

TV WEEKEND

Anita Gates

What Home Buyers Whisper At a Look-See Open House

Finally, there's a home improvement show that I — and other people who don't own staple guns — can relate to.

I mean, you look at series like "Trading Places" and "Changing Rooms," on which sadistic television producers assign redecorating chores to the owners' friends and neighbors, and wonder who could possibly want that. Would Ned Flanders be happy with a room designed by Homer Simpson? "Sell This House" is much more appealing.

Beginning Sunday at 5 p.m., "Sell This House," a segment in a two-hour Sunday afternoon programming block that A&E calls "The Art of Everyday," presents an all-too-familiar situation. A couple have put their house on the market; lots of people have come to see it, but nobody has made an offer. All the other houses in the neighborhood that were for sale have been snatched up quickly. What to do?

In real life, you repaint, put fresh flowers on the coffee table, bake cookies (Mmmmm — homey smell) and pray. On "Sell This House," you can turn your problem over to Tanya Memme, the host, and Roger Hazard, the show's official home decorating expert. In the premiere episode, the subjects are Mark and Candace, social workers who live north of Seattle, hoping to sell their 1,380-square-foot "cottage" for \$270,000. An open house with hidden cameras is held to pinpoint the problem. Mr. Hazard comes in and looks the place over, improvements are quickly made, and a second open house is held to see how reactions differ.

Immediately the show gives viewers an opportunity to feel superior. My place may not be perfect, you think, but at least I don't have fake-wood-grain Contac paper on my kitchen cabinets. At least I don't use dried flowers — outdoors!

For those who believe television isn't successful unless it humiliates somebody, there is the joy of the videotaped comments of strangers at the first open house. "I don't know," one woman says. "There's something depressing about everything." A visitor says of the master bedroom: "It smells. It smells like tobacco or something." The floor is ratty; the white brick fireplace is dated; a bedroom resembles the gates of hell.

Enter Mr. Hazard, who discusses his plans with the owners but doesn't pay much attention to their opinions. When the master bedroom's dark red walls are painted beige, Candace's first reaction at seeing it is: "Oh, my God! Oh, it's so boring."

Mr. Hazard reassures her. "It's not how you would live in the house," he says. It's restaging, strictly to help prospective buyers imagine the house as their own. This explanation has the double benefit of being true and sparing the couple's feelings.

Furniture is rearranged, knick-knacks and family photographs go into storage; a kitchen rug is thrown down to cover the terrible linoleum; the TV room is transformed into a nursery. (Candace really is expecting a baby.) The people were rounded up for a second open house and are astounded by the change.

This is where "Sell This House" let me down. An A&E publicity release promises that the show will answer the question "Will the house sell, and for how much, at what emotional cost and to whom?" In the premiere episode, at least, there's no information on the sale, which makes the whole exercise a little anticlimactic.

"The Art of Everyday" begins at 4 p.m. with "All Year Round With Katie Brown," in which the host demonstrates projects like how to make a beach mat out of mattress ticking ("You will be all the rage at all the



Tanya Memme and Roger Hazard spiff things up in "Sell This House."

THE ART OF EVERYDAY

A&E, Sunday at 4 p.m., Eastern and Pacific times; 3, Central time.

Bruce David Klein, executive producer, and Maria Lane, supervising producer for Atlas Media; Nancy Dubuc, executive producer, and Tom Moody, supervising producer for A&E Network. Produced by Atlas Media.

WITH: Katie Brown, Tanya Memme, Roger Hazard, Doug Duda and Mark Cutler.

shores," she tells viewers), how to make jerk chicken with citrus salad ("Is your mouth watering yet? I hope so") and how to paint your duvet cover, assuming you would want to. Ms. Brown also does an instant makeover for a viewer's room and competes with a design star in a timed decorating project. (This Sunday: Mario Buatta makes a \$20 roll-up shade fabulous.)

If Ms. Brown wants to be the next Martha Stewart, and I suspect she does, she needs to do some restaging of her own. Her stubby ponytail and wrinkled T-shirt give the impression that she's frazzled, her comments are sometimes a little too Home Shopping Network, and her cutesy projects could make a room look like a supermarket magazine crafts project.

Ms. Brown is followed at 4:30 by Doug Duda and "The Well-Seasoned Traveler," a culinary-travel hybrid. This Sunday Mr. Duda visits Provence in search of the black truffle, attending a "Truffle Mass" that has been held in one church for 50 years. It's good luck to donate a truffle during the offertory, the host points out, and "it's permitted, by the way, to smell the collection basket as it's going past." Mr. Duda is personable and the show is scenic, but this is strictly for viewers who care enough to concentrate on a single ingredient for half an hour.

The block ends with "Makeover Mamas" at 5:30. I had hoped the title indicated sexy older women getting new makeup and hairdos. But no. What we have here are one couple's mothers working together to redecorate one room in their son and daughter's house. This weekend the host, Stephanie Lydecker, is so taken by the fact that one of the mothers is French that she makes comments like "Will it be oui-oui or non-non?" Luckily, the two women, who frequently disagree on colors and styles, are led by a designer, Mark Cutler, who interprets their ideas. But no one reins in (or edits out) the mothers' incessant happy-talk humor. Hated the show, loved the room.

POP AND JAZZ GUIDE

A selective listing by critics of *The Times* of noteworthy pop and jazz concerts in the New York metropolitan region this weekend. ★ denotes a highly recommended concert.

★ RYAN ADAMS AND THE PINKHEARTS, JESSE MALIN, Lawn at Battery Park, (212) 835-2789. Ryan Adams is steeped in the right 1980's snowwriters — Van Morrison Neil



Sanders and Tom Tom Club, leads his own sextet. Tomorrow night at 9:30; admission is \$12 (Pareles).

INGRID LUCIA AND THE FLYING NEUTRINOS, Rodeo Bar, 375 Third Avenue, at 27th Street, Manhattan, (212) 683-6500. Ingrid Lucia pours on the Crescent City charm, with slinky vocals, a neo-swing band and tales of zoot-suited dancers, love and New Orleans. Sunday night at 10; free (Pareles).

★ NELLIE McKay, Box 381, 145th Street

steadfast reggae beats of Steel Pulse have carried righteous sentiments about topics including revolution, dancing, Rastafarianism and racist taxi drivers. Pete Francis (who calls himself Pete Heimbald as a member of Dispatch) puts some reggae backbeat into his introspective folk-rock. Tomorrow night at 9; tickets are \$25 in advance, \$30 at the door (Pareles).

★ TRIBUTE TO IRVING STONE, Tonic, 107 Norfolk Street, near Delancey Street, Lower East