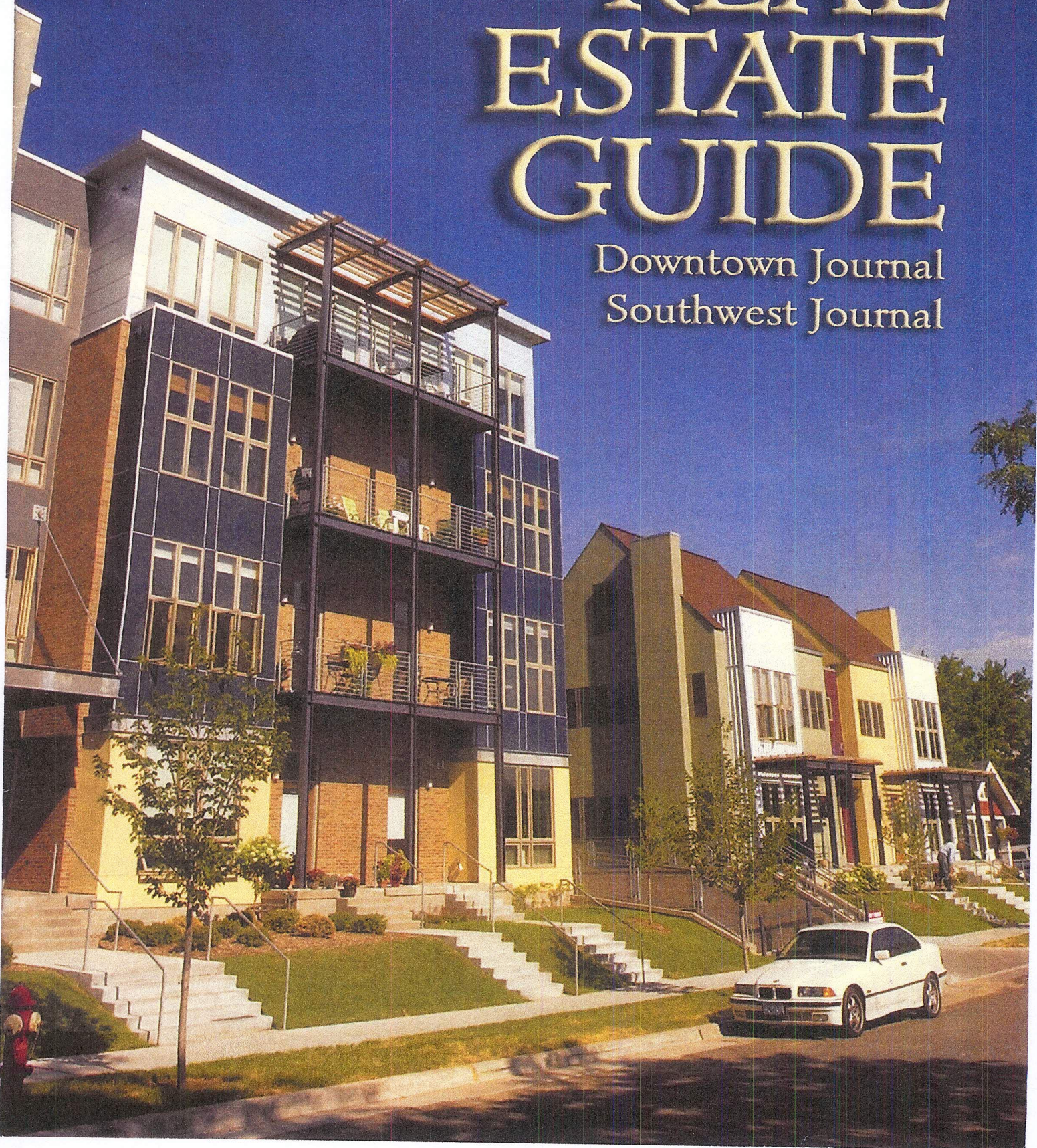


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REAL ESTATE GUIDE

Downtown Journal
Southwest Journal



STAGING TO SELL

A new concept polishes the look and feel of homes, making them more competitive in the marketplace



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Above: a Southwest home, cleanly staged. Below: the 'before' shot.

