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All Your Home's a Stage

Staging homes makes for faster sells

By XAZMIN GARZA
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

When GraceAnn Nipper decided to sell her Henderson home, she wanted to do it fast. But, Nipper understood she wasn't exactly alone in her endeavor. With 21,181 units on the market in May, according to the Greater Las Vegas Association of Realtors, she knew she had her work cut out for her.

Nipper didn't stress it, though. As a real estate agent herself for Independence Realty, she had a few tricks up her sleeve and managed to sell her property in two weeks, a time frame on par with the speed of light in today's sluggish real estate market. It wasn't accomplished through underpricing, either. Nipper relied on the age old practice of staging her home.

"(Staging) is big," she says. "It's really, really big. It presents a house so that you can see it's been well-maintained."

Staging is the difference between taking a trade-in to the car dealership straight from the mud races and taking it in just after it's been scrubbed, waxed and polished. The same car gets presented, but one has a figurative big red bow on top of it. The car quickly goes from something resembling a plea to a hardball negotiation chip. It explains why more real estate agents are suggesting staging to clients and why a slew of interior decorators have added staging to their resumes.

Jill Abelman, owner of Inside Style Home and Design, has been staging homes for 23 years. She put in the brunt of that time decorating model homes, the "model" for home staging. "You're trying to bring in a sense of calm and organization," she says. "A lot of times homes for sale are chaotic."

The biggest misconception concerning staging is cost. More often than not, it involves subtracting more than it does adding. Most people overfurnish their homes, leaving little to potential buyers' imaginations and much to their curiosity. According to Abelman, a home full of photos and personal mementos detracts attention from the actual home and pulls it into your individual interests. Suddenly a home advertised as having spacious bedrooms and cathedral ceilings turns into the house with the cookie jar collection and all the wedding pictures.

"Put all that stuff away so they're only looking at the home," she says.

Think of physical clutter as purchasing clutter. Be sure buyers have ample space to explore the house. Hallways should be open and corners should allow for easy clearance. Remove anything that doesn't serve a function special to the room it occupies. A computer desk in the office works; one in the master bedroom doesn't. Buyers want to immediately begin the visualization process. Customizing your use of space (converting the dining room into a play area) throws an unexpected hurdle into that process.

Staging can go as far as a seller is willing to take it. Cleaning, decluttering and making proper use of space costs little to nothing. The next step is focusing on small details that carry a big impact. Abelman recommends concentrating on the lighting in the home. "Leaving all the lights on when you show it warms up the house," she says.

To further the impact, update the lighting fixtures and highlight windows with inexpensive rods and modern drapes. Both will run you less than \$300 and put a pretty spotlight on each room.

Some clients take staging full circle to make it more than just a visual experience. Abelman has known owners to pop a batch of cookies or a loaf of bread in the oven just before showing their properties. If it's the holiday season, stereos are left on and playing songs such as "Winter Wonderland" at a low volume.

Carolyn Mullany, a realtor with Coldwell Banker Premier Realty, refers to this as "making the buyer look at a home instead of a house." As a real estate agent who primarily works with luxury homes, she says about one house in her price range will sell a month. For her, staging is essential, which is why her agency regularly works with the same pool of interior designers.

"If you don't stage then you're putting yourself at a disadvantage," she says. "Even if you just do curbside staging."

A new welcome mat, freshly painted front door and a couple potted plants all lend an inviting first impression and build anticipation for what's to come.

David Coleman, president and director of design for David Coleman Ltd., just completed a staging project for a spec home in Southern Highlands. Although he primarily performs residential work for people just looking to freshen their home's look, Coleman's seen an uptick in his staging requests as of late. Why?

"Most people don't have good design sense," he says.

They come to him to make the house they want to sell appear "special." The goal is anything but mass market for his clients, who usually are real estate agents wanting to sell empty luxury homes. His job is to fill it with items that will sell a lifestyle, a much different objective than the standard \$160,000 homeowner has. For them, Coleman has some advice. Ask someone whose taste you trust to do a walk-through and let them critique away. If that's not an option, do it the old-fashioned way.

"You just need to make your home look like a model home," he says. "Go look at the model homes to get ideas."

