

HOME, HOT
Setting
the stage for
a big sale



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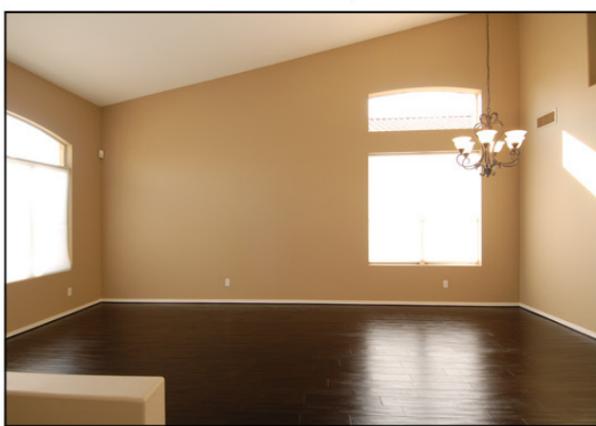
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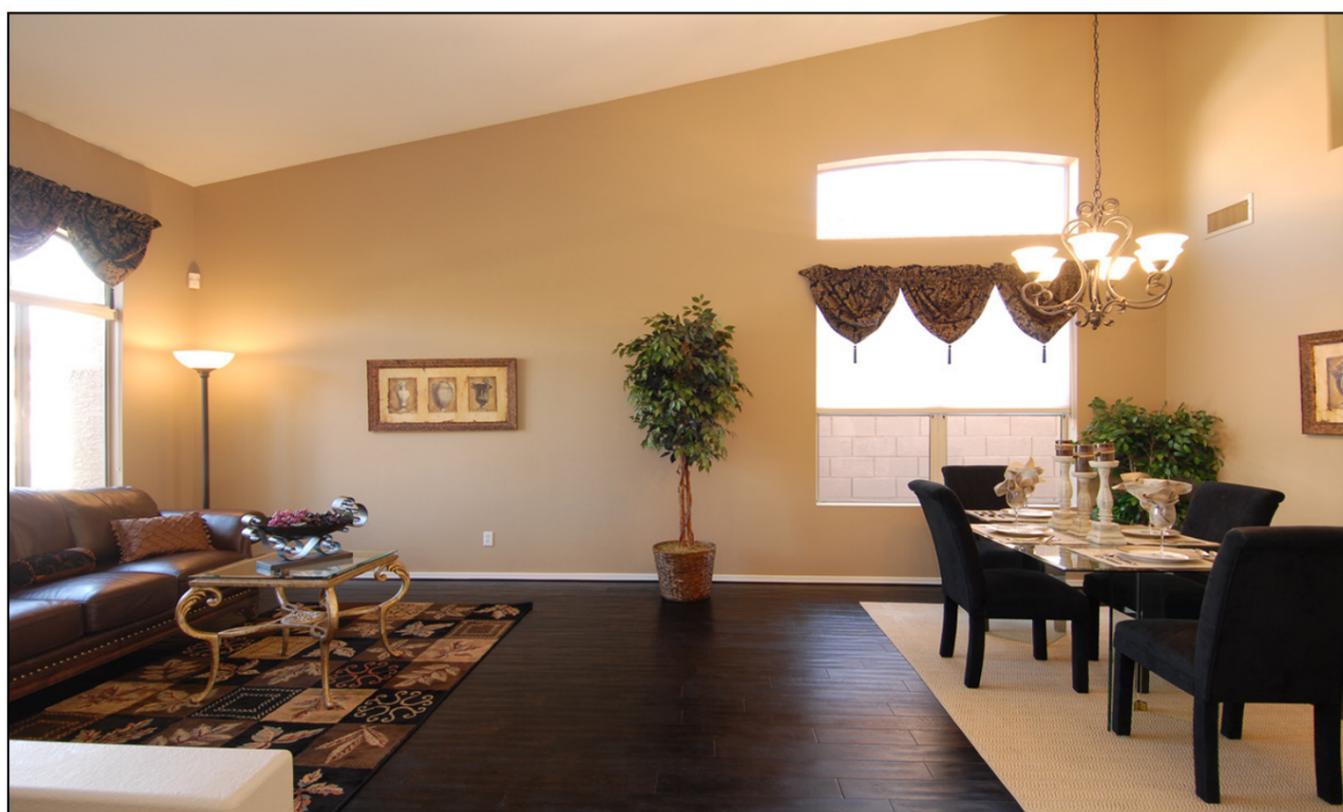
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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2006

Staging the sale



MARLON DECASTRO PHOTOGRAPHY



A bare room (top) becomes a showcase for a home sale after staging (above) by Enhanced to Sell.

