

PROPERTY

Style on demand

There's no need for shabby furniture to prevent a sale, writes Lynn Cochrane

It is a headache faced by home owners, property developers and estate agents on a daily basis: they have a fabulous house that they want to get on the market within days but the furniture is either notable by its absence or not so much tired as completely exhausted. A couple of new sofas would help but the store manager estimates it could be Christmas before they arrive. Meanwhile the photographer is itching to go ahead with the schedule.

Well, help is at hand in the shape of Loraine Chassels and her husband and business partner, Carlo Sambucci. This whirlwind pair offers a unique service transforming empty shells and dated interiors into must-have properties. They can do the physical turnaround in as little as 24 hours. "I've worked with a lot of people in the building industry and I would say they are probably the best," says David Browne of BM Developments.

Chassels and Sambucci own two companies, EX Showhouse Furniture, which hires and sells thousands of household items, from Art Deco mirrors, to hand towels and leather suites, and XS Interiors, the interior design arm of the business, which styles each home.

With the market slowing and properties taking longer to sell, the pair are busier than ever. Chassels says: "We call what we do our style-to-sell service and we calculated that last year we helped sell more than £25 million worth of property."

A typical transformation, she says, involves an initial call from a developer or an estate agent. The house has often been on the market for weeks and attracted little interest. Can she help?

"What I do is get the plans of the house - is it a stately home or a Manhattan-style penthouse? Then I find out as much as I can about my prospective buyer. They could be a young executive or empty nesters. Then it is time to go through our enormous collection of furniture, objects



d'art, you name it, and start to piece together a bespoke picture of what I am going to create. It is eye candy," she says.

Keeping track of every item, from vases to velvet bed throws, takes time and effort. Every piece earmarked for a certain house must be itemised. Add to that the fact that Chassels and Sambucci must know exactly where everything is stored - they have warehouses across Glasgow - and you can imagine the mental acrobatics required. If a client likes their ideas and wants to proceed, a contract is drawn up regarding hiring each item of furniture. Most contracts cover a six to eight-week period with the option of extending.

Chris Traynor knows more than most people about the magic that Chassels and Sambucci weave. He and his wife were selling their 200-year-old listed terraced

house in Glasgow. "Some of the furniture we'd had since we were married. It was tired," says Traynor. He had heard of Chassels through a friend. He got in touch and she came out to survey the house before it went on the market. Traynor and his wife had redecorated and taken out their original furniture. It was now up to Chassels to turn it into a house viewers would be falling over themselves to buy. "I last saw it as an empty shell on a Thursday night. They came with a van full of furniture and when I got back on the Friday evening every room was furnished, even down to plants and paintings."

Without revealing exactly how much the service cost, he estimates it was less than 1 per cent of the sale price. The house was put up for sale in August of this year and sold within a month for more money

than expected. Was the quick sale partly thanks to Chassels and Sambucci? "I've no doubt that it was," says Traynor, who has gone on to furnish his new property with Chassels' interiors expertise and EX Showhouse Furniture. "It's nicer than furniture you see in the shops and only about a fifth of the cost," he says.

Gary Thomson, managing director of estate agent Clyde Property, has used Chassels and Sambucci on numerous occasions. "A classic example is a house in the West End of Glasgow. The owners were moving to St Andrews and had a six-week entry date. When the time came, they moved all their own furniture into their new property, leaving a house that looked bare. We brought in Loraine to partly furnish it and it sold within two weeks."

Clients agree that viewers often find it hard to visualise what an empty house would look like fully furnished. "You have to create a perception, a style of living," says David Browne, who specialises in redeveloping traditional tenement-style properties.

James Durward, a partner of estate agents Corum, agrees. In his view, having a property furnished not only helps it sell more quickly, it helps a place command a better price. "We've used Loraine maybe half a dozen times and always been really pleased. She even helped to sell my mum's house," he says.

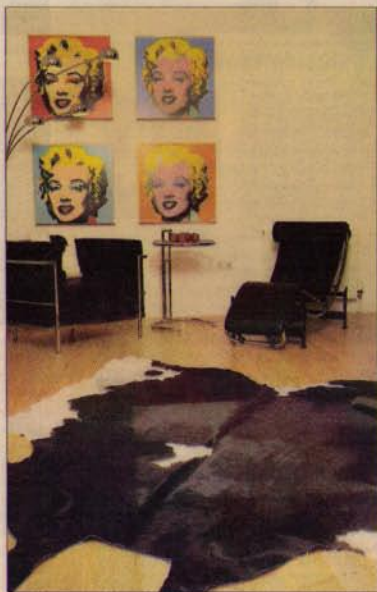
The service, while based in Glasgow, operates throughout Scotland. And any extra miles do not mean extra time. "If Loraine says on a Monday that something will be done by Thursday you can guarantee it will be," says Thomson of Clyde Property. Meanwhile Chassels juggles, on average, 12 properties at any given time.

"The bottom line is that beauty sells," she says.

● For more information on the style-to-sell service, contact Loraine Chassels on 0141-942 0519.



OPPOSITE: Loraine Chassels at one of the penthouse properties she has decorated



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