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THE NEW TODAY IN LAS VEGAS MAGAZINE



LIVING THE LIFE!

Buying a house can be a daunting task – it is perhaps one of the most stress-inducing events that one has to go through! If you're reading this and thinking about investing in Las Vegas property, and perhaps even relocating here, then you're headed in the right direction. Your search begins with the right realtor, and thereafter, the right interior designer and there's no better combination of talent and passion than with Kenneth Baker, of Shapiro & Sher Group and Jill Abelman, of InsideStyle.

Whether you're a first-time buyer, or looking to make an investment, many people don't realize that a good realtor can make you money, while the right decorator saves you money – both of these factors are held by a common thread – that of establishing relationships – which is paramount to either one.

Kenneth Baker is "one of the hardest-working agents you'll meet this year," completely dedicated to the client, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. Being in the real estate industry for only five years hasn't stopped him from over-achieving and exceeding expectations. A member of the nationally-honored Prudential team, Kenneth had the highest sales volume at Shapiro & Sher Group in 2006, and again in 2008, as well as the highest volume in the first quarter of 2009.

A born-and-bred Las Vegas, Kenneth says, "My grandfather was the Mayor of Reno when Las Vegas boasted less than 250,000 residents. I know he is proud of my commitment to Las Vegas and enthusiasm when working for you." After years of employment



with Dun & Bradstreet, Kenneth pursued a degree in Education and it is this commitment to educating others that has eased his transition and contributed to his success in real estate.

Since joining Shapiro & Sher Group, he has excelled at both luxury representation and cross-trained himself in Nevada foreclosure and short sale. You can rest easy in knowing that you have a true professional protecting you when buying, selling and investing in this market.

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as well as an agent who is well-versed in navigating the Las Vegas market.

Kenneth adds, "Anyone can write a contract, the challenge is successfully closing each escrow while protecting your client at every turn."

On the other side of the coin is interior designer, Jill Abelman, A 30-year design veteran who began her career in Orange County –working her way up through the ranks of interior design companies in Newport



Beach and Los Angeles. In 1992, she opened her own company in Laguna Beach where she spent many enjoyable years designing model homes, high-end residences and commercial projects. A true design-addict, she also owned and operated her own home accessory store on Pacific Coast Highway in Laguna Beach.

However, six short years later, Jill could not pass-up the opportunity to head-up National Homebuilders' Homebuyers Design Center in Las Vegas. Shortly thereafter, she was asked to open their "In-House" Model Home Division and for the next seven years, Jill was responsible for the design and installation of all model home projects in Las Vegas. "I love model home designing, but I began to miss the most important element that hooked me on interior design – the people," says Jill, adding, "I truly enjoy working with clients and seeing their faces light-up when they see their space for the first time."

Ever-passionate about design, Jill stresses, "Your interior surroundings can greatly improve the quality of your life. I work extremely hard to create the right environment for my clients, even if they, themselves cannot describe it." Whether you're looking for turn-key design services or even just that one, key, accent piece that will transform your house into a home, the staff at InsideStyle are on-the-ready to turn your idea of a "dream home" into reality. Jill's dedication to design and hands-on approach to client servicing is evident when she says, "I am not satisfied until I am absolutely sure the job is completed, down to the last, tiny detail," adding, "My goal is to create a space that fits you so perfectly, that you will be finding excuses to stay home!"



