

LUXURY

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A living room that has been staged by Designed by Woulfe, a company that sources unique accessories, antiques and contemporary art for home styling

Spend £1m to sell your place

Owners are calling in interior designers and hiring cars to make their homes desirable, says Jessie Hewitson

Home staging, when you spend lots of money doing up your property just before you sell it, is big business in the luxury homes market. So much so that some homeowners and developers set aside budgets of up to £1 million for this purpose, according to Caroline Takla, the director of One Point Six, a London developer.

Tim Macpherson, the head of residential at the Mayfair office of Carter Jonas, recently worked with a developer who spent £1 million on furniture alone for a small scheme he was selling. Another client is selling a £4 million two-bedroom flat in Mayfair and furnished it entirely with the Italian designer brand Minotti. Some have gone for a less subtle tactic, renting a Rolls-Royce Phantom or a Porsche to sit in the garage of the home they are selling.

The reason why sellers are spending this money is not a burning desire to invest in quality interior design, it's because they feel they have to.

"The best way to gauge if the sales market is struggling is the increase in calls I receive from developers asking for help," says Chris Dale, the managing director of Vesta Interior Design. Dale reports that nine months ago he would receive one to two calls a week about home staging; now the calls are daily.

Maurizio Pellizzoni, an Italian interior designer who has previously worked on home collections for Ralph Lauren,



A sleek new kitchen, such as these grey designs from Tom Howley, will impress buyers. Inset left: Maurizio Pellizzoni's flat in Lewisham, with furniture and wallpaper from Andrew Martin, is on sale for £475,000 with Robinson Jackson

recently spent £70,000 of his client's money doing up a two-bedroom flat in Mayfair that is on the market for £4.5 million.

"Talking to developers, they say there is so much out there that they need something 'wow' to attract buyers," he says. "Now they are not just selling the home, they are selling the lifestyle."

The home styling Pellizzoni oversees typically involves adding furniture, expensive wallpaper and installing a custom-made kitchen and bathroom just before the "for sale" board goes up. Homeowners can rent artwork or furniture — the usual fee is between 5 and 15 per cent of the sale price per week, based on a three to six-month rental agreement. Some galleries and furniture-makers charge an initial fee, which can be reimbursed if the buyer decides to purchase the furniture or artwork as well as the property.

There are less pricey options: companies such as David Phillips and Accouter Design offer packages where clients pay as much as £5,500 a week for furniture and artwork to furnish an empty flat. David Phillips charges £5,500



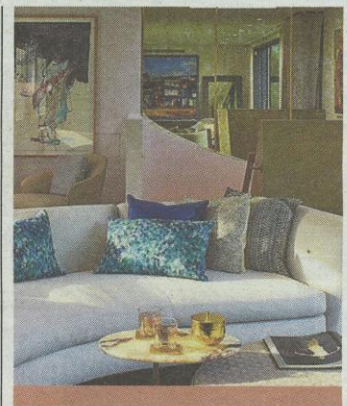
to buy enough furniture to furnish a two-bedroom flat outright, or you can rent the furniture from £230 a month.

Cheaper still is the virtual-reality home-staging option. This is where graphic designers take photographs of a property and superimpose desirable furniture, fixtures and fittings. In this way an empty home — or one that could do with new furniture — appears to be a smartly styled home on property websites and in the marketing details (with the crucial disclaimer, "This is what the home could look like"). Prices are about £180 per photograph.

Pellizzoni has styled an investment property he is selling in Lewisham, southeast London. While it's an up-and-coming area, it's not the type of place you would expect to find a flat with interiors overseen by such a high-end designer.

He has furnished the one-bedroom flat, which is on the market for £475,000 with the agency Robinson Jackson, with furniture and wallpaper worth £30,000 from Andrew Martin and has rented artwork from OnGallery.

"The agents have commented that this is a property for Chelsea and not Lewisham," he says, adding that his plan is to see what value his interior design will add. He is hoping he will get the asking price, "but then if we negotiate over the asking price, it means I can bargain with the furniture rather than the selling price", he says.



Tastemakers March & White

Elliot March, 39, and James White, 40, launched their architecture and interior design house, March & White, in 2010. They have worked on private clubs and super-yachts, as well as luxury residential projects. They recently completed the interiors of 125 Greenwich Street, a luxury apartment skyscraper in New York, and Royalty Mews, four loft apartments in Soho, London.

They met at university and now divide their time between their offices in London, New York and Los Angeles.

► **What is your biggest source of inspiration?** We challenge ourselves to create designs that draw inspiration from other sectors. Our residential projects are inspired by cutting-edge yacht, jet and automotive designs.

► **Chintz or minimalism?** Both. We take inspiration from the sense of light, space and volume that minimalist architects mastered, and love layering our interiors with bespoke finishes.

► **What is your design essential?** The iPad — it's a complete design tool. ► **Your top interior design "quick fix"?** Painting walls, skirting and architraves in the same colour tone, and being bold with darker shades.

► **The next big interior design trend?** Adaptable furniture and invisible technology.

► **The design pitfall to avoid?** Chair heights that don't work with the table — so many restaurants get it wrong.

► **If you could live in anyone's house whose would it be and why?** Coco Chanel's La Pausa Villa in the south of France. With such an iconic fashion designer overseeing the design of the home, one can imagine it was stunning.

► **When decorating, what do you splurge on?** Bar carts — we are launching one this year.

► **What would you save on?** The simpler finishes, such as timber floors.

► **The best piece of design advice you have received?** Care about the detail.

► **Your favourite thing about your home?** March: The outdoor firepit. It's a place where we gather to relax and chat. White: The family room in my house, particularly the bay window with the backdrop of beautiful London buildings.

Anna Temkin



Elliot March (left) and James White

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