

# DRESSED

## STARK TO FINESSED

By Lynne Friedman

**"H**old this," Beth Ann Shepherd said.  
It was seven fifteen a.m. in downtown Los Angeles and I was clutching a miniature ceramic cowboy boot with a bald eagle etched into it. I scurried after the energetic, five-foot-nine blonde as



Before and after shots of guitarist Slash's home. Beth Ann Shepherd of Dressed to Close transformed the empty home into a warm, lavishly appointed living space within a matter of days to help it sell faster.







After Beth Ann Shepherd (above) "dressed" this two-bedroom home (below) with significant entertainment space, it sold for \$6 million.

her golden-heeled, animal print Pradas clicked purposefully against the concrete floors of the Los Angeles Flower Mart.

"This is what we call *tchotchke*," Shepherd said.

The boot was going into the vacated home of rock star Slash (Guns N' Roses, Velvet Revolver) and his wife, Perla Ferrer, who decided to sell their seven-thousand-eight-hundred-square-foot Hollywood Hills compound to look for a home in the hills of Malibu. But they wanted to sell it quick.

And selling faster and higher is what Shepherd's company, Dressed to Close, is about. Within a forty-eight-hour installation time frame, Shepherd and her team completely furnish the empty, saleable houses of "rock star royalty," celebrities and other folk who are constantly on the move. This is the process of "staging." Customized furniture, rugs, window treatments and details are precisely executed down to framed photographs and bowls

of fresh fruit—all to seduce a buyer into making the move.

"We can put eighty to ninety percent of the home [furnishings] in there and it will look good, but it doesn't look finished until you put in the details," Shepherd said, her smile evincing a love for what she does and her blue eyes focusing with an intensity that befits her career: one in which speed and artistry come together.

## INVESTING EMOTION

Malibu is a prime market for Shepherd's services. "When you sell a home, you are selling emotions," veteran Malibu real estate agent Susan Monus said. "Buyers don't have the ability to put the emotions into a house when there is no furniture in it."

Emotions in real estate lead to hard dollars. The *Wall Street Journal* ([www.RealEstateJournal.com](http://www.RealEstateJournal.com)) has quoted esti-











Malibu resident Christopher Maratos' Broad Beach home, which had stood tenantless for several months, rented within ten days for fifteen percent higher than the asking price after Shepherd worked her magic.

mates of price increases for staged homes to be two to ten percent for a moderate market and twenty to fifty percent in a market where there are bidding wars. With Malibu's multi-million-dollar selling prices, even the lower end of those percentages could translate into significant numbers.

"I like to think of staging as a short-term, high-yield investment," Shepherd said. "There are very few things in which you can invest and get such a high rate of return in less than six months."

The cost of Shepherd's staging has ranged from less than ten thousand dollars to more than seventy-five thousand, depending on the square footage and quality of a home.

Shepherd doesn't only stage for the purpose of selling. Last year, Malibu resident Chris Maratos' empty Broad Beach house stood tenantless on the rental market for several months. After Shepherd "dressed" it, the house rented within ten days for fifteen percent higher than the originally

desired price.

"It was so easy working with Beth Ann," Maratos said. "She just came in and had a feel for the house ... she opened my eyes to something I didn't know anything about."

#### STYLE WITH SPEED

Shepherd's clientele includes celebrities Greg Kinnear, Candy Spelling, Keenen Ivory Wayans and Natalie Imbruglia, among others. Recently, Shepherd staged the Westside pied-à-terre of Josh Duhamel ("Las Vegas") and fiancé Fergie (Black Eyed Peas), pushing it to sell for the asking price within three weeks.

Creating a hip and ready-made roost for industry types is also in demand. Studios, talent agents and business managers routinely call Shepherd to quickly furnish a short-term home for their talent.

"A lot of clients come out to L.A. for projects, usually a movie or a music video," Shepherd said. "They may be in town any-

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—Susan Monus, Realtor



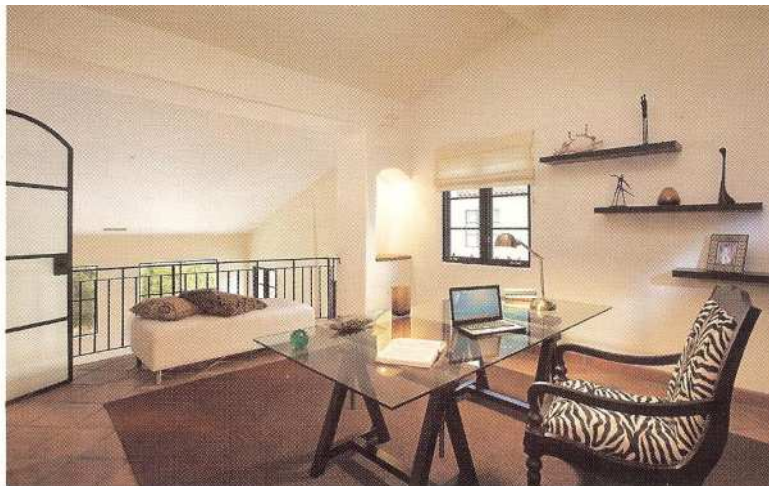
where from a month to a year and they don't want to sacrifice style."

