SELLING YOUR HOME, NOT YOUR LIFESTYLE

Home staging will help a buyer's imagination

north shore news

By Niki Graham

LAST summer when West Vancouver resident Anne Marie DeLuise and her husband were preparing to sell an investment property in Kitsilano their real estate agent suggested they "home stage" the suite.

Through that agent DeLuise was introduced to Sandy Arthur, a designer for the West Vancouver-based staging company DEKORA. Arthur offered to help DeLuise stage the condominium.

Although the service was free, DeLuise still had to pay $2400 for a week of rental furniture. DeLuise said it was worth spending the extra cash to spruce up a house that she would never live in.

"We sold the apartment within a few days," DeLuise said, adding that they ended up selling it for more than they originally expected to.

"When the apartment was being shown the Realtor told us that of the many people that walked through and looked at it, a lot of people said 'Can we just buy it furnished?'" DeLuise explained. "It looked like a show suite."

According to DeLuise the key to home staging is to not have too many personal objects, so that the buyers can visualize themselves living in the apartment. The idea is to sell the house, not the homeowner's lifestyle.

Home staging is not a new concept, especially among most real estate agents who have long acknowledged the benefits of making a home look clean and clear for potential buyers.

There is even a television show devoted to the effects of home staging.

The concept behind DEKORA is similar to Arts and Entertainment's TV show called Sell This House, which gives old homes a speedy facelift with the hope that the owner will sell fast with maximum profit.

On Sell This House hidden cameras record potential buyers strolling through the rooms and scrutinizing the house, which generally reflect the 1980s décor philosophy, when porcelain knick-knacks, plastic floral displays, tacky wall art and wallpaper ruled.

The comments from potential buyers walking through the "before" house are often harshly critical. The homeowners are forced to listen uncomfortably as strangers dissect every corner of their house. But it isn't all bad news.

A sort of magical prince of redecorator comes in and with the help of the homeowner refreshes the glum house and creates a sparkly, clutter-free haven. The decorating prince, Roger Hazard, tries to highlight the architectural highlights of the house, while downplaying the low points.

Once the home staging is complete, viewers watch as the same prospective buyers who formerly trashed the house, now stroll through it as if it were a new palace. The comments are always more positive and potential buyers are astounded by the transformation. More often than not the show ends with the homeowners receiving at least one offer.

DEKORA's basic premise is similar to Sell This House, except the West Vancouver company does not work under a $300 US-per-house budget.

Property owners can choose a $95-an-hour consultation, where DEKORA's designers tell them what they should do to make the property more appealing to buyers.

This process can take from one to four hours, said DEKORA's John Carter. The consultation ends with a written report.

Much like Sell This House, property owners do a lot of the work themselves.

But those who take this approach may not have access to furniture rentals, Carter explained, although there is a single listing for furniture rentals in the phone book.

The other option involves a free estimate, where DEKORA will do a room-by-room assessment and give the cost of the job and then do it for the homeowner.

"We are not going to get into paint colours and where should furniture be and that sort of thing," Carter explained about the free estimate procedure.

The company does not explain room-by-room what they are going to do because the risk is the homeowners might do the work themselves without paying the hourly consultation fee.

The cost for DEKORA's services is broad, according to

Carter, and can range from $150 to upward of $10,000. "We can do anything, except major renovations, "Carter said. "So if you need a new roof don't call us."

The film and television background in set design means DEKORA designers can completely transform a house through painting, landscaping, and minor repairs, Carter says.

Arthur has worked with designer Ron Sowden for production companies such as Disney, Paramount and 10th Century Fox. Sowden, who lives in West Vancouver, is also one of the founding instructors of set decorating at Capilano College's Professional Film Studies program.

Although the designers sometimes give the house an entire overhaul, Carter and other specialists are quick to point out that home staging is not interior decorating.

"A good understanding of target markets is one of the differences between interior decorating and staging," said Carter. "In interior decorating, the decorator will hold the homeowners hand and make decisions based on the person living there."

The goal with home staging is to sell the house, which means homeowners won't spend a lot of time debating paint colour and home accessories. The idea is to create a clean palette that potential buyers can paint with their own imaginations – to keep it as subjectively clean as possible.

"We don't spend six months trying to figure out how to make the home look good, we do it in like three to five days," Carter said.

But not everyone is able to see the forest for the trees. Some homes may be "gems" buried in a sea of personal artifacts and beaten-up character furniture.

It seems most people should be able to see beyond bad carpets, but for some beauty is just paint-colour deep.

For those who argue that home staging is an unnecessary expense for sellers, Carter says they only have to look at real estate developers who build large condo developments.

"Those bottom-line business people don't create $100,000-show-suites, if it doesn't help sell suites," he says. "They would just show it naked, if it didn't make a difference."

In February, DEKORA won the prestigious American Design Award. For more information on DEKORA visit www.dekora.com.