BY DANI LITT

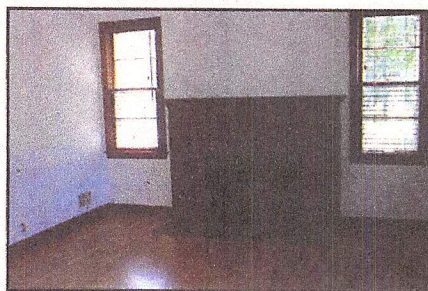
A home on Lake Harriet Parkway sat on the market for three months before the owners called a professional stager to help transform it into a hot commodity.

When Robin Kessler, an accredited staging professional and owner of Southwest Minneapolis-based Sorted Affairs, went to look at the home on the 4800 block, Kessler noticed chipped paint, wood floors that needed to be refinished, bad tile and a lot of clutter.

After some new paint and carpet, refinished wood floors, flowers, a freshly mowed lawn, and some furniture rearrangement, it looked like a different home. The home sold in less than three weeks near its \$1.3 million asking price.

Had the homeowners staged the home before putting it on the market, they could have sold it for closer to the asking price, and more quickly, said Sharon Mitchell, another accredited staging professional and owner of Simply Staged.

That's because "The way people



live in their house and the way they sell it are two different things," said Mitchell.

As a rule, Gleni Sprague of Coldwell Banker Burnett Realty always stages homes before putting them on the market. "It's part of the marketing plan. You live in a house like it's a home, and when it's on the market, it's a commodity."

STAGE FROM THE BEGINNING

Mitchell emphasized key advice: "Stage before putting it on the market."

It's important for sellers to stage their homes from the beginning

because most buyers walk through within the first 30 days, Mitchell said.

Lynelle Hartman, an accredited staging professional and co-owner of LH2 Staging, agreed. "You want to stage the home right away, or you can't get back those people who came in the first 30 days. You want to make an impact," she said.

According to the National Association of Realtors, homes sold in the first four weeks average 1.9 percent less than the listed prices, and the decline grows as the weeks wear on. Homes sold between 13 and 24 weeks average 5.6 percent less than the listed price. Homes sold after 24 weeks average 8.9 percent less than the listed price.

For a \$400,000 home, the drop between the first month and the sixth months works out to \$14,800.

Mitchell's stages begin at \$180 and up for a partial stage, including two hours or more of helping sellers to get started staging their home — the amount of time spent on staging determines the price. The price rises to \$240 and up for a complete staging, which can include home maintenance.

Who pays for a staging varies by Realtor and homeowner. Sometimes the Realtor will pay for the consultation because they want the stager to explain to the homeowner the work that must be done, Hartman said. The homeowner will then pay for the work and/or rentals.

Other times, the homeowners do it on their own and end up convincing the Realtor their home needs to be staged. Staging a home could cost as little as a couple hundred dollars to as much as a couple thousand. In the end, homeowners save a lot of money, she said.

"The investment of staging is less than your first price reduction," Hartman said.

Before rearranging the whole house, most stagers educate their clients through a consultation. Hartman explained: "The first rule of staging is to honor the homeowner. If we don't teach them why we want to change something, they will be offended."

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'Stage' coaching can help home sellers avoid price cuts

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Mitchell's consultations cost \$150. She spends about an hour in the home taking pictures and making notes, and then she prepares a report detailing what changes need to be made for the home to be perfect to show.

After the consultation, the homeowner and stager work together to decide what must be done and how much money to spend.

To cut costs, the homeowner can do many of the tasks on the list rather than paying the stager to do it. Hartman gives the homeowner homework, including a list of things to do such as painting, cleaning and yard work to be done before she arrives.

STAGING AN EXISTING HOME

When staging an existing home, stagers use the furniture and accent pieces already there, as in the Lake



A typical staging makes the home look livable, but with a clean enough canvas for buyers to 'mentally move in.'

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Harriet Parkway home. This is cheaper for the homeowner because they don't pay the cost of furniture rental.

