weekend, they moved a mountain of stuff onto the driveway and held a garage sale. They traded castoffs for cash (ka-ching), and hauled what was left to the donation center.

I was impressed. With the four-bedroom, two-bath house thinned out, we could start staging. D.C. and I arrived the following Saturday and pushed up our sleeves.



In the kitchen (top), we took all items off the refrigerator, cleared counters of clutter, put appliances out of sight, and added fresh, yellow dish towels (above). Before photo courtesy of Tara Carey. After photo courtesy of Adam Taylor, Yaatra Photography.

I called out instructions, while D.C. and Brett followed behind with a ladder and hammer. (If only all life worked that way.)

We moved furniture, rehanging art (universally too

high), moved or removed drape panels, replaced light bulbs so their temperatures matched (no more warm and cool), filled more trash bags, made a dozen more décor moves, then acces-

sorized with color.

Instead of resistance, I met with wholehearted willingness and appreciation.

By the end of a long day,

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