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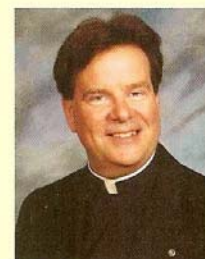
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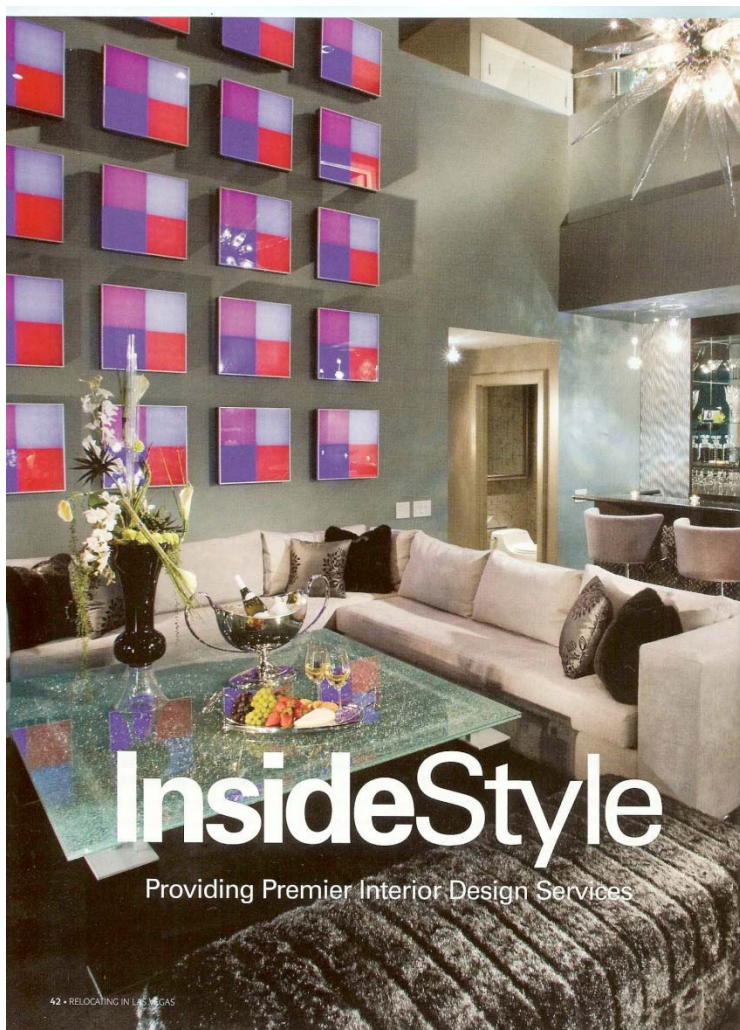
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Las Vegas is the home of InsideStyle, some of the most creative and innovative design in the country, if not the world. As a premier design firm, InsideStyle provides a team of business and design professionals that has been practicing in this industry for more than 30 years.

The firm's active role in the design community has allowed it to build relationships and a resource library of the most reliable local contractors and painters, as well as accounts with manufacturers across the globe. "The World Market Center is just one of many resources we use for vendors and ideas for innovative and fresh design," says co-owner Marc Abelman.

People relocating from national and international locales are bringing their incredible visions and dreams to Las Vegas, and "we at InsideStyle are thrilled to be a part of the growth in the community," he says.

InsideStyle designers work with clients on a wide range of projects, from finding a single key piece for a space to helping them design an entire home and even turn-key services for out-of-state clients. The firm is proud of its service-intensive approach to client satisfaction.

"The first thing we do is listen and learn about our client's vision. We then combine functionality and design with our client's needs in mind," Abelman explains. "Most of our clients know what they want but have a hard time picturing the end result. That's where InsideStyle excels at making the project a success."

One example is this 5,000-square-foot penthouse, which started with plain white walls and no architectural details. The clients wanted a "night-club feel" for the space since it's their vacation home. In the main living areas, InsideStyle designed a spectacular 25-foot custom bar that sits across from a cutting edge lighting panel that rotates to music if desired. The entire floor was raised to access a better view of the Las Vegas Strip. When finished, the home was move-in ready with every aspect of design and function considered, from custom furnishings to flatware selection. This project was coordinated by communicating entirely long-distance with the international clients.

"We kept in touch via e-mails, faxes and limited telephone conversations. Our continual open communication enabled us to stay on time, in budget and produce the end

result that exceeded our client's expectations," Abelman says.

In fact, InsideStyle has been instrumental in helping many clients with their vacation properties by providing a second pair of hands and eyes for guidance, communication and project management.

Abelman also notes that hiring a local designer is an essential part of any design project, especially to find reliable and professional subcontractors. "When designing remodels, we become actively involved with the hiring and overseeing of various subcontractors. We can also enlist the aid of a general contractor based on the scope of the project," he adds. "We maintain outstanding connections to our design and construction community and provide a wealth of referral resources for our clients."

