

HOME DINING RECREATION TRAVEL COMMUNITY HEALTH SHOPPING

805

LIVING

APRIL 2009



Home & Garden

Pursuits

By Cynthia House Nooney



CENTER STAGE

Make your for-sale home a showstopper.

IT'S NO SECRET that a few extra dollars funneled in the right direction can bring a big return when selling large-ticket items. Some might “detail” a car before trying to sell it, and now the same can be done to a home, thanks to an emerging industry. Real estate agents have used “home staging” as a marketing tool for years; now the trend has been adopted by professional designers and decorators. The concept benefits both homeowners and real estate brokers: Their time can be devoted to other things while home stagers quickly, efficiently, and creatively “detail” a home for market.

The cost for staging is in the hundreds, as opposed to the thousands. Unlike interior design, which is a more complex and multi-faceted approach that incorporates creative *and* technical solutions, home staging is a temporary fix designed to enhance a home's features, as well as hide its flaws. Fortunately a number of friendly, imaginative, and enthusiastic home stagers are at our disposal in the 805 area.

“Every time I go to her house, she's rearranged the furniture,” laughs Vicki Sears about her friend and colleague Reece Mack. “She can't seem to help herself!”

“She's right, it's something I've always done; it's in my nature. I have a strong desire to organize and create aesthetic beauty,” replies Mack, certified home stager and founder of Simplicity Home Design, who admits she confuses her two young children by constantly moving around the household shoe container.

As a former realtor, Mack enjoyed showing properties and observing how clients prepared their homes for viewing, but didn't necessarily like sales administration aspects. “Then I discovered home staging,” she recalls. “Luckily, it combines all my interests. This is what I've wanted to do my whole life.”

The creative duo of Mack and Sears (whose partner calls her a “genius with fabrics,” particularly when it comes to pillows, curtains, and even the occasional piano stool) embark upon home redecoration projects throughout the 805 area. From townhouses to single-family luxury homes, they identify flexible alternatives for every budget in order to stage a property in hopes of selling it.

Depersonalization is a large part of the staging process, according to Mack. “The idea is to neutralize a home through color schemes, furniture, and accessories. Stagers create illusions, so anyone who

walks in can imagine living there. For example, we may arrange a bottle of wine and two glasses near a fireplace, or place a tea set and serving tray on a master bed, and we always remove clutter and personal effects, particularly family photographs,” she says, adding that a staged home is pristine and free of items that can distract or indicate someone lives there. “A stager’s job is to make a home inviting and distinct from other listings, so the probability of selling increases.”

Mack and Sears stage homes according to listing price, and scour a variety of retail locations, from bargain stores to high-end interior design shops (and everything in between), in order to find the perfect scene-setting furnishings and accessories.

“I equate Mack to [the computer puzzle game] Tetris because she’s a master at assessing each piece separately, then dropping, moving, switching as needed. She’ll flip a table around or change the bedding and instantly transform a room,” says Sears.

Diane Dumbauld, real estate broker with Rodeo Realty in Westlake Village, calls Mack a valuable part of her team. “Clients absolutely love her,” she says. “She listens to them and incorporates many of the items they already own.”

While it’s easy to imagine that redecorating costs must add up quickly, home staging and redesign specialist Marcia Smart insists that isn’t so. “My industry colleagues and I aren’t trying to sell merchandise, we’re providing advice on how to prepare a home for sale. We pride ourselves on being budget conscious.”

As a pioneer of the staging and redesign (using your existing furnishings to update your home) industry as well as a founding member of Interior Redesign Interior Specialists (IRIS), Smart provides local workshops on “debt-free” decorating, as well as certification training to become an industry specialist.

Coldwell Banker broker associate Shirley Richards attended a class hosted by Smart a few years ago in hopes of gathering home-enhancing tips she could pass along to sellers. “I was impressed with how informative and approachable she is. She’s a great resource,” says Richards, who has since invited Smart to help stage some of her listings. “It amazes me how quickly she turns bland rooms into pizzazz.”

Smart says she enjoys the challenge of turning owner-occupied residences, filled with personal belongings, into model homes. “That gives me the most satisfaction. I like educating clients about creating big, open spaces, and explaining what needs to be done and why,” she says. “Of course they have to keep the home impeccable while it’s on the market, but once they see the results, they’re very motivated. Even staging just a few rooms can have a positive impact.”

If it’s determined that new items should be purchased, Smart selects products that can be used in her clients’ next home, such as potted trees, bed linens, and accessories. “I gear items toward future use. I want my clients to be happy down the road too,” she says.

Each home is a creative endeavor and every situation is unique, challenging, and fun, summarizes Mack, who believes environment affects how people feel about themselves. The ultimate compliment? Overhearing someone say, “this is exactly how I would want my house to look,” says Mack, recalling a day in recent memory. “That’s what we strive for.” ■

Local Resources

Simplicity Home Design, 805-499-8727,
www.simplicityhomedesign.com

Smart Interior Styling, 805-241-7997,
www.smartredesign.com

Spotlight Staging California Resources,
805-402-6062, www.spotlight-staging.com

Stage Your Space, 805-823-2238,
www.stagingyourspace.com

Your Place Lift, 805-665-8280,
www.yourplacelift.com

Ways to Refresh Your Home for Spring

Many home stagers also provide redesign services.

While interior designers create new rooms from scratch, redesigners use your existing furnishings in new ways.

De-clutter, de-clutter, de-clutter.

Thoroughly clean your home inside and out.

Create storage spaces as needed for toys, files, books.

Remove large pieces of furniture that overwhelm your rooms.

Complete or pick up unfinished home projects.

If selling, consider removing potentially controversial items (such as animal heads or skins).

Remove unsightly items such as used toothbrushes and unclean shower curtains.

Take into account all five senses. What do you see when you approach your home from the outside? Is the yard neat? Can you see trash cans from any of the windows once you’re inside? Are there spider webs or dust bunnies in the corners? Any lingering odors such as garlic or cigarette smoke? If so, bake cookies or sliced apples with cinnamon. Pay attention to sound: Is there any road noise? If so, plant shrubs or trees or install a fountain. If selling your home, place wrapped treats for prospective buyers and realtors to munch on. For instant warmth, light candles and fireplaces. Add texture through bamboo blinds, decorative pillows, and throw blankets.

Sources: Reece Mack of Simplicity Home Design and Marcia Smart of Smart Interior Restyling

Decorating Workshop: Smart Color Styling

Hosted by Marcia Smart, this practical workshop will help you develop your home’s color palette and teach you how to avoid making mistakes when selecting paint colors for your rooms.

The workshop will be held Saturday, April 25 from 9:30 a.m. to noon at Conejo Valley Adult Education, 1025 Old Farm Road, Thousand Oaks. To register, call 805-497-2761 or visit www.conejo.tec.ca.us.