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bricks & mortar

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Property
Supplement
of the Year



A castle to capture

Play out your Game of Thrones
fantasies in this 13th-century pile *Page 4*

Interiors



The Manor House in Holybourne, Hampshire, before and after its rejuvenation by tenants Sophie and Richard Rogerson

Set the stage to speed up a sale

Declutter but don't empty the rooms and use neutral decor tones to bring out the best in your home, says **Carol Lewis**

If your property isn't selling your estate agent may suggest dropping the price, but a more cost-effective strategy might be to spend money on staging your home.

Spending money to make a house more desirable to buyers is definitely worth it, according to Ben Bambrugh, managing director of bB Design House, a home staging and interior design company. "Staged homes sell faster in slow markets and at higher prices in stronger markets. The cost of staging is very small when compared with the return it will bring."

Home staging is similar to interior design but is aimed at buyers rather than residents. It is about furnishing a house in such a way as to show off the property rather than the furniture. It is not about individual taste or sentimentality. "As soon as people decide to sell they need to detach from the property emotionally," says Bambrugh. This is about selling a lifestyle rather than something lived-in.

Bambrugh recently staged a property that had an asking price of £3.3 million but wasn't attracting offers, despite being on the market for months and attracting a large number of viewings. He advised the owner to remove poor-quality fitted cupboards, decorate and refurbish, at a cost of about £20,000. Within three weeks three buyers were in a bidding war and the house sold for £240,000 above the asking price.

Staging does not tend to involve major construction or new bathrooms and kitchens, much of it is achievable quickly and simply, and doesn't require massive expenditure compared to the returns possible. Here we look at the key ways in which you could stage your own home and boost the chances of a quick sale.

Declutter
While an empty home is soulless, a



house crammed full of furniture, books and pictures is likely to distract from what the property has to offer. "Don't overfill cupboards, though, because at the third viewing potential buyers often want to see inside to assess storage space. Don't put all the clutter in one room either: don't sacrifice a room, show off the whole space. Rent out a small storage unit and fill it," Bambrugh says. Kitchen surfaces should be free of gadgets and fridge magnets removed; attics should be tidy and well lit.

Plump and prime
Your home is now on show and needs to be dust-free and clean at all times. Beds should be made, sofas straightened and cushions plumped "like a hotel", Bambrugh says. Fresh flowers are a good idea but will need regularly replacing, so consider good-quality fakes — orchids work well. A diffuser is a good idea, particularly in the kitchen, but

don't introduce strong scents. Sophie Rogerson, director at RFR, a property search and interior design consultancy, says: "It is all about the little things. New blinds, a clean shower curtain and regrouting the bathroom so it feels fresh and clean."

Neutralise walls
Any overstylised or personalised rooms will need to be redecorated. Walls should not be white but are best painted a pale, neutral tone. Bambrugh favours Farrow & Ball's Skimming Stone. Rogerson prefers Farrow & Ball's Elephant's Breath and Hardwick White. She adds: "People think that you should have the lighter colours on the woodwork and darker colours on the wall, but sometimes doing it the other way [round] can make rooms look bigger."

Neutralise furniture
Bambrugh furnishes homes with white and cream sofas, using cushions to add accent colours. "You don't want the furniture to take up too much visual space. A cream sofa can be lost into the walls. Neutral colours create an airy roomy feel," he says. Both Bambrugh and Rogerson advise clients to remove

Above and right, 8 Royal Avenue, a 3,000 sq ft five-storey Grade II listed home in Chelsea, has been renovated by architects Markam Associates and staged by Ben Bambrugh, inset left (£7.5 million, hamptons.co.uk, struttandparker.com); inset below right, Sophie Rogerson



dark furniture, although Rogerson adds that stripping and repainting dark wood to lighten it can be effective.

Don't empty rooms
"The idea that empty rooms look bigger is a myth," says Bambrugh, who advises putting furniture into all rooms, including box rooms. "In a small, boxy bedroom I would put a 4ft 6in bed, a couple of side tables with lamps, a console table and a small chair," he says.



Neutralise floors
Replace deep-coloured and patterned carpets with neutral ones. "You can get a decent cream pile carpet for £11 to £12 a metre," Bambrugh says. Rogerson suggests replacing mismatched carpets with seagrass, which is neutral, hardwearing and durable.

Shine a light
Bambrugh uses mirrors wherever possible to open up spaces and reflect light. This is especially effective at opening up narrow hallways. Lighting is important too: have plenty of lamps in addition to ceiling lights. If possible ask the estate agent to switch on lights ahead of a viewing. The houses Bambrugh stages for developers often don't have curtains, meaning lots of light can come into the rooms. Rogerson advises taking down curtains in rooms that are not overlooked and pulling back drapes where they block light.

Artistic licence
The homes Bambrugh stages are dotted with paintings and sculptures. "If you have a £7 million home, you can't put cheap prints on the wall," he says. He adds that many people hang pictures to be at their own eye level rather than according to the height of the room —



you might need to move pictures up a little if your ceilings are high. Although a few pieces of well-chosen art are a good idea, large canvases of your wedding and children are not. Keep personal pictures small and discreet.

