

# TWIXTRA

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Standard-Examiner

## Series provides help for homely homes

**E**mbroiled in the drama of selling a house in a tough real estate market? Wish you had some direction to help you make it happen?

Then you should improve the odds of selling with proper house staging. That's the concept behind A&E's series "Sell This House!"

"The response from viewers has been amazing," said host Tanya Memme. "As far as I know, this is the only show about 'staging' your house so you can sell it."

The show - currently in its first season with an order for season two - sends Memme and designer Roger Hazard to a home that has been on the market for some time without drawing any interest. The duo holds an open house and places hidden cameras to gather negative feedback.

Then the two-day transformation begins, with buckets of paint, rearranging of furniture, removal of knickknacks and placement of plants and flowers. Afterward, the former critics are invited back for a second review.

"Sell This House!" airs at noon Saturdays and 3 p.m. Sundays on cable's A&E network.

"There are so many people that really don't know what to do to make their houses better, to make them sell," said Memme, whose family lives in Canada and owns a home-construction business.

"People think they have to go shopping to buy all these things, but 80 to 90 percent of the job is using the things you have, repositioning things, and using lighting and flowers in a festive way," she said. "It's fascinating to see the change you can make on a small budget, and how much small changes can impact whether the house sells."

### Why won't it sell?

Memme remembers one house, well-priced and in a good neighborhood, that wasn't drawing any interest.

"People were having a really bad reaction to this house because it has this four-tiered shoe rack, full of old running shoes, right by the front door," she recalled. "When you walked in the house, the whole front smelled like old shoes. The owners had gotten used to it."

Dirt is another thing some owners don't notice.

Pet owners who have grown accustomed to vintage stains on the carpet may not even realize a



Nancy Van  
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On TV

shampoo is in order.

The home of one art-lover was packed with framed art.

"It was like nothing I had ever seen," Memme said. "There must have been at least 500 pieces of art on one wall. Potential buyers couldn't even see the walls."

Memme and Hazard often remove all art and photographs, and decorate the wall with one or two larger pieces of art they think will have broad appeal. Perhaps the most common mistake sellers make is to show a house still decorated to reflect their specific family history and tastes.

"People don't want to let go of their personal style," Memme said.

"When potential home-buyers come in, they want to come to a place they can picture themselves in."

### What can be done?

Among the design revisions made in recent episodes:

▶ The removal of personal clutter and excessive amounts of furniture. If possible, the remaining furniture should reflect a streamlined, nonfussy style. An ultra-ornate Victorian sofa may be your personal treasure, but might remind someone else of great-grandma's musty parlor.

▶ The painting of unattractive walls or dated wallpaper. Removing wallpaper might be preferable but takes a long time. Most nontextured wallpapers that are well-secured can be coated with a primer formulated for wallpaper, then painted in a light color that will make the room look spacious.

▶ The addition of inexpensive art, area rugs and colorful accent items. One house with dated blue-and-beige tile was staged with

a beige rug to make the blue (which visitors overwhelmingly disliked) seem less dominant.

If a house is not selling because of a bad location – for example its distance from town or proximity to a busy road – there's nothing a can of paint can do to help. But one house, on a road with many homes for sale, did draw buyer interest after a mini-makeover made it look like the best of the lot.

Memme said she loves getting word that the staged homes have sold, but even more gratifying is the feedback she gets from people she has never met.

"I have people e-mailing me all the time, saying things like, 'My house has been on the market for three months, and I watched every episode and did everything you said, and it sold in three weeks.' That's what's great about the show: you watch and you learn what you need to know."

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A&E Network

Host Tanya Memme (left) teams with designer Roger Hazard on A&E's "Sell This House!" Each week, the show features homeowners desperate to sell their houses and prospective buyers being secretly videotaped as they express their observations about the homes. After getting help from a home-decoration expert, the house is transformed, and the potential buyers are brought back. "Sell This House!" airs locally at noon Saturdays and 3 p.m. Sundays on A&E.