

WINTER

January 26 & 27,
2005

REAL ESTATE REVIEW

A Special Resource Guide published as a newspaper supplement by Sonoma West Publishers

Setting the stage to get the most for your home

Professional stagers allow potential buyers to visualize themselves in a home

by Patricia M. Roth
Staff Writer

When it came time for Nicole Canon to sell her house in Skyhawk in East Santa Rosa, her Realtor asked her if she would consider staging it.

Canon agreed. "I knew the market was slowing down a bit and I was concerned about getting the price I wanted and selling it in a timely fashion," she said.

In walked Mona Reeder, an accredited staging professional (ASP), to evaluate Canon's house. To prepare the house for its makeover, Reeder first recommended what she calls "editing" — in this case, removing most of the hand-me-downs, extra furniture and personal items — plus repainting and deep cleaning. "We worked together to get the house ready for staging. Then in eight hours, Mona brought in rented furniture and personal props and turned my house into a Tuscan bungalow," said Canon.

Two weeks later, the house had been sold and Canon was nestled into her new home in Sebastopol, where she works as a veterinarian at Animal Hospital of Sebastopol. "I did get my asking price and the Realtor had been concerned that it was a little high," explained Canon, who lived in the staged home until it sold. "It's really neat. You look at your home in a whole new light."

And that's the objective — staged homes are clutter-free, clean, cozy and inviting. Stagers are trained to optimize how a pre-owned house feels and flows, so that it resembles a model home and new construction. This means making it marketable to the broadest base of clients. "You don't want people to walk in and say, 'oh, look at the furniture.' You want them to say, 'wow, I could visualize myself living there,'" said Reeder.

Reeder lives in Sebastopol and is the founding president of International Association of Home Staging Professionals (IAHSP) of Sonoma County. She is typically brought on by realtors, and then works closely with homeowners. "I help the homeowner realize in a tactful way what is dated and what will capture too much attention," she said.

Stagers want to make the feel of



FURNISHED AND READY TO SHOW — Bringing in furniture shows off the beauty of a home. Photos above and below show the difference a furnished room can make.

Photos courtesy of Alise Sheehan



a house to be as close to new construction as possible. "We want to add light and openness. We want you to come in and just sigh, rather than holding your breath. So the first thing I'm looking are the 4 C's: clean, clutter-free, color and creativity. Those are the things that I will add into 90 percent of the homes that I stage," said Reeder.

Stagers use repeating colors to tie rooms together. They often use objects the homeowner has on hand and bring in props such as café tables, rugs, silk flowers and lighting to "dress up" rooms.

"You really aren't inviting buyers to sit down and stay awhile. You don't want them to fall in love with one room. You want your theme to run throughout the house," said Reeder.

"Things don't sell the house. When you remove the personalized things and just make it a soft palette, it's very easy for potential buyers to slip themselves into that picture," she said. "Every house has too much clutter. Too much furniture, too many magazines, pillows, photos and overstuffed closets. People who are buying will look in your closets and have been known to peek in your drawers. They touch and feel everything, especially if they like it, so there is a difference between clean and showing clean.

"Purchasing a house is an emotional buy. You have to connect to the home. You have to be able to visualize yourself and your family in that home and how it's going to work for you. Because you're not those people who have lived there before. They may have all those family pictures out and they'll say, 'well, we're not anything like those people. This isn't the right house for us,'" she explained.

Houses that are staged sell faster and at a higher price than other houses on the market, according to staging professionals.

The term "staging" was coined in the 1970s by East Bay resident Barbara Schwarz, who has since trained more than 500,000 stagers in the U.S. and several European countries. ASPs proudly carry their designation, which they earn by attending a two-day intensive course taught by Schwarz. They are required to carry insurance (and encourage homeowners or realtors to ask them about it).

While staging is highly popular throughout most of the Bay Area, it's been slower to catch on in

(See *Staging* on page 2)



KITCHEN BEFORE — A kitchen in a house for sale that has not been staged may not hold much appeal for potential buyers. Photo courtesy Mona Reeder



KITCHEN AFTER — A kitchen that has been cleaned up and had a few touches added can be very appealing to potential buyers. Photo courtesy Mona Reeder

Staging helps homes sell faster for a higher price continued from page one

Sonoma County. “Much of the work that Mona and I do is education at MLS meetings. Change is difficult for Realtors who have told clients to clean the house and put flowers on the front porch. Many have never really integrated staging into the selling of a house,” said Alise Sheehan, a Healdsburg resident. Sheehan is an ASP who integrates staging and design in her work as a Century 21 Realtor with Martin Levy & Associates of Santa Rosa.

“I got exposed to staging in Silicon Valley. My sister sold her house in an upscale neighborhood, and a realtor staged my sister’s home and transferred the house into a

model home. It had multiple offers and sold over what she expected,” said Sheehan.

When it came time for Sheehan and her husband to sell their own house, she staged it herself. “The market was good, it had multiple offers, we got top dollar for the house,” she said.

“The reason staging is important is that potential buyers are either adding or subtracting the value of the house. If their first impression is, well, I have to turn on visualization for the house to look great, a lot of people don’t have the ability. You want your house to appeal to the largest number of people possible,” said Sheehan.

“I’m always designing things. I love doing artwork, too. But the thing to being a designer is focusing on how

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you can make things work better. With my background in marketing and sales and aptitude as a designer, that’s

the way I see things. Staging a home is like packaging a new product on the market to appeal to as many people

as possible,” she said.

Sheehan’s focus has been on higher-end homes. She recently staged a house for

Anthony Marinelli, a Windsor resident who purchases investment properties. “My wife and I have sold a couple of higher-end properties during the past year. On one of our properties staged by Alise, the staging was done so well and the transformation was so impressive that the agent who listed it decided to buy it after a week,” he said.

“I make a house look cozy — with art, plants and furniture — because the whole goal is to have people walk in and say, ‘wow, I can visualize myself living here.’ I recommend painting in some cases. The palette I recommend is neutral but warm. We want the house to look

warm and that you like living here,” said Sheehan.

Home staging professionals point out that the way people live in a home and market a home are two different things. Their services range from written consultations to re-design to complete staging. Fees vary, depending on service, but can range from \$250 for a consultation to \$2,000 for a 4-bedroom home (in some cases, fees may be included in listing fees). For more information, visit the following web sites: www.IAHSP.com; www.StagedHomes.com; www.amazing-staging.com (Mona Reeder); www.firstimpressionsdesigns.com (Alise Sheehan).



EMPTY ROOM — An empty room in a house for sale does little to stimulate the imagination of potential buyers. Photos courtesy of Alise Sheehan



MADE OVER — Furniture and fixtures can add a warm touch to a room that allows a buyer to visualize living there. Photos courtesy of Alise Sheehan