

Sweet house of his

Rock star Slash turns to decor expert to get home sold fast

By Valerie Kuklenski
Staff Writer

The Hollywood Hills home has so much going for it: a natural setting, a private street, charming Spanish architecture, a guest house, a lap pool and possibly the best view in L.A. — an uninterrupted vista that sweeps from Griffith Park to the Pacific.

And it has pedigree, at least for rock fans. Slash of Guns N' Roses and Velvet Revolver slept here.

Still, the guitarist and his wife, Perla, were advised it needed a little something to make it stand out as a listing in this buyer's market.

Their broker introduced them to Beth Ann Shepherd of Dressed to Close, a Los Angeles company that provides everything it takes to grab the attention of real-estate agents and, later, their clients.

"We bring in everything from rugs to furniture to candles to books to photos to frames to lights to light bulbs to orchids to fruit," Shepherd, who also lists singer Natalie Imbruglia as one of her celebrity clients, says as she gives an impromptu tour of the home.

The cost of staging varies widely, influenced by both the square footage and the home's market value.

It's all about the location

"In L.A. you have to price it that way," she says. "Because you have 3,000-square-foot homes that are \$600,000, and you have 3,000-square-foot homes that are \$25 million in Malibu."

Shepherd says Slash's house — 6,800 square feet with about 20 rooms, listed at \$6.99 million cost just under \$30,000 to decorate. The price includes the design work, a three-month

contract for furnishings rental and maintenance, move in, move out and installation.

A much more modestly priced four-bedroom home, she explains, might run about \$15,000.

Trends say it's a worthwhile expenditure.

"If a home is priced right and it's staged, it's going to sell in about half the time," Shepherd advises.

She says some clients charge the staging fee on a credit card, reap the frequent-flier miles and then sign the sales contract before the credit card bill comes in.

And the purchase price is on average 20 percent higher than it would have been unfurnished, she claims.

Consider it an investment

"It's what I call a short-term, high-yield investment," she says. "Where else can you invest your money and get it back so quickly with such a high return? Not the stock market."

"You pay us, it's staged three days

later, it's on the market, it sells. The minute it sells — even if it takes three months — it comes right back to you. It's a win-win, as Steven Covey would say."

There are some 1 million people in the home-staging business, according to the International Association of Home Staging Professionals.

With the supply of available homes exceeding the current demand, that means plenty of work for Dressed to Close and other local companies, including Alpha & Omega Home Staging in Burbank and Simply Stage It in Los Angeles.

Vanessa Sandin, Slash's broker, would be happier if more of her listing clients would vacate their homes before putting them



Home stager Beth Ann Shepherd, above right, shows rock musician Slash and his wife, Perla, decorations she added to their house to help it sell faster and — ideally — for a higher price. Singer Natalie Imbruglia, pictured at left, is another of Shepherd's celebrity clients.

"We create impact in 48 hours. You can't do that in interior design. Interior design is a six-month to one-year process."

—Beth Ann Shepherd

on the market and hire a stager.

"I think a lot of people come into an empty house and they don't know how to live in it," Sandin says. "But if it's staged beautifully, someone could think, 'All I need is my toothbrush and I could live so easily in this house.'"

"There are so many homes I really wish we could stage," she says. "People love their stuff. They just don't see it the way everybody else does."

Slash — whose real name is Saul Hudson — and Perla had owned the house for about two years but never completely moved in while maintaining their principal house in Sherman Oaks.



Slash's collection of pinball machines — which took two rooms — was removed from this area to create a screening room.

"We were going to live here, so we were going to do a whole remodel to make it livable for us, and we'd stay here on the weekends and have parties here and stuff like that," Perla says. "And then Slash decided we're not going to be in Hollywood. We're over the Hollywood thing because we have two small children."

Their boys, London, 4 1/2, and Cash, almost 3, need more outdoor space than the hillside living affords, she says, so they're planning to sell the Hollywood and Sherman Oaks houses and buy a property in the hills above Malibu.

Pinball parlor ... or gym?

Slash's "stuff" that may not

have been appealing to buyers included a collection of pinball machines spread through two rooms in the guest house, which is reached through a large breezeway off the kitchen.

After Shepherd's crew was done, the smaller of those two pinball joints was a home gym, and the larger one had been converted to a screening room with four comfy settees facing a pull-down screen and a pool table at the rear of the room. A tray with Red Vines and Good & Plenty candies sat on an ottoman.

He likes it

As Slash walks through the finished house, it was the screening room that caught his fancy.

"That's the biggest development because we never did anything specific with it," he says. "Now it actually has a purpose."

Shepherd says about half of the homes she decorates end up being sold fully furnished, down to every candle, throw pillow and fluffy hotel towel.

Otherwise, the furnishings go into another client's house or



before

Slash's Hollywood house — 6,800 square feet with about 20 rooms, listed at \$6.99 million — cost just under \$30,000 to decorate. The price includes Beth Ann Shepherd's design work, a three-month contract for furniture rental and maintenance, installation, and move-in/move-out costs. Above, an empty office. Below, the finished result of Shepherd's work.



after

back to one of the Designed to Close warehouses to await their next assignment.

Even with the rush of the work and the demands of often finicky clients, Shepherd prefers her current line of work to the regular interior design business.

"We create impact in 48 hours," she says. "You can't do that in interior design," she said. "Interior design is a six-month to one-year process."

"And when clients call me and say, 'You won't believe it, the house sold, first open house, multiple offers,' it's the greatest thing. And they become clients for life."



Furniture, pillows and a barbecue are all included in the work done by a professional home stager, Shepherd

Fix it up to help it sell

Home-staging expert Beth Ann Shepherd has a guiding philosophy to the 100 homes for sale her company decorates each year: "If it looks good, sounds good and smells good, it feels good."

Aware that not every homeowner can hire a company like hers, she offers some tips on do-it-yourself staging to get a better price.

- Glamorize curb appeal with new sod, landscaping lights or just fresh hardware and a coat of paint on the front door.

- Make a memorable entrance. Consider an oversize mirror or a captivating piece of art in the entryway, along with fresh flowers.

- Tend to neglected attributes. Sand and restain hardwood floors, steam-clean carpet or replace it with neutral berber, and have stone floors pressure-cleaned.

- Open your mind to new furniture layouts that enhance the size or traffic flow of a room.

- If possible, add stainless-steel appliances in the kitchen.

- Add that vacation feel to your bathrooms with plush white luxury hotel towels. Small touches such as scented reeds and cotton balls and swabs in an attractive holder are enticing.

- Reconfigure closets. If you have time and money for a professional redesign, do it. If not, at least thin out the wardrobe by half and use wood hangers for what remains.

- Think "hotel" in the master bedroom: thick white bedding, warm paint on the walls, maybe a tall plant to play up the height of the room. A couple of books on a tray are a nice touch, but tuck away the family photos, the TV listings and the to-do lists.

- The "sounds good" aspect can come from inexpensive wireless speakers operated by an iPod with, say, Frank Sinatra's hits cued up. And now's the time to invest in flat-screen televisions for the family room and master bedroom.

- Play up the outdoor space with a dressed cafe table for a small terrace, or a full-service entertainment space on a large patio, complete with cushioned seating, a good grill and a dining area.