

ULTIMATE ADDRESS

YOUR GUIDE TO LUXURY HOMES



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Virtual Staging by Ilaria Barion

An empty space turns into a home a buyer can envision living through staging. In the above property this look was achieved by computer imaging, virtual staging.

Luxury staging turns surfers into buyers

These days, a home has to look like a million bucks online to even warrant a serious look from a buyer, let alone a showing or a quick sale.

"Luxury homes need luxury staging," says Jim Kinney, luxury marketing director at Baird & Warner in Chicago. "If you have an empty space, or it's poorly furnished, professional staging can help up the image and help make the home more competitive."

Staging a home means preparing it for sale in a way that enhances its to appeal to potential buyers.

"Empty space looks smaller because you don't have the furniture there to give the scale," says home stager Ilaria Barion. "When it's empty, the eyes go to the flaws."

Barion honed her craft in the competitive New York market where she had 900 pieces of staging décor in a warehouse. She compares househunting to online dating, where buyers compare hundreds of properties hoping for one with which they connect emotionally. Great staging creates the images that help them do so.

Kinney enlisted Barion's help last year to market a vacant \$3.9 million, 5,000-square-foot condo in The Fordham that had been on the market for a year.

"I felt the main objections were that people just did not get the flow through the formal areas," Kinney says. "People

couldn't understand where placement of the furniture would be."

The seller worked with Barion to purchase and place about \$20,000 in furnishings. (Sellers typically pay for staging.) It worked. "We were under contract within 60 days and I attribute it to the staging," Kinney says. "It addressed the problems with flow patterns. The home sold for

(or hours) instead of weeks to execute. Third, the cost is substantially less than buying or renting actual furniture and décor. The price difference is hundreds instead of thousands.

Buyers respond to it, too. "I have a lot of success stories, such as properties that were sitting on the market for a year. Then I staged them and they sold within a month, even in this market," Barion says.

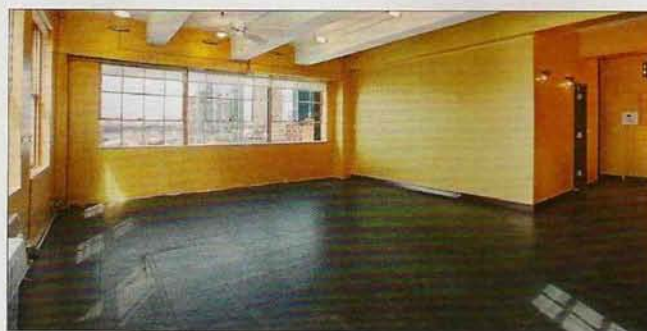
Both Kinney and Barion believe virtual staging is completely ethical.

"You want to show what the home could be, just like a builder shows renderings of a model home before it is built," Barion says. "I don't think there is any problem with that as long as there is disclosure.

"No one is trying to deceive the buyer," she adds. "We are helping them see how the furniture would fit in the room. The agent could also post the actual photo of the empty property online, so the buyers could see the before and after."

Changes Barion won't make include adding a fireplace or wood floor that's not there, but she might recolor a wall if the client agrees.

Are buyers shocked when they get to the home and it's actually empty? Not really, because that is not uncommon in the real world," Kinney says. ■



The addition of furniture (staged photo top) makes this space look larger.

around \$3.5 million."

Another option is virtual staging, where a designer fills digital images of a vacant home with furnishings with the click of a mouse. The magic of photo editing software transforms the home into a model.

Barion branched into virtual staging a few years ago and is having great success with it. "I think this is the future of staging," she says.

Realtors and sellers love it for many reasons. First, having a property that stands out on the web generates traffic, and the photos can be used to generate marketing pieces. Second, it is fast, taking days