Bambrugh also likes symmetry: two sidetables with matching lamps either side of a sofa or fireplace, pictures either side of a chimney breast and sculptures on shelves.

Make an entrance
Tidy the garden, clean the steps, and paint the front door.

"Dark colours are always the smartest and most sophisticated. Charcoal, slate, midnight blue and black all work on front doors," Bambrugh says. You only have a short time to grab the buyer's attention, make a good impression from the start. Set the stage to make a sale. bbdesignhouse.com, rfrproperty.com

City living

Surf's up in the heart of the city

A Marylebone flat is home and HQ to a couple with a business in boards and bikinis, says **Jessie Hewitson**

Three things connect Giles Dunn, a designer and seller of luxury surfboards, with Sir Terence Conran. First, Dunn's father, Charles, worked with Conran in the 1950s on an office design. Now, six decades later, The Conran Shop stocks Dunn's boards. "I gather Jasper [Terence's son and chairman of The Conran Shop] asked what was the most outrageous thing they could offer their clients last Christmas," says Dunn, whose company, Swami's, has collaborated with Paul Smith on a surfboard design. "Someone said they had read about a company that makes bespoke surfboards. Jasper said, 'That's insane. Let's do it.' One of their guys came to our office and said, 'I don't know anything about surfboards, but can you make some for us?'"

The third connection is Marylebone, the Central London area where Dunn lives and which Sir Terence helped to put on the map in the 1990s with a shop and restaurant. Waitrose followed suit and the rest is gentrified history.

Dunn, his German-born wife, Ilka, and their ten-month-old baby, Caspar, are about to benefit from this gentrification, having put their one-bedroom, top-floor flat in Montagu Square on the market. Just a few doors down from a flat once owned by Ringo Starr — where John Lennon and Jimi Hendrix lived (though not at the same time) — it is both home and office.

"For most people, living and working in the same place is an unhealthy thing to do, but for us, life and work are almost



Above, Giles, Ilka and Caspar Dunn; below, Swami's swimwear now sells in Selfridges; bottom, Montagu Square, Marylebone

the same thing," says Dunn. As well as creating boards so beautiful that non-surfers will, upon seeing them, be inspired to take up the sport, Swami's produces custom-made wetsuits (one magazine described them as "the Savile Row of wetsuits"), hoodies, T-shirts and a new capsule collection of women's swimwear for Selfridges.

The asking price for the property, on the market through Druce estate agency, is £1.325 million. Those who despair at how crazy high prices in prime Central London have become — everyone except those who own property there — will roll their eyes at the size of this million pound-plus flat just 756 sq ft.

However, for that you get lots of light, lovely views (the rooftops of smart London homes from the bedroom; the prestigious square from the living room) and the cachet of living a short walk from Marylebone High Street.

The design of the flat is simple: white walls, seagrass flooring and, in the living room, a steel bookshelf designed by Ron Arad. Dunn, who also owns the graphic design agency Punkt, once worked for Arad on a project.

Instead of payment he asked to have a steel prototype made of the Bookworm bookshelf, which has become a design classic. The property was a two-bedroom flat when Dunn bought it in 2002 — one of the rooms shared a wall with the living room. He turned this bedroom into an office, knocking down most of the wall to make it more open plan, and thickening the walls to add cupboard space accessible from both the living room and bedroom.

The couple's plan is now to sell the flat and move to a four-bedroom bungalow they have recently bought in Kew Gardens. The bungalow, centred around a garden, was built in 1979 by an architect who planned to live there but instead moved to California. "It looks like a time capsule from the 1970s — my favourite design era," says Dunn, who is planning on significantly renovating it.

"The entranceway to the house looks like two garage doors. You would walk past and think, 'What a strange house,' and dismiss it, not knowing what is beyond the front door. I love that. It is what I love about Morocco: you walk down a street in Marrakesh and it looks dirty and there's a sheep, then you walk through a door and an amazing riad opens up. Our new home is like that." druce.com, 020-7935 6535

Renovate in return for a cut in rent

Painting walls and replacing carpets might seem an unusual preoccupation in a rental property, but estate agents say tenants are negotiating rent reductions in return for a little renovation.

Last year interior designers Sophie and Richard Rogerson decided to move from the city to the country, renting before they bought, but while they found a home they loved — The Manor House in Holybourne, near Alton in Hampshire — they weren't so sold on the decor.

"The house had been on the



market for a while. It was lovely but a bit old-fashioned," Sophie explains. "We saw that we could make it appeal more to a young family quite easily." They negotiated a deal on the rent and, with the landlords' permission, set about freshening it up (see before and after shots, above).

Gordon Hood, of Knight Frank estate agency in Ascot, says: "We are finding landlords amenable to [tenants changing interiors] ... on the proviso that the landlords are consulted along the way. And they will want to see clauses within the tenancy agreement ensuring that the property can be returned to the original condition at the end of the tenancy."

The move to the country hasn't worked for the Rogersons and the six-bedroom Grade II Regency house, with refreshed interiors, is on the market with Knight Frank for £1.75 million. CarolLewis.com