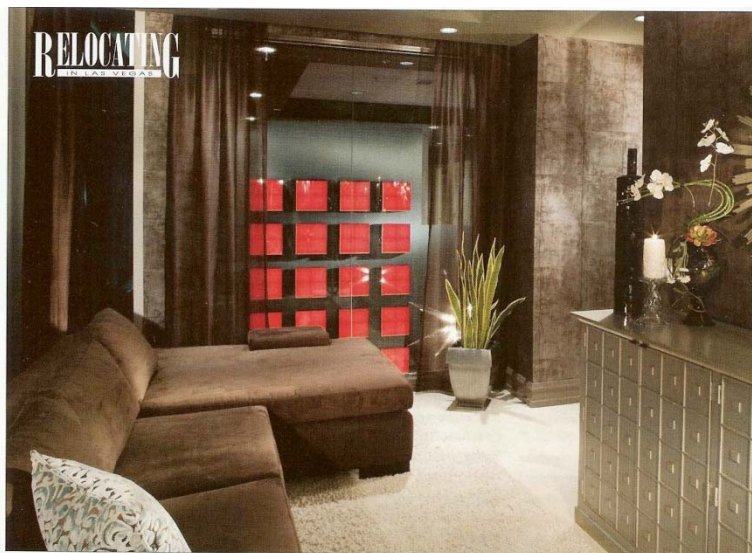
No matter what vision you are dreaming of, the professionals at InsideStyle can bring it to reality. "We are passionate about our role and take ownership of each project, treating your home as if it were our own," Abelman says.

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Designing Your Desert Home

Making your home fit your new lifestyle.

You've decided to relocate. Maybe you've found your new home, maybe you're just beginning to look. No matter where you are in the process, chances are you're facing the stressful reality of moving — that is, deciding how to fit your existing lifestyle into your new home.

New Nevadans are moving into three primary types of developments: retirement communities, traditional suburban homes, and condominiums or other high-rise properties. While each of these presents a distinct design challenge, you can follow some basic design principles that will help you avoid possible pitfalls in the design process and help turn your new space into a place to call home.

When you are looking to move, the more

you know about your current space, prospective space and existing furniture, the better equipped you will be to make design decisions, but keep in mind it should be a process that's fun, too. "Designing your home doesn't have to be difficult," says Jill Ableman, interior designer for Inside Style. "Make it a space you feel excited and comfortable to be in." Also, be aware that Las Vegas might offer smaller-scaled homes than what most new residents are used to, warns interior designer Keven Weber, ASID, with Henderson-based Martin Thomas Interior Design.

If you're able to give feedback in the initial building stages of your home, Nancy Bohnett, academic director of interior design

programs at The Art Institute of Las Vegas, suggests focusing on one of the hottest and most sensible design trends — going green. "Money invested in energy-efficient appliances, fans for air circulation, water-conserving fixtures and window applications to block the Las Vegas heat and sun can save you significant money in the long run," she says. "Cover those basics and worry about other design decisions like paint and furniture once you have moved in."

Light, color and texture have huge impacts on a space, according to Bohnett and Ableman. In a warm and sunny climate like Las Vegas, you need to select window treatments and materials that will reflect your sense of style, as well as provide needed

protection from the sun and heat. "Fabrics will deteriorate more quickly with the intense sun, so use a matchstick blind or roller shade with natural materials instead," Weber says. Limiting the types of flooring and utilizing complementary colors throughout the home will help create a unified sense of space and make a home feel larger, but not everything always has to match.

"Think about how color is going to affect your space," Ableman says. "Your walls don't always have to be a neutral color or finish. Consider a faux finish to create an effect on your interior space that will accent and highlight your furnishings and accessories. What colors make you feel good? Design is very personal. Don't be afraid to try a new color on your walls and carry the scheme out with colorful pillows. I always say follow your instincts and don't ask too many others for their opinion. If a certain color or style makes you happy, it works."