Style with speed allows Shepherd, at times, to create a one-night ambience. She once had forty feet of hot pink sofas custom-made for a client's outdoor Christmas party. The following day, the sofas were back in her downtown warehouse and eventually sold to a studio prop house. Shepherd's usual schedule is the transformation of two to three houses a week.

## THE FINISH LINE

On day two of Slash's installation, the empty, sprawling Mediterranean I saw the previous day was now an inviting home with each room lavishly decked out.

The spectacular views of Hollywood and the downtown skyline were accentuated by sumptuous interiors of chocolate brown, ruby red and gold; a pallet chosen to complement one unique piece—a fiery red Murano glass chandelier that the owners left hanging in the dining room.



"Where's the boot?" I asked.

"It hasn't gone out yet," Shepherd said.

There were still tchotchkes on the kitchen counter waiting to be placed in just-the-perfect spots, and the boot was one of them. But, then again, it was only six o'clock in the evening of the second installation day. There were still a few hours left in Dressed to Close's demanding time frame.

"We have never missed a deadline—never," Shepherd said.

And they didn't miss this one. ■

A sitting room of Malibu resident Christopher Maratos' home. "She opened my eyes to something I didn't know anything about," he said of Shepherd's "dressing" of his home.

## Dynamic Tips to Sell Higher and Faster

Beth Ann Shepherd of *Dressed to Close* stages a home to project a lifestyle of success, glamour, happiness and organization. Here are some of her tips:

### ■ GLAMORIZE CURB APPEAL

New sod, fresh landscaping, new exterior design, landscaping lights or something as simple as an updated, modern front door and handle can add curb appeal, which is paramount to getting buyers through the front door.

### ■ MAKE A MEMORABLE ENTRANCE

The minute a potential buyer walks in they should think, "Looks good, sounds good, smells good." Put an oversized mirror in your entry (people love to look at themselves), or an oversized dramatic artwork. Fresh flowers and scented candles go a long way for this first impression.

### ■ OPEN YOUR MIND TO NEW LAYOUTS

Place your furniture in a way that permits people to clearly walk

through without having to stop and adjust their walking path. Remember, the fireplace does not always have to be the focus of your seating area; a lanai, beachfront or pool area may be more pleasing to the eye.

### ■ MODERNIZE YOUR KITCHEN

A stainless steel refrigerator, stovetop and dishwasher go a long way in updating your home for the sale. Stainless steel appliances immediately add perceived value. If you have the room, add a glass-front wine cooler.

### ■ THINK LUXURY HOTEL MASTER SUITE

Turn your master bedroom into a luxury suite. You only need a few items to impress: thick white sheets and pillows, thick white duvet and duvet cover, scented reed diffusers

(or scented candles) and a nice tray with a couple of reading books. Paint the walls a nice warm color and put in one plant that reaches the ceiling (this adds perceived height to any room). Remove clutter, photographs, notes, pens and pencils. Leave nothing except what you would find in a luxury hotel suite.

### ■ ENSURE GOOD SOUNDS

Hook up an iPod to inexpensive wireless speakers casually placed throughout the house and have Frank Sinatra's Greatest Hits playing during open houses and viewings. Invest in one plasma television for the main TV-watching area and, possibly, one for the master bedroom. Plasma televisions immediately tell the buyers this is a modernized, updated "impressive" home, perceived as more valuable.

### ■ DRAMATIZE OUTDOOR AREAS, ADDING PERCEIVED SQUARE FOOTAGE

For small patios, put an oversized, leaning mirror on the back wall to make it appear larger and place a café table with two chairs, two placemats with colorful napkins and interesting napkin holders. If possible, hang a candlelight chandelier or an outdoor light above the table. If you have a larger area, create an outdoor living room. Customized outdoor sofas, modular sectionals and chairs are optimal. Place pillows for color. Install extra-long, white sheer mesh draperies on rods around your trellises or outdoor area for the billowy, drapery feeling found in resort hotels. This is a dynamic and fast way to provide the "major wow" needed to sell your home higher and faster.