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Home Styling and Staging

by Brent Sedo

A visitor approaching Deena DeVito-Carl's Oceanside, West Coast-style home might well expect a casual, laid-back feeling and a neat-as-a-pin appearance once inside the front door. After all, the lush green lawn is well trimmed, a stately straight-as-an-arrow cedar fence marks the property perimeter and patio furniture is neatly arranged on the matching cedar deck.

But what greets the visitor once inside the home could better be described as organized chaos, with boxes, furnishings and home accessories stacked in every room. DeVito-Carl navigates through a confusion of items on the floor and smiles apologetically. "If anyone saw how I really live right now, we'd never get a project."



But she isn't worrying much about attracting new clients these days. Hers is the booming industry of home staging (a.k.a. fluffing, dressing, enhancing). This is where professional designers are employed to turn lived-in or vacant homes into show suites, upping the ante for prospective sellers and wooing buyers into imagining what she calls "the lifestyle they never had." In fact business

is so good for DeVito-Carl's Urban Peridot Design; they now carry a full inventory of home furnishings and accessories available for rental. Thus the organized chaos.

"When we first started I would present myself in real estate offices, and many agents would not have heard of staging, or believe that it worked," says DeVito-Carl. "Now almost all of them know about it. Some realtors use us on every vacant project they have – it's just a value-added service. The consensus among realtors and home stagers is that vacant properties, new or old, are the toughest to sell."

"A key point is that empty spaces seem smaller," explains Danielle Gayton, a stylist with Urban Peridot Design. "It's an issue of perspective because there's no context for the eye, no sense of relative proportion."

*Home staging has become
big business because it
adds dollars to the sale price
– Investing by Design.*

Home staging is a service that inspires some homeowners to think of open houses as much more than a pot of coffee and a firm handshake. When Royal LePage commissioned a research study to look into staging, they found that 75 percent of Canadians are willing to spend up to \$5,000 to enhance their home for the market. What's more, a recent report in the *National Post* newspaper indicates that staging can raise sale prices by almost 20 percent (Island stagers place that figure closer to 5 or 10).

When Realtor, Richard Goldney wanted to sell his Qualicum Beach town home, he had hoped to do so quickly, but instead found the listing lingering on the market for months. He had previously rented the property, but it now stood vacant. Enter the home stager. DeVito-Carl and her team proceeded to bring in furnishings and accessories to "set the stage". His \$ 2000 invest-

ment in home staging allowed him to sell right away. That makes Goldney a believer. "Staging is a wise investment for sellers. Only 5% of buyers can envision themselves living within a vacant property. That limits your market drastically," Goldney says.

Aware that few sellers have substantial marketing budgets at hand, DeVito-Carl assures prospective clients that for \$250 to \$4000 homeowners can enhance their property's value, although fees can range as high as \$40,000 for decked out developer show suites.

Real estate agents say that while certain designers claim to have invented home staging, the reality is that the relatively new industry represents the professionalisation of something that has always taken place in less organized ways.



"Real estate agents do the same thing on a lesser scale all the time," says DeVito-Carl. "So do ordinary folk who just happen to pick up after themselves prior to showing their home."

Professional stagers, however, offer the ease of one-stop shopping – for a single fee the lawn is manicured, walls are painted a calming but *en vogue* shade of taupe, and a hip espresso set is positioned just-so on a stylish ottoman – and the experience of knowing what subtle touches will leave a lasting impression with a potential buyer. Once the stager has finished the job, a cold and vacant house is given the appearance of a warm and inviting home. And that is a lesson on investing by design. ■

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