Once you are settled in, live with your existing furniture and home awhile to see how everything works in your new space. When you're ready to make your design move, set your budget and take your home and furniture measurements with you to the store. "Investing in a good sofa is an anchor, the No. 1 element in a room, then you can fill in as you go," Weber says. Bohnett adds, "You don't have to redesign everything at once. Start in the rooms where you spend the most time."

"The Midwest and East Coast have more of a traditional flavor, and that's generally going to be the biggest change for anyone moving here from those regions," Weber says. "The West has cleaner lines and not as much pattern." But no matter what anyone tells you, decide what feel your home should be for you, whether it's comfort, sophistication, simplicity or something else, and design around that.

The most important design decision you can make is to create a home that reflects your personal sense of style, complements your lifestyle and can be a retreat for you and your family, Bohnett says.

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A Room to Grow In

by JILL ABELMAN, NEWPORT FURNITURE OWNER
photographs courtesy of JILL ABELMAN



These pieces will work from early childhood through college.

MAY 2005

One of the great things about having children is that you can indulge your childhood fantasies when decorating their rooms. This was especially true for me, because as a child I was relegated to the makeshift office, complete with an old desk painted army green, and an orange, rust and gold checked bedspread. I sincerely believe this fueled my passion for interior design at a young age.

First and foremost, when thinking about decorating for your children, relax and have fun. Even if you do the bare minimum to it, wonderful things will happen in your child's room. This will be a magical place where he or she will practice their first steps, build make-believe castles and seemingly grow up overnight. You can't mess it up.

There are so many options when choosing furniture. Unless you want to spend a decade or so re-painting, re-wallpapering and purchasing piece after piece of furniture, you want furniture and décor that you can easily adapt to your child's changing needs.

Kids' Kingdoms

Look for furniture that can be raised, added onto or reconfigured. Many furniture manufacturers sell modular groupings and convertible pieces for children's rooms featuring everything from drawer units that can be stacked in different heights to cribs that convert into beds.

There are many practical and beautiful furnishings that are not made especially for kids, but work wonderfully in kids' rooms. Consider an armoire that can be

their books and I know part of that is just having the books within easy reach.

One of the questions I hear a lot is, "How do I know everything I want in my child's room will fit?" A simple way to insure that your furnishings will fit is to tape the dimensions of each piece to the floor with painter's tape for a true visual. When planning your furniture purchases, be sure to allow for ample room for your little one to move around and have some play space.

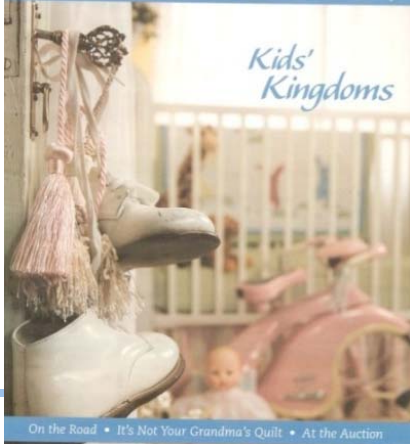
glue, a little fabric and fringe.

If your "baby" is old enough to have an opinion, include them in the decision making process whenever possible or feasible. I learned this the hard way. Three days after installing brand-new wallpaper in my normally very easy-going three-year-old daughter's room, she tore a huge section down during what was supposed to be her nap time because she "didn't like it!" Learn from my mistakes and always order



The trunks shown in the twin's room were bought unfinished and hand-painted, as were the letters painted on inexpensive eight-by-ten-foot canvases.

Southern Nevada
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May 2005
The Well-Lived Desert Life



On the Road • It's Not Your Grandma's Quilt • At the Auction

fitted for hanging storage for your little one, and can later house a television or stereo for your teenager, or moved to some other part of the house.

When decorating for smaller children, it's always a good idea to make some storage just their size. If you want him or her to play contentedly in their room, hang up clothes and put away toys, you will need to make sure some of the clothing racks and toy storage are within your child's reach. (Well, you have to admit it's a good wish.)

My girls are two and three and they love their small table set. A small bookshelf has been invaluable as well. They love

When it comes to decorating the walls and ceilings, you don't have to spend a fortune to make a big impact. I love using combinations of paint and wallpaper. The diamonds shown in the twin's room could easily be used from the baby stage all the way through to the young teen stage. The wide stripes in the music-themed room will "age" with your child also.

