

When homes take centre stage

Sometimes decluttering alone isn't enough to attract big selling price

KATHLEEN FREIMOND

When first impressions can mean the difference between a sale and just another showing, it's no wonder realtors encourage staging to boost the appearance and ambience of homes on the busy real estate market.

Kim Anderson, principal of Home Reworks, a home staging and interior design company, is fascinated by the growth of the industry. "We used to have to sell people on the idea. Now there is more demand than we can fulfil; people are really on board with it," she says.

Anderson, who has a warehouse of staging supplies for Home Reworks' stagers and designers, says potential buyers decide very quickly whether they like a home. "It's about creating a feeling — warmth and happiness and sometimes richness — depending on the market. That is what buyers attach to. That first impression is really important."



Kim Anderson

Anderson achieves this by bringing in the right style and scale of furniture; however, she believes it is the layers that makes a space feel comfortable. "It's the finishing layers we put in with the art, and tie in colours to the soft furnishings. If you just had the furniture and didn't put in the extra layers, it wouldn't feel cohesive," she says. Currently, one of the most popular ways of doing this is with sheepskin, which instantly adds soft texture to space, she adds.

Patti Houston of Fluff Design & Decor has been at the forefront of the staging phenomenon in the Vancouver area. Fluff stocks everything from trendy accessories to sofas and sectionals to support the demand for rented furnishings from homeowners, stagers and the film industry.

When she established the business 12 years ago, it operated out of a 1,500-square-foot warehouse. This week, after several expansions, the company is celebrating its move from a 15,000-square-foot warehouse to a 40,000-square-



Patti Houston

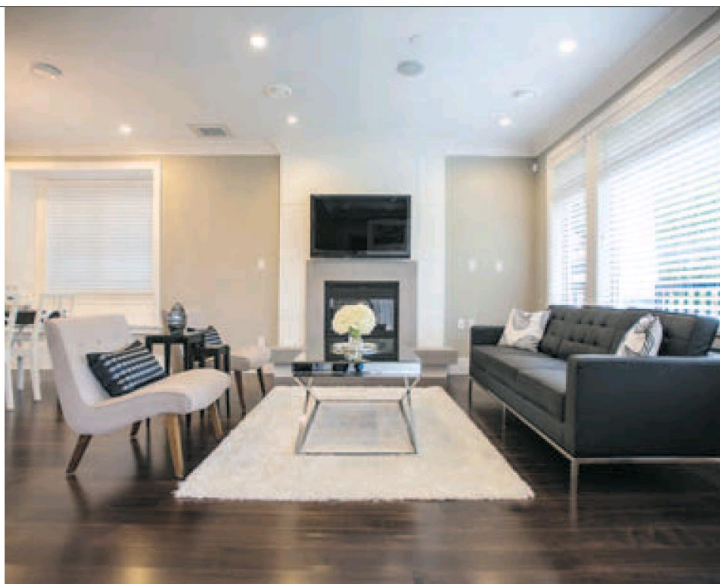
foot warehouse on William Street in Vancouver.

At Fluff, the inventory is organized by category and colour, making it easy to co-ordinate the items needed to get a home ready for its close-up in the online listings and newspaper advertisements that often make the difference between a buyer deciding to view a property or not.

Houston stocks furnishings to create a "soft contemporary" look. She recalls that a few years ago, staging was very contrived. "You'd walk into a staged home and each pillow was the same and the 'chop' was perfect — everything was so precise. Now it's looser, with a more lived-in look," she says.

That nod to the home's next owners is an important part of the staging process.

"The stager is part of the marketing team and we listen very carefully to ensure the interiors appeal to the demographic," Houston says. If a three-bedroom condo is being marketed to a young family, we would hang kids' art in a frame so it looks more personal. A dog leash hanging from the coat rack makes it appear people live there. We want potential buyers to walk in and feel relaxed."



Home Reworks stages homes to create a positive first impression for potential buyers. "It's about creating a feeling — warmth and happiness and sometimes richness," says Kim Anderson, principal of Home Reworks.

Houston says a Scandinavian influence is driving her inventory that is accessed by Fluff's stagers. "Lots of light wood, and light colour. It's more tone on tone and with texture — there's a calmness about it."

For homeowners who choose not to hire a stager, Houston says decluttering is a priority. "We all have way too much stuff, me included. Then neutralize and take out some colour. If you're going to paint, we have a palette of five colours we suggest — if you choose one of them, it will work. Also take a look at your art. Every home we go into has the art hung too high. The centre of the art should be about 60 inches from the floor, that brings it to the average person's eye level," Houston says.

Bernadette Dunnigan of VPG Realty encourages everyone who lists with her to pay attention to staging. "It makes a big difference. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that you will get 10 times return on your investment," she says.

Dunnigan explains to sellers that the home they live in and the home they sell are different. "Staging makes the home stand out. Sure, you can sell without staging, but it makes a difference to the price you will get. It's an emotional response, people don't know it but they fall in love with the furniture when they

view a home," she says.

She also aims to work with clients' furniture as much as possible because potential buyers often identify pieces and styles that they may be familiar with.

"With all the home shows nowadays, staging is something people expect," Dunnigan says.

At Home on the Water

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	<p>Langley</p> <p>Now relocated to a secure moorage in Langley, this 30'x80' barge/floathome is ready for your redecorating ideas.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$225,000</p>
	<p>Vancouver</p> <p>Coal Harbour live-aboard boat... over \$100,000 recently spent on mechanical and electrical upgrades!</p> <p style="text-align: right;">\$290,000</p>

The Fluff Design & Decor warehouse stocks decor to stage a contemporary look.

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