



Dressed to Close

WRITTEN BY EMILY WEXLER

In Los Angeles, you have to dress to impress. This rule not only applies to celebrities on the red carpet, but also to homes on the market.

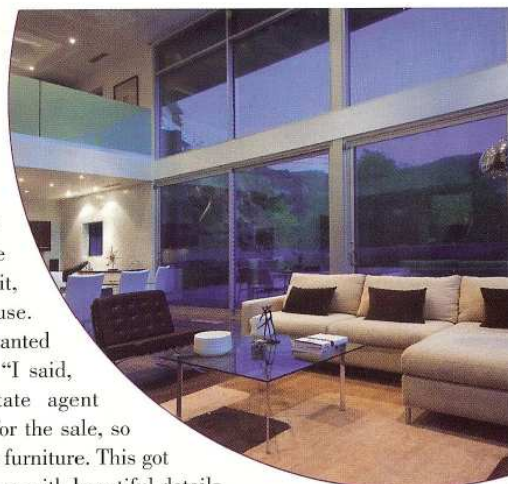
Beth Ann Shepherd is dressing some of the most luxurious homes on the West Coast, turning empty rooms from drab to fab.



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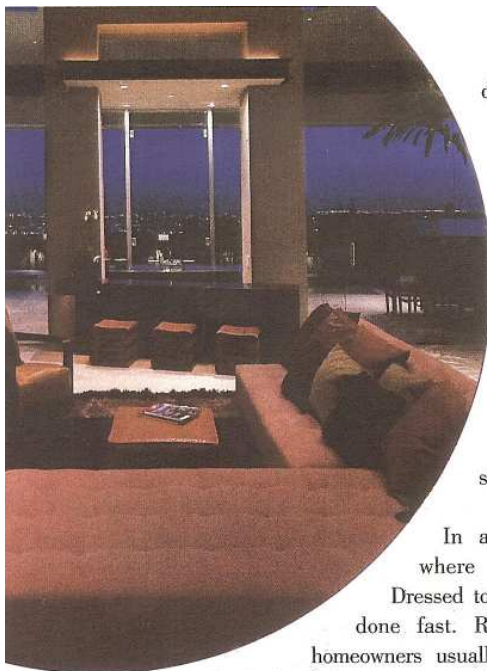


Three years ago, Beth Ann Shepherd was trying to sell her home in Los Angeles. She found that when people came to look at it, they weren't just interested in the house. "Everyone who put an offer on the home wanted to buy it with the furniture," she says. "I said, 'absolutely not!'" But her real estate agent convinced her that it was important for the sale, so she ended up selling a portion of her furniture. This got Shepherd thinking – certainly a room with beautiful details is more appealing than a big empty space. She started out with a collection of her own modern and contemporary furniture and went to real estate agents and homeowners, asking if she could stage their homes, promising faster sales and higher profits. She didn't disappoint. Today, staging is a prerequisite for selling a home in Hollywood, and Shepherd's company, Dressed to Close, is filling the need.



Shepherd usually starts with a blank canvas. "Out here in Hollywood, there isn't a lot of patience," she says. "We have a lot of celebrity clients, so when they find something they want, they just move and take their things, and they leave an empty house." The celebrity clients that Shepherd is referring to run the gamut, from musicians like Fergie of the Black Eyed Peas, to actors like Christina Ricci and Greg Kinnear, to socialites like Candy Spelling (wife of the late Aaron Spelling). Dressed to Close stages everything from \$800,000 condos (small by LA standards) to \$30 million mansions. The cost of the service






depends on the home and what is needed, but a 3,000-square-foot home usually ranges from \$18,000 to \$25,000. Not bad when you consider that staging can increase the sale value by 15 to 20 percent. "Staging is what I call a short-term, high yield investment," says Shepherd.