The trunks shown in the twin's room were bought unfinished and hand-painted, as were the letters painted on inexpensive eight-by-ten-foot canvases. These can be found at most craft stores. Even lamps can be personalized for only the cost of some

extra wallpaper, or try to get your child's reaction before you put it up.

No one needs to tell you that your child is a distinct little individual complete with his or her own preferences, aversions, habits and interests. Combine what you know about these traits with a few basics to create a safe and appealing setting for kids, and you have the foundation for making design decisions. If you choose wisely in the beginning, with the exception of the bed, the furnishings will be able to serve you and your child through their teen years. The children will enjoy growing with the pieces, and you will enjoy saving a lot of money. ☺

RELOCATING IN LAS VEGAS



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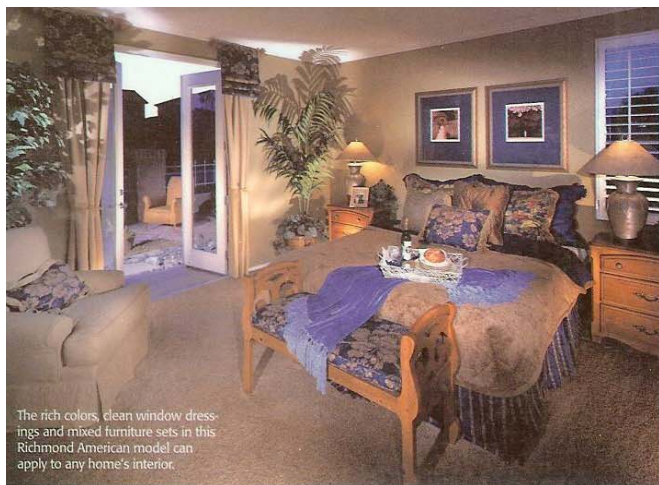
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Once you are settled in, live with your existing furniture and home awhile to see how everything works in your new space. When you're ready to make your design move, set your budget and take your home and furniture measurements with you to the store. "Investing in a good sofa is an anchor, the No. 1 element in a room, then you can fill in as you go," Weber says. Bohnett adds, "You don't have to redesign everything at once. Start in the rooms where you spend the most time."

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LAS VEGAS LIFE



The rich colors, clean window dressings and mixed furniture sets in this Richmond American model can apply to any home's interior.

Home Sweet Model Home

Replicating those well-appointed show houses is within your reach **BY JENNIFER ROBISON**

A tour of local model homes can be a frustrating exercise for the amateur decorator. The builder's demos always seem to have the latest flooring, nicest furniture and newest accessories. Nothing is out of place, everything is to scale. It's all so annoyingly, you know, perfect. And, according to local interior decorators, it's also doable for most home owners. Builders spend anywhere from \$25 to \$45 per square foot on their interiors; that might sound prohibitive, but the tally includes expenses such as labor for wallpaper installation—costs you can contain if you're an average do-it-yourselfer.

First, let's demystify model homes: Believe it or not, decorators don't go for exceptional concepts. "I decorate model homes the same way I would decorate a real home," says Jill Abelman, vice president of merchandising at Richmond American Homes. Janice Jones, vice president of area merchandising for Pulte/Del Webb, says she "focuses on creating lifestyles we want to project, as well as making the home feel as open and usable and livable as possible—which should be the goal for anyone decorating their own private home. For example, you want to maximize seating in the family room without making it feel cluttered."

So where should you begin? How about with the walls—the foundation of a room's overall atmosphere. "Plain white walls in every room of the house are awful," Abelman says. "Home owners should be a little more courageous about trying even a warm tan, which can make a house feel so much more comfortable. If you're doing a child's room, try a half wall of color, or a border—anything to create interest. It's the easiest and biggest difference you can make in your home. I don't know why people are so afraid of it. It's only paint!" If you're really concerned about how the end product might look, Abelman recommends you buy a pint of paint in the color you're considering and paint a 2-by-2 swatch on a wall. Give it a few days and see how it looks in every light. If you like it, finish the wall.

