

# Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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## Staging—First Impressions Count

By Andrea A. Firth

Staging is akin to putting on pearls with a little black dress, says Niko-lene Isely who owns Staging by Design based in Moraga. “The idea is to make the house, not the contents, the star,” says Isely. Barbara Winters, the owner of Staging & Design in Lafayette, employs a similar analogy to explain the concept of staging. “If you put on a little lipstick, you always look better,” says Winters. “Staging is like putting a little lipstick on a house.”

Stagers in Lamorinda share a com-

mon goal—maximizing the sale. “Staging a home really does put more money in the seller’s pocket. It leads to a quicker sale and a higher price,” says realtor Sue Layng, a founding member of Village Associates Real Estate in Orinda. “We have a wealth of talented and caring stagers in this area,” adds Layng, noting that almost every property her firm sells is staged at some level.

Stagers in Lamorinda provide a wide range of services to ready homes for sale. The cost to stage a home, typically

based on time (the stager’s fee) and materials (furniture rental fees), can range from several hundred to several thousand dollars depending on the services used and the length of time on the market. Stagers will consult on home décor design and color and manage contractors to paint, repair, and update. Empty homes can be furnished with rented furniture, art, and accessories, or stagers will work with existing home furnishings, rearrange the old, and mix in new pieces. Most stagers will do as much or as little

of the legwork to get the home prepared as a client wants.

“You want people to remember the house,” says Winters, but she acknowledges that this can be challenging in an area that has a number of generic, and often dated, ranch homes. “Sometimes the challenge is adding some character to the house, and that’s when being eclectic can help.”

Winters, a self-described collector, maintains a 6,500-foot warehouse in Lafayette filled with a huge assortment of furniture, bedding, art, and accessories to support her staging and furniture rental businesses. “I like to add a bit of humor and levity to my staging designs,” says Winters who aims for variety and is comfortable mixing contemporary and Chinese pieces and throwing in an animal print for contrast and pop. “I’ll do whatever is fitting for the house and put a twist on it to give it that wow factor,” she adds.

Jenifer Brunk and Gray Hynes were two of the first stagers to work in the Lamorinda area. The two college friends, both longtime Orinda residents, purchased their staging business, Improve to Move, 18 years ago. “Early on we spent a lot of time explaining the staging concept to realtors and buyers, but it’s a well accepted practice now, it’s expected,” says Brunk. “We don’t have a specific style,” says Brunk, “We stage a home to showcase what’s special about that house,” Although the approaches employed by stagers may vary, it all comes back to the sale.

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Barbara Winters (on R) with Leslie Price who manages outside rentals.



Jenifer Brunk (L) and Gray Hynes in a home they recently staged.

Photo Doug Kohen