Once the house is cleaned and-painted and knick-knacks smaller than a fist-size are packed away, the stager comes in and begins to rearrange the rooms, beginning with the big pieces.

Furniture from one room may

move to another, some may be taken out of the home altogether and the layout of the rooms could be changed completely. Many times, homeowners will begin to see their home in a different light.

Although a setting's elements can be persuasive, Hartman said it's important for homeowners to remember that they're selling their



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space, not their furniture or artwork. "Buyers only know what they see, not what it's going to be," she said.

Some people's perceptions may seem counterintuitive. For example, if the cabinets are so full that the doors are slightly open, buyers will think that the cabinets are too small, not that the homeowner has too much stuff. Removing things from the home during the staging process can also be a bonus for the homeowner. The earlier the packing starts, the less stress there is likely to be later on, Hartman explained.

STAGING A VACANT HOME

Staging a vacant home is important because buyers need to see what they can do in the home. "It's about creating a place for buyers to mentally move in," Hartman said.

She and Leigh Hagen, an accredited staging professional and co-owner of LH2 Staging with Hartman, were hired to stage condos in the building on 3215 Girard Ave. S.

to create a place the potential buyers could see themselves living in.

They used contemporary furniture to create a look that would appeal to young buyers in the Uptown area.

Both Hartman and Sprague said they think about who might be moving in and stage accordingly. Will the buyer be a newlywed couple? A family? A bachelor?

Objects can make a space seem comfortable. The effect is psychological. For example, putting a game on the table in a room can make the potential buyer "see" family and friends having a good time. Placing stuffed animals and toys into a room helps a newlywed couple envision their future child's room.

Mitchell's vacant home stages begin at \$500 plus the monthly rental costs for furniture and accessories used for staging. Both she and Hartman have extensive inventories that they collected everywhere from Goodwill to Target to Gabbert's. Pricing for the rentals are by room, not necessarily broken down by accessory.

STAGING COMES FULL CIRCLE

Staging is still relatively new to Minnesota, although Hartman and Hagen predict customers will be calling stagers before contacting the Realtor within two or three years. Staging is also an important step in being a competitive seller, according to some real estate professionals.

If there are two homes for sale, both about the same, and one looks better because it is staged, buyers are going to want the one that looks better. "More and more Realtors understand that in order to be competitive over other Realtors, they should stage the home," Mitchell said.

Since staging is so new, many first-timers are skeptical, but Hagen said he thinks that once someone has their house staged, they are hooked. Even the skeptics say they wish that they'd staged it before so they could enjoy their home, he said.



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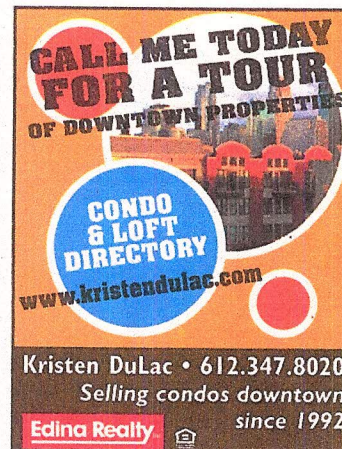
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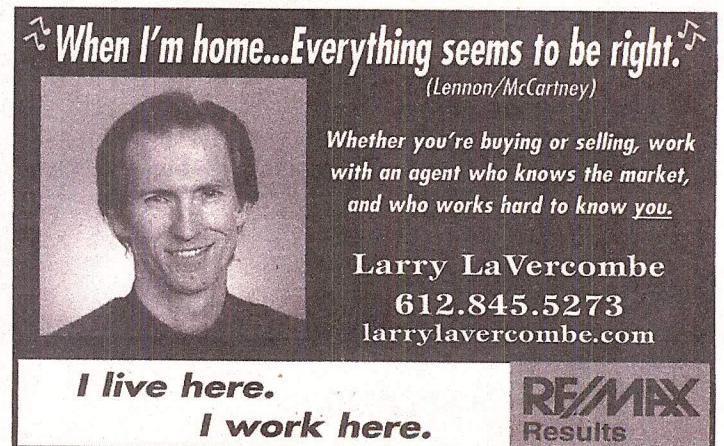


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