Decorators also recommend color for your floors. Jones says deeper shades of carpets and tiles show less dirt and wear better than tans, beiges and whites. Also, avoid chopping up your space with multiple colors and materials, which can make your home look smaller. If you have an open floor plan with living areas flowing into each other, Abelman advises you

choose one type of flooring—preferably a hard surface—and stick with it, using area rugs to flavor each distinct area. Another trick to help small spaces look larger: Wood or tile laid diagonally can visually upsize a room, Abelman says.

Decorators employ another trick in model homes that home owners can use to confer a feeling of light and space. Most model homes have only top treatments on windows, rather than blinds and heavy curtains. To copy the look while maintaining your privacy, try delicate Venetian blinds with top treatments rather than thick cloth panels. If your home comes with blinds as a standard window covering, add some sort of additional curtain element to warm up living areas.

To enjoy your own model home, you're probably going to have to change how you think about buying furniture. The days when decorators would purchase a complete, matching dining room or bedroom set are long gone. "You don't want it to look like you live in a furniture store," Abelman says. "You should pick things you love and mix them up. We avoid matched sets in any room. We might do a certain style of nightstands and pair them with a different dresser, or get an iron headboard with a wooden furniture set. The added benefit is that you don't need money for the whole suite. You can add as you find pieces you like."

You might be surprised to learn where decorators scoop up furniture for model homes. Rather than heading for high-end shops that peddle custom-made items, they shop instead at RC Willey, the Great Indoors or Brandon Home Furnishings. Jones even hits Pier 1 Imports, Cost Plus World Market and sales at Pottery Barn and Target. "It's amazing what you can find," she says. "A lot of the accessories you see in model homes came from local stores."

After you've finished your walls and floors, and purchased your furniture, it's time to think about accessorizing, which "might be the most impactful" element of your home's interior, Jones says. If you've hesitated trying vibrant colors, accessorizing offers the opportunity to experiment extensively without creating expensive or irremediable mistakes. You can buy a neutral-colored sofa, for example, and load it up with red throw pillows. And a couple of sets of bright artwork can be alternated with each season. Go for impact rather than volume: "One really great piece of artwork will make a much bigger difference than a couple of inexpensive paintings and a

bunch of accessories," Abelman says.

With these basics in hand, you're on your way to model-home bliss. But before you begin, decorators have a few additional nuggets of advice. Jones recommends you focus on your most important spaces first—primarily the kitchen, the family room and the master suite. A shotgun approach can result in a rushed interior that isn't well assembled. And don't expect to make things perfect overnight. Even Abelman spent a year looking for the perfect draperies for her kitchen. Also, if you're not a professional painter, don't attempt tricks such as faux painting or striping with multiple colors unless you've taken a class first.

Most important, though, are the finishes you buy when you close on the home. "I think people are afraid to upgrade," Jones says. "People buy the home, and they get the basic carpet and tile and think they'll upgrade in a couple of years when they can afford it. But my experience has been that people rarely get around to making those upgrades on their own, and they often regret choosing the standards. Also, the value of a home increases upon resale if the owners went to that extra effort of including upgraded cabinets and countertops—especially if their home is competing with the non-upgraded house next door."

To see Jones' and Abelman's work in action, visit some of their model homes. Jones says she spends \$30 to \$35 per square foot on decorating Pulte's models; you can see a collection of 18 models in contemporary and traditional styles at the sales center in Anthem Highlands, at Anthem Highlands Drive and Bicentennial. The homes are open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday, and from noon to 6 p.m. Monday. Abelman says she spends \$24 to \$27 per square foot on Richmond American's model communities. You can see her handiwork at Echo Canyon in northwest Las Vegas, near Cliff Shadows and Gowan, and at Belcrest in southwest Las Vegas, at Blue Diamond and Jones. Hours at Belcrest are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday through Thursday and noon to 6 p.m. Friday; hours at Echo Canyon are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday and noon to 6 p.m. Monday.

And look for ideas in other places, as well. Abelman, a "magazine junkie," is always finding new concepts in a variety of publications. "People should do the same thing when they're looking for ideas for their own home," she says. "It should be a sanctuary where they feel best. They should relish and love to be in their home." ■

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