

The London Magazine

LUXURY LIFESTYLE, PRIME PROPERTY



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How to stage your house for sale • Bedroom sanctuaries
• Mother's Day gift guide • Antique jewellery revival

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DRESSED FOR SUCCESS Right: This house in Lowther Road, Barnes, was furnished prior to sale, through Knight Frank Interiors. Far right: Penthouse at Dumont St James, interior designed by Angel O'Donnell



SET *the* STAGE

Selling your house, or renting out your flat this spring? Alexandra Goss meets the 'home stagers' who inject characterful and authentic style to woo buyers



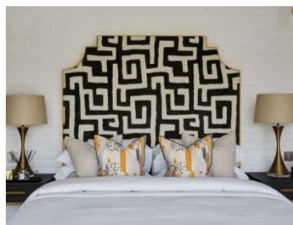
UNIQUE APPEAL Top: This property in Tedworth Square, Chelsea, has been colourfully dressed by the staging company Burbeck Interiors. Bottom: A loft in Shoreditch is given the Burbeck treatment. Bottom: Lowther Road in Barnes had no buyers for three months until it was dressed by Knight Frank Interiors

Leafty Barnes, in southwest London, is a dream address for many. Yet a spacious five-bedroom house near the Thames and the village green spent three months on the market with no takers. The reason? It was empty. The property was kitted out by Knight Frank Interiors, with stylish furniture to complement the sleek kitchen and steel-framed windows. It was dressed with plants and books, decorative items and cushions. Four weeks later it sold for the full asking price of £3.75m.

Welcome to the world of home staging, familiar to fans of the Netflix show *Selling Sunset* as the process of styling houses and apartments in a bid to sell them quickly and for more money. The trend began in the US in the late 1990s and has been used over here for years, often by developers.

"If a property is empty, thoughtful staging will make it stand out from the competition, leading to more enquiries, more viewings and more offers," says Tara Welsh, director of Knight Frank Interiors. "In a 2021 report by the Home Staging Association, 67 per cent of agents agreed a staged property sold faster than a non-staged one."

However, post-pandemic, the rules have changed, particularly at the top of the London market. "Buyers and renters turn



up their noses at grey and beige vanilla properties, dated paint colours and generic furniture," says Georgie Noel-Shore, associate director at Marsh & Parsons in Kensington. Now, each home must feel unique, insists Alex Willcocks, managing director of the staging company Burbeck Interiors. "The generic show home is dead

– it's vital for the interior to feel as if it has been curated for that specific property." His approach appears to work: 70 per cent of properties his company dresses go under offer in the first five weeks of marketing; recently, one apartment was snapped up within five days for £150,000 over the asking price.

Authenticity is key, says Simon Kincaid, partner at the design studio Conran and Partners, which styled the penthouse at LUMA, King's Cross. "It should feel as much like a real home as possible – so anything overly manicured or curated should be avoided. The days of the photography book on the coffee table and the breakfast tray on a fur throw on the bed are gone."

The key to authenticity, especially in a new-build, is to go custom-made, says Charlotte Hodges-Peck, senior consultant at Savills Interior Services: "Bespoke furnishings – whether a headboard, a commissioned piece of art or a statement wall – are essential to setting a property apart." And, thanks to the focus on sustainability, vintage items are increasingly used – the LUMA penthouse features a vintage pendant light and reupholstered vintage chairs. Rooms are individually staged – Hodges-Peck adds popcorn makers to

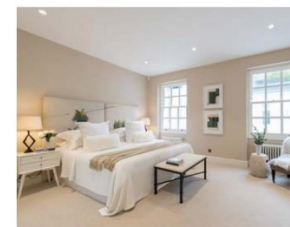


BUY THE LIFESTYLE Top: The penthouse at Park Modern in Bayswater, where the developers Fenton Whelan can dress properties with luxury items including bespoke cocktail bars. Bottom: Three-bedroom Laverton Mews in Earl's Court was immaculately staged by Lurot Brand and subsequently sold

home cinemas, while the Park Modern developers Fenton Whelan create beautiful cocktail bars (apartments cost £2m to £60m through Savills and Knight Frank) – and the overall look is considered to appeal to the target buyer or renter. For family properties, Katie Price, senior interior designer at the architecture firm SHH, incorporates playrooms, but for those marketed at professionals, she includes entertainment spaces and home offices.

Staging post-Covid is about making the most of a property. When instructed on a two-bedroom flat with no garden near Wandsworth Common, Carter Jones worked with the owner to style it. "We focused on the showstopping element: the view," says Isabelle Branson, head of Wandsworth sales. "We styled the Juliet balcony as a wintry aperitif space, with fairy lights and sheepskin throws to create a 'hygge' vibe." The flat sold after 10 days close to its £700,000 guide price.

Brands are also important. Stagers say traditional top-end buyers appreciate names such as Hermès, Ortigia Sicilia and Frette, whereas younger ones may look for Balenciaga and Aesop. Hodges-Peck often uses a fedora from Rag & Bone in



a dressing room and Jo Malone candles. Increasingly, though, branding needs to be personal, says Ed O'Donnell, co-founder of the design firm Angel O'Donnell: "Discerning buyers prize the unique over

the ubiquitous." At the Atlas Building, in east London, his firm incorporated cookbooks from Shoreditch restaurants and planting from local florists.

Talking points make a property stand out, too. A two-bedroom flat in Kensington had a light installation by the artist Natasha Archdale – lettings agent Marsh & Parsons received more enquiries about the artwork than the apartment. Indeed, sometimes staging will be so successful that a buyer falls for it all.

A show penthouse at Islington Square, priced from £4.25m, was dressed by Style & Stage, with pops of brightness and natural textures inspired by LA living and *Selling Sunset*. Beauchamp Estates says it was reserved within days by a buyer who purchased the entire design – from the kitchenware to the linen to the soaps.

Home staging isn't cheap – renting out luxurious settings for a 1,500 sq ft mews property would cost £8,000-£12,000 for three months, according to Marlon Lloyd Malcolm, managing director of Lurot Brand. Yet he insists quality will attract the right clients: "Ultimately, they need to be able to imagine themselves living a better version of their current lives there." ■