In a town like Hollywood where people expect results, Dressed to Close has to get things done fast. Real estate agents and homeowners usually call them two weeks before a house goes on the market. The company then assesses the house, submits a proposal and drafts a contract. Then the magic happens. The house can be staged in 48 hours, bringing in everything from beds and sofas to exotic fur rugs and orchids. "We even bring in photos and photo frames – with beautiful people, of course!" says Shepherd. Naturally, decorating a home for selling and decorating a home for living are two very different things. Shepherd explains that they are creating a dream lifestyle. "Do you have slippers next to your bed at home?" she asks. "Do you have hotel bathrobes in your closet? Probably not, but in your dreams you do!" When staging a home, appearance is the only concern. Dressed to Close makes sure that each room exudes the perfect lifestyle.

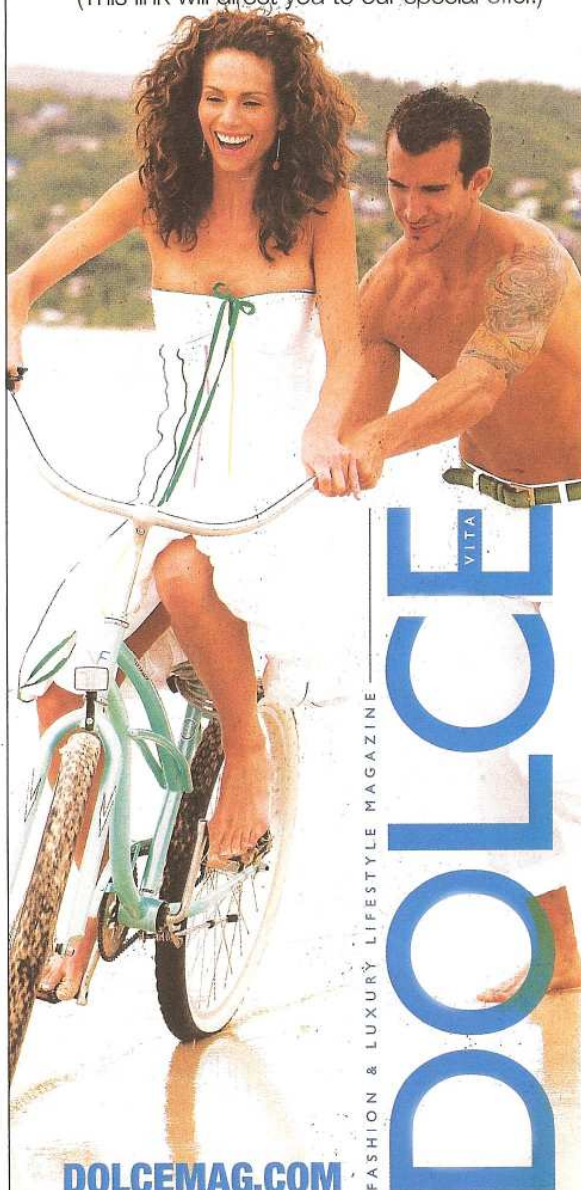
Staging over 100 homes each year means that Shepherd has more than a few tricks up her sleeve. Her number one tip? "Leaning mirrors are the greatest invention to the home and to the design community," she says. "They will change your life." Shepherd suggests putting a leaning mirror in a small room, at the end of a hallway, or in any room that appears a bit drab. She also suggests that to create a room that is a little more sexy or moody, put a dimmer switch on the light and always paint the room. Although she doesn't usually like paint, she says it does the trick when you want a little more warmth.

Beth Ann Shepherd has been overwhelmed by the reactions she gets from people walking through her staged homes. She has had so many people wanting to buy the furniture and accessories, that she has launched a new website called Fabulous by Friday (www.fabulousbyfriday.com). On this site she sells home accents that can quickly transform a room. "If you want to change your room by Friday, get this one fabulous pillow or this great rug, and there you have it!" she says. With several items named after the celebrities that love them, Shepherd is bringing Hollywood chic to the masses. So how does she define *la dolce vita*? "Doing absolutely nothing in the most beautiful environment, whether that's your home or a five star hotel, it doesn't matter." 

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