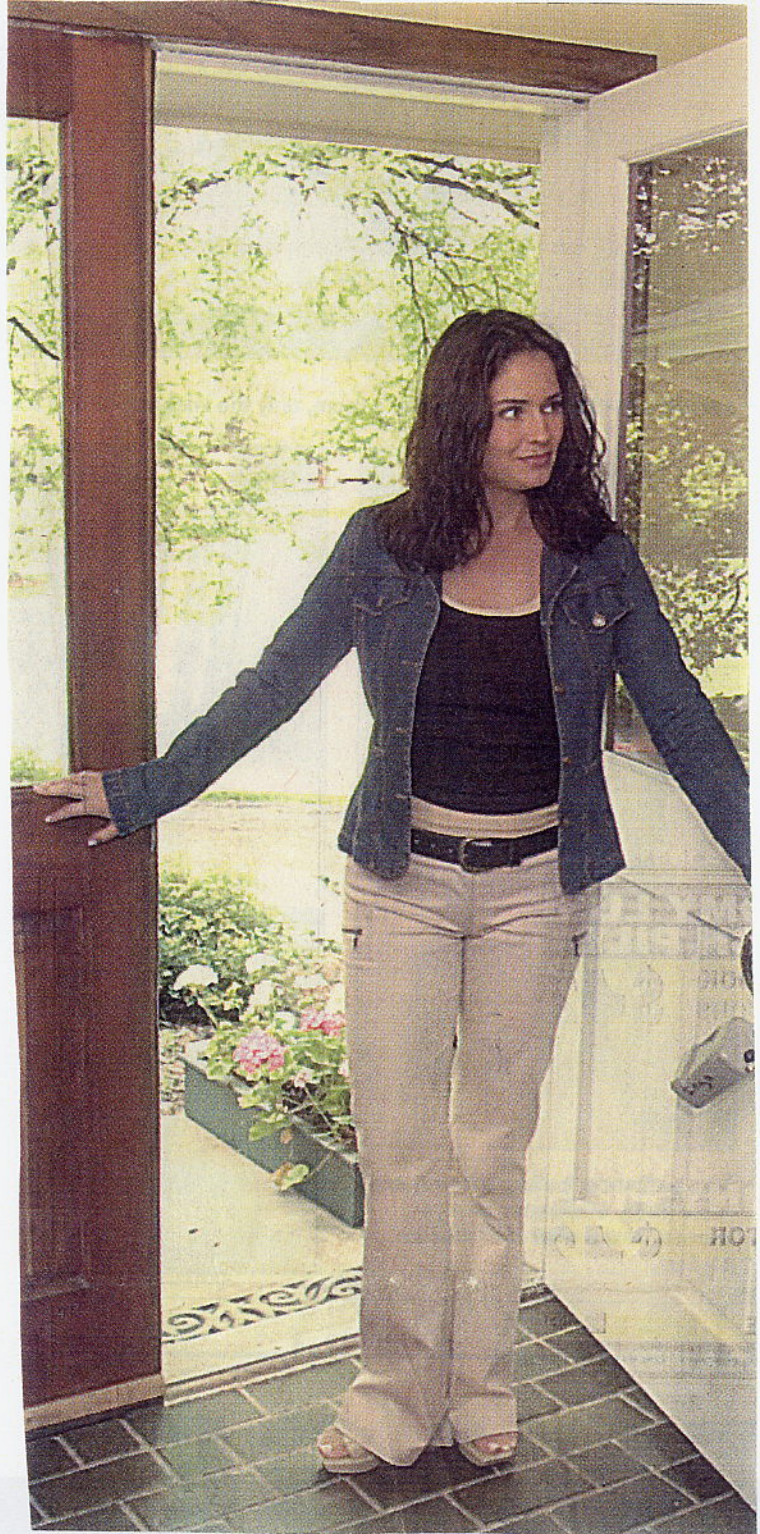


Dressed to sell

Chicago Sun-Times



BY CELESTE BUSK
STAFF REPORTER

De-clutter, clean up, neutralize and de-personalize.

That's the design philosophy behind "Sell This House," a new cable show designed to help sellers prepare their homes for sale. In the half-hour program, prospective buyers are videotaped as they walk through a home that is for sale. The tape is then reviewed by the home sellers and the crew of "Sell This House." Then, changes are made based on the potential buyers' criticisms and observations.

