



# Help me sell this ugly home!



This \$1.875M home was a war zone (above) before stager, Jill Vegas, worked her magic and welcomed three immediate offers.

Photos courtesy Jill Vegas

By RAQUEL PENZO

If you believe everything the media has been reporting, now is not the time to be selling your home. According to recent reports, it's a buyer's market, and with so many listings collecting dust, sellers and their brokers have to pull out all the stops to make a sale. It can be twice as difficult to attract buyers if the property in question is, how do I put this delicately? Aesthetically challenged.

That porcelain frog collection that your friends and family compliment you on will only deter buyers from taking your listing seriously. The avocado green paint job in the kitchen and the cracked tiles in the bathroom won't help, either. And that study that you so painstakingly transformed into a safari getaway in the middle of SoHo will

most likely end up an anecdote at someone's cocktail party: "I mean really — a life-sized giraffe as an end table? Who does that?"

"Right now, buyers have a sense that they can afford to be very particular about the real estate they purchase, as they should," says Lawrence Rich, of Prudential Douglas Elliman. And sometimes it all comes down to how a property looks.

Having to show an apartment that is filled with clutter and 30-year-old wallpaper doesn't make it any easier for the seller in a slow market, let alone the broker.

"I have a saying that I like to use: 'Every seller likes to believe that his baby is the cutest,'" says Rich.

When broker Melissa Leifer, a senior agent at Best Apartments, is showing a home that isn't in the best condition, she tries to re-organize the furniture or, in extreme cases, refurnish it altogether.

Leifer gets some info on the apartment's condition like: will the landlord fix any defects before a new resident takes over? Is there a better unit in the same building that she can show to give potential buyers an idea of what the place could look like (with some elbow grease and some imagination).

Darren Sukenik, at Prudential Douglas Elliman, will often pass on a listing if it doesn't fit a certain aesthetic ideal, especially if the seller is resistant.

"Sellers really need to present a complete package," says Sukenik. "A buyer needs to be able to see themselves in the space within the first ten minutes or it won't sell."

Sukenik, who has a background in interior design, always advises clients, "Anything that can be blown away in a hurricane, put it away."

Some brokers will enlist the help of a professional "stager" like Jill Vegas, of Jill Vegas, Inc., someone who will come in and give the space that "look" that will help it move.

Vegas got her start while selling her

own place; a broker loved the look of the home and offered her a job doing what she'd done in her own space for others. The first day Vegas' home was on the market, she received five offers over asking price. She had her first client within a week.

Prior to her work as a stager, Vegas worked in advertising and marketing and sees nothing different in what she does now. "What I do is considered marketing, not decorating."

Her main advice to sellers is to realize that the home "is not their home anymore; it's a product on the market." And as such, that product needs to put its best face on.

Vegas describes what she does as simply, "making homes look good to sell for a lot of money."

She is the author of the soon-to-be-released *Speed Decorating* and teaches seminars at NYU and for the larger real estate houses. "In this market, you have to do something

about the condition of your home."

Jorden Tepper, a sales director at Century 21 NY-Metro, always approaches clients with gentle suggestions on what will make their place more appealing to buyers. "Presentation is almost as important as pricing a unit correctly," says Tepper, whose bottom line for sellers: "If you need to sell your home, it's in your best interest to fix up the space before showing it."

Brokers Ben Morales and Ed Lacayo, both VPs at Barak Realty, worked to try and sell a property they call the Marble Palace in the West 70s.

**S**ellers have to realize 'it is not their home any more; it's a product on the market.'

- JILL VEGAS, JILL VEGAS, INC.

"The seller is a marble distributor who has more than a fleeting passion

for his product. All 1,100 s/f of surfaces, including the bedrooms, the bathrooms, right down to the radiator covers, are entombed in Italian varietals."

After more than 50 showings — many which garnered such comments as, "Are you sure we didn't get off in the lobby?" and, "If you can't sell it, you can always sell tickets for people to view it!" — Morales and Lacayo wished the seller luck as he took the listing to another broker.

"The pros of the property are that the unit is on the top-floor, has huge windows with southern exposure, and private roof rights with open city and river views," adds the duo. "An architect could sculpt a gracious vision for what potentially could be a trophy home."

In the meantime, the brokers pointed out that potential buyers have difficulty seeing past the sterile, museum qualities and envisioning a home. Which, after all, is the point of putting the apartment on the market in the first place.

And drives home the point that one surefire way to sell your home, besides pricing it correctly, is making your 'baby' cute in the eyes of a potential buyer.