

Staging Takes Center Stage

You don't have to be a star to be in Beth Ann Shepherd's show.

Shepherd is one of those "to the stars" service providers, in this case, setting the stage to position a home for sale or staging. It's a smart marketing move when it's time to move a home in just about any kind of market.

Staging is to the interior of a home what curb appeal is to the exterior -- nipping and tucking, furnishing and accessorizing, buffing and polishing until the place looks like a model home, without being clinical. But it can also include curb appeal.

With just the right special effects, the effort can transform a home into a house of dreams and help potential buyers visualize potential.

Done wrong and a home can become more like the set of a horror movie, a real house of screams.

Operating under the name "Dressed to Close," Shepherd says her clients include Black Eyed Peas' Fergie, leading-man actor Josh Duhamel, off-beat Christina Ricci, even the glamorous "Desperate Housewives" actress, Eva Longoria.

But you don't have to be in a music video, hit movie or top rated TV show to benefit from Shepherd's expertise.

She's offering you an exclusive peek at how to make staging take center stage in your home for sale.

Here's what she advises.

Appeal. Start with curb appeal, including landscaping, doors, fixtures all that customers see upon approach to the home. Curb appeal should exude an unforgettable first impression that prompts buyers to cross the threshold.

Enchant. The portal should generate some pop, excitement, drama, maybe a little razzmatazz. Create a focal point with an oversized mirror, a dramatic piece of art, strategic lighting, fresh flowers or scented candles -- but not all at once. Add drama, not comedy.

Refresh. Update worn attributes. Sand and refinish hardwood floors. Clean or replace the carpet. Pressure wash stone flooring.

Rearrange. New furniture layouts make for a new look, feel and flow. A fire place need not be the focus in the middle of summer. A point of view to the lanai, beachfront or pool area may be a better set.

Upgrade. Stainless steel appliances are the rage because they add the commercial look of perceived value. Toss in a glass-front wine cooler for sex appeal.

Accommodate. Give your baths that "Five-Star" look. Add thick, white, luxury hotel

towels, extra hand towels at each sink and a container of those hotel goodies -- scented reeds or scented candles, and cotton-ball, Q-Tip, holders and the like.

Impress. Likewise treat your master bedroom like a luxury hotel suite featured in the movies. Include thick white sheets and pillows. Use a thick white duvet and duvet cover, a nice tray with reading books, scented reed diffusers (or scented candles) and warm colored walls. A ceiling-height plant adds perceived height. A nice chair and reading light or sofa seating area brings in coziness. Remove the clutter, photographs, no note pads, pens or pencils. Nothing you would not find in a luxury hotel suite.

Reorganize. Clear the set. Remove the clutter. Put in professionally built-out closets. Closets should look good and smell good, not musty or mildewy. Your closets should look good, smell good and sound good. Rack or drawer your shoes and other accessories. Leave nothing on the floor. Add cedar blocks for scent and invest in matching wood hangars for every item of clothing to project a lifestyle of success.

Entertain. Add a sound track. iPod music to wireless speakers. Install a plasma TV tuned to an eye-catching, replaying, high density disc of panoramic scenes. You want to present your home as modernized and updated.

Accentuate. "Add" a subplot of square footage with dramatic effects -- mirrors in small areas, focused furniture positions, lighting, etc.

"Purchase extra-long white sheer mesh draperies and install rods around your trellises or outdoor area for that billowy drapery feeling found only in exclusive resort hotels throughout the world. This is a dynamic, fast way to provide the 'major wow' need to sell your home faster to the highest bidder," Sheperd advises.

Written by Broderick Perkins