

Home Staging: Reality TV vs. Real Life

"I'm a huge fan of all those home staging and real estate 'reality' shows on cable like HGTV's *Designed to Sell* and Bravo's *Flip This House*. And then there's *Million Dollar Listing* and *Million Dollar Agent, Buy Me*—the list goes on and on," says Kathi Presutti, owner of her own home staging company, RE:STYLE LLC. But when it comes to being realistic, Presutti has some concerns. "My favorite show, *Designed To Sell*, sets unreasonable expectations for people trying to sell their homes," says Presutti

In *Designed To Sell*, a Realtor critiques the house while the sellers watch the process on a video monitor from a remote location. Then a home stager/designer comes in and gives recommendations, based on the Realtor's concerns, on how to stage the home so it will sell quickly. The staging/redesign team has \$2000 to make their magic happen. "That's where I really believe the show creates a misconception with the viewer," says Presutti. "They use the \$2000 for materials only, which I have to say, they find at remarkably low prices. But what about the labor? They don't pay out any money for the carpenter, the plumber, the electrician—let alone the stager! Real people will need to find reliable sources for this kind of help, and pay for it themselves." RE:STYLE assists its clients by referring them to a trusted group of talented professionals, who often give special discounts. "And I know how to shop to find great bargains," says Presutti, whose face is familiar to all the local consignment store owners and discount store managers..

It's important to note that staging need not be expensive. "As an Accredited Staging Professional, I give clients a list of staging recommendations. But it's really up to them which ones they implement," says Presutti. And unlike on one recent episode of *Million Dollar Listing*, most stagers are not going to suggest that you empty your house and rent furniture, or charge \$35,000 to do so.

For example, "I recently created a detailed Staging Recommendations Report for a client. We agreed on which things she would do, and which ones RE:STYLE would complete. The client took about 1 month to finish her part (painting, repairs, new bathroom hardware, etc.) and then RE:STYLE spent a 10-hour day doing all the staging." They brought in lots of artwork and accessories. And what a transformation! "The staging made a huge difference—and that part *is* like on the reality shows," says Presutti with a grin.

Another similarity? “This house, a historic 2-story, was staged on a Friday. The first showing was the next day, and in a week and a half, the seller accepted an offer!” This happy event occurred in January (yes, last month!) in Chelsea, Michigan. Statistics show that staged houses sell twice as quickly as un-staged homes. RE:STYLE keeps its own statistics, which match up well to the national ones. “I had a house sell 3 days after I staged it—just a 2-hour hands-on session, in that case. Then I’ve also had it take 6 months—but that was understandable, as the house was a vacant \$3 million restored Tudor that had been on the market previously for at least 18 months. That staging took several hours,” says Presutti.

Perhaps one reason that Presutti is such a fan of HGTV, 2 houses staged by RE:STYLE have been showcased on National Open House, including the aforementioned \$3 million Tudor. “That episode just aired on January 21, and I was so excited to see RE:STYLE in the credits!” That’s understandable, too!