The program airs at 4 p.m. Sundays on A&E, and it's repeated at 1 p.m. Saturdays.

"It's like 'This Old House' meets 'Candid Camera,'" said Aimee Gautreau, spokeswoman for the show. "It's designed to get inside the mind of the buyer and the heart of the seller with real-life experiences and offer advice on how to prepare a house for the market."

The "Sell This House" crew recently brought their expertise to Chris and Kathy Brady, who had put their two-story modern home in northwest suburban North Barrington on the market. It was listed for \$499,000 through Baird & Warner's Schaumburg office, but it wasn't moving.

"We listed the house in May and hoped to sell it within three to six months," Kathy said. "We had some buyers walk through, but no offers."

The couple has lived in their home for 16 years. They're selling



Chris and Kathy Brady let the crew of "Sell This House" decorate their home for sale.

because their children are grown and have moved out. "It's a 5-bedroom house, and we just don't need this much space," Kathy said.

With some focused redecorating advice and labor from "Sell This House," the Brady home had a new look. The total cost of the redecoration for each show is about \$300, plus plenty of work by the crew and home sellers.

The crew's changes, which typically range from a coat of paint to rearrangement of existing furniture, are completed within two days of the home shoppers' initial walk-through. Then, the same potential



ABOVE: The crew rearranged the master bedroom and chose neutral bedding. INSET: The bedroom before.

buyers are brought back to see the results.

In the Brady home, the bedrooms and a bathroom were the center of the show's attention.

"They attacked the rooms which got the most negative feedback from the buyers," Kathy said. "The buyers said our daughter's room had too much clutter and they did-

n't like the blue color. They also thought the master bedroom was outdated."

None of the buyers' original criticism surprised the Bradys, but having the TV show's experts there made improving the property less overwhelming.

"Our visions of what we had to do to these rooms were lopsided,"

Chris said. "We thought we had to spend a lot more money. The show's efforts showed us that we didn't need to totally redecorate these rooms, but we just needed to restage them."

"For example, we thought we had to spend about \$8,000 for a whole new bathroom," Chris said. "But, by making a few changes it

On the air

What: "Sell This House," a weekly show to help sellers make simple, affordable improvements.

When: 4 p.m. Sundays (repeated 1 p.m. Saturdays) on A&E. The Brady episode is scheduled to run Oct. 5.

More information: www.aetv.com.



was staged differently at a minimal cost."

In the daughter's room, all furniture was removed except the wicker bed and small table. Designer Roger Hazard painted the walls a wheat color to match an existing comforter.

"We were told to clean up the floor, which was carpeted," Chris Brady said. "So we pulled the carpet off and refinished the wood floor ourselves in one night."

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To complete the room, new curtains were added.

The TV crew rearranged the master bedroom. "They put on all new bedding, too," Kathy said. "All the sheets and pillowcases are beige and white, and they put a new duvet over the old comforter."

The bathroom was completely redone. "We 'de-blued' it — the tub was blue, the sink was blue, the floor was blue and the tile was blue," Chris said. "I put in a new white sink. The show [crew] took down the old wallpaper and painted the walls gray. We kept the blue tub and blue tile, but the blue became a complementary color, not a dominating color."

On the second walk-through, the same buyers approved of the changes, though none made an offer. However, since then, the house has gone under contract, and is about to close, Chris said.

Simplicity and speed are key to "Sell This House."

"The show is a good practical way

to show people how they can show their home, and hopefully make more money," said Tanya Memme, who has been hosting the show since its debut July 6.

"It's different than other decorating shows because we're not changing the architecture of the home," she said. "We're just staging it differently — moving furniture around and doing simple things to make the homes look more generic, comfortable, bright, roomier and welcoming so they sell quicker."

Memme marshals the production and provides both physical and emotional support, while Hazard creates most of the strategies for the interior design changes.

Hazard watches the video of home shoppers with the sellers and advises them on how best to "stage" their home. Then, one or two main living areas of a residence are transformed.

Making the home appealing to the most people possible is the goal.

"The basic idea is to simplify your tastes," Memme said. Owners need to depersonalize the space, too, removing family photos and collectibles. "Buyers buy on emotion," she said. "They don't like to feel they've invaded somebody's space."