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Real Estate

South
County

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Laguna Niguel home before its "interior facelift."

Story by Aleta Walther
Real Estate South County



After Open House Interiors' decorators added accessories and rearranged furniture.

Forget curb appeal,
interior makes or
breaks the sale

As Dora Garcia strolls through the front entryway of her neighbor's home she hesitates, then stands gap-jawed in the entryway.

"What have you done?" she exclaims while surveying the home's formal living and dining areas. "This is a different house! The plants. The furniture. What a wonderful difference. It's perfect!"

Two months earlier, Garcia had toured the Laguna Niguel home soon after a "for sale" sign popped up in its front yard. And a month before decorators from Open House Interiors transformed the home's blasé interior into a show place rivaling million dollar model homes.

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Furnished homes sell faster

From B1

The three-bedroom residence, located in the hilltop neighborhood of Laguna Niguel Summit is listed by Link Realty for \$459,000.

Realizing the vacant home and its sparse furnishing would not reflect the home's potential, listing agent **Ashley Handal** recommended the homeowners procure the services of Open House Interiors of Laguna Hills.

Open House Interiors' owners, **Patricia Buxton and Dawn Mercer**, specialize in enhancing the interior appeal of sale homes - appeal they claim generates buyer activity and increases selling potential. They also decorate spec homes for builders, and have an interior design division which is managed by **Diane Peck**, an ASI designer.

“A lot of people spend money in the wrong places when they fix up a home to sell.”

Patricia Buxton
owner, Open House Interiors

“Everyone selling a house has heard the term ‘curb appeal’, and although aesthetic curb appeal is important, people do not live outside their homes,” said Buxton. “It is ultimately the feeling prospective buyers get inside a house that makes them submit offers. Whether or not buyers envision themselves living in a home depends entirely on one thing, emotional appeal.”

Most of the pair's clients are referrals made by listing agents or former clients. Former clients include former football and baseball great **Bo Jackson**, tennis star **Tracy Austin** and theater impresario **James “Jimmy” Doolittle**.

“I was so confident in Patty and Dawn's work that I would have been willing to pay for their services myself if I had to,” Handal added while pointing out places where the team had added character and charm to his

listing. “Homes that are furnished, and looked lived-in sell faster.”

If a sale home is furnished, but still lacks pizzazz, the Open House Interior team will supplement the homeowners' furnishings from their enormous inventory of plants, furnishings, art and accessories. If the home is totally vacant, they can completely furnish the rooms, dress the windows, add accessories, even strategically place family photos on a desk or books on a ledge.

In the case of the Laguna Niguel home, long-stem crystal wine glasses on shelves above a wet bar reflect cascading light and elegance. A polished stone sculpture on a pedestal, tucked in a nook under the stairs, beckons passerbys to take a closer look. A plethora of cozy couch pillows invites cuddling and carefree relaxing.

“New home developers like William Lyon Co., Fieldstone and Barrett, contract interior designers to furnish their homes to display a warm and inviting ambiance,” said Mercer, a designer. “We offer homeowners the same competitive edge — the edge



Patricia Buxton and Dawn Mercer

that helps sell a home fast at the best possible price.”

When homeshoppers tour a home, Buxton and Mercer know they will be looking for, and often find, a home's negative attributes while overlooking hidden positives. Homeshoppers are

also quick to hold those negatives as a bargaining chip in negotiating a selling price.

“We have done a condo in as little

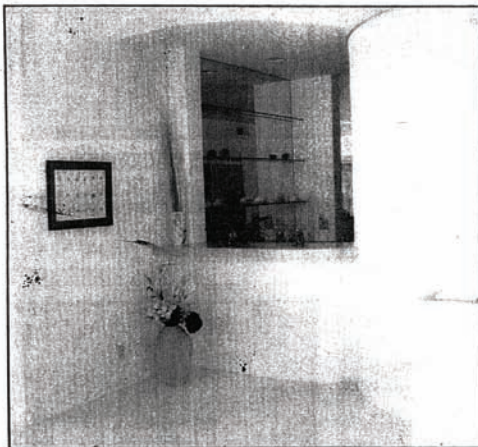
as four hours, but can spend five to seven days on a 3,000-square-foot-home,” said Buxton who started her company seven years ago. “It's easier for us if a home is vacant because everything we bring in matches and gives the home a pulled-together look and feel.”

Buxton added that not only can they enhance the appeal of a home, reduce days on the market, and get a higher selling price, they can also save the homeowner money if they are consulted early in the selling process.

“A lot of people spend money in the wrong places when they fix up a home to sell,” Buxton said. “They hang outdated wall paper and install the wrong fixtures. They replace carpeting and paint when it isn't necessary. We have had clients who told us they have new carpet scheduled to be installed and we have talked them out of it. With the right arrangement and accessories, often all a homeowner needs to do is wash walls rather than paint and clean carpet rather than remove it.”

Open House Interior's fee for a makeover is 1 percent of the home's selling price.

“We have found that on the aver-



age, a 1 percent investment generates a minimum 2 percent return or more. Usually more,” Buxton said. “Our homes show better than other homes in the area, and sell faster while saving the homeowner time and money.”

Vickie Rosenstein, a sales agent with Real Estate Services of Laguna Niguel agrees with Buxton.

“I think the concept is a great idea,” said Rosenstein who works mostly as a buyer's agent. “I have seen their work before and after and I'll tell you, they know how to transform a house to a home.”

Former San Juan Capistrano resident **Greg Degado** had to sell his home after changing jobs and moving to Rolling Hills Estates. After a year on the market, Degado decided to retain the services of Open House Interiors. “Dawn and Patty came into our house and within two weeks we had two offers and the house was sold,” Degado said. “We were so impressed with their decorating that we hired them to decorate our home in Rolling Hills.”

Real Estate Advertising

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