A professional makeover can add sparkle to houses that linger on market

Sue Doerfler
The Arizona Republic
Nov. 4, 2006

Gary Kennedy's under-furnished south Phoenix house sat on the market for 50 days with no offers. But instead of lowering the price, like most sellers would do, he hired someone to come in and decorate - adding wall hangings and accessories.

Two weeks later, the house sold for the list price of \$255,000.

Houses are taking longer to sell due to the Valley's housing market slump, and staging or giving them temporary new decor has become the strategy of choice for many sellers and investors. advertisement .

Staging is typically done by professional stagers, interior designers or real estate agents. They may rearrange your furniture, suggest that you repaint, remove worn drapes and reduce clutter, and supplement your décor with accessories. If your house is empty, they'll furnish it.

But staging is more than decorating, certified home stager Bonnie Lewis said. It showcases the home's possibilities, she said. It can make rooms look larger, de-emphasize unusually shaped rooms or dark rooms, and can show buyers how to decorate the space, she said.

"You're setting a mood, and you're showcasing the lifestyle you could lead in this home," said Phoenix interior designer Patti Craze who staged Kennedy's house. "You're trying to have the buyer imagine themselves in the space."

Diane Neslund, a Scottsdale interior designer who also does staging, said that it gives the illusion that you're not desperate to sell your home. "People will think that they had better hurry up and buy it or somebody else will," she said.

The purpose of staging is not just to sell the house but to sell it at an optimum price, Neslund said.

The cost for staging generally is less than the \$5,000 or \$10,000 first price drop sellers make to entice buyers, said Lewis, who owns Enhanced to Sell with David Bugniaret.

Stagers, who want to see a house before they quote a price, generally base the cost on time, work involved and furnishings. The price, which differs among stagers, typically ranges from \$500 to \$1,500 for a home that needs minor rearranging to \$10,000 or more for an upscale home with full furnishings. Lewis, Neslund and Craze say that staging works on homes priced \$250,000 and above.

Realtor Pat Hune, who sold Kennedy's house, said staging isn't the solution for every for-sale home.

"If you have a home that's getting no showings, it's a price problem," she said. If it's getting showings but no offers, it's can be a problem with price or the condition of the house, such as under-decorating, she said.

In Kennedy's case, Hune considered lowering the price but instead recommended staging. The re-decorating cost \$1,500 and added everything that his house didn't have: wall hangings, accessories and other items that made the house look homey.

"That was the only difference; I didn't change the house," said Kennedy, who until recently was a bachelor. "The staging made everything look good. It brightened up the whole house." It made him almost wish he had kept it, he said. He and his wife, Kelly, recently had the house she owned before their marriage staged by Craze - it now sports new blinds, paint and curtains - and put it up for sale. They are buying a new home.

Staging isn't new; it's been around for more than 20 years. Last year, during the Valley's housing market boom, few homes were staged. That's because many sold in a matter of hours or days, as is.

With the flood of homes on the market now, buyers have become more selective, said Neslund, owner of Distinctive Interiors and Design in Scottsdale.

"There is so much competition you have to do something different than the others," said Claudia Michalson, a Realtor with Russ Lyon Realty. She has used Neslund to stage a Scottsdale home listed at \$595,000.

The key to staging is incorporating the correct scale of furniture and the right furniture for the house, using neutral colors that appeal to everyone and making the home look fashionable and cozy, the stagers said.

That may mean removing some of the seller's personality and replacing it with a neutral environment, said Craze, whose company is PMC Interiors. She started her staging business three years ago and is certified as a stager through Minneapolis-based Home Staging Expert. She does several stagings a month.

It's not that your quilting room isn't handy; it's that few buyers have need for one. Your walls of family photos are appealing to you, but they're distracting to buyers. Purple may be your favorite choice in carpet color, but few buyers are going to have furniture to match.

Craze said that stagers take special care when sellers are still living in the home. "When a family is living there, you can't just yank all the items they use," she said.