

Star of the home movie

The credits roll, the music starts and the blue front door of a grand Georgian house in a quiet residential street swings open. A dimly lit hallway leads to an airy white space where an Eames table set for dinner for two sits in front of a modern fireplace. So far, so Hollywood. But is this a high-gloss drama series? Will we soon discover a body buried in the garden? Or is a romantic comedy brewing?

In fact, it's neither. There are no famous actors and the script is as minimalist as the decor. But that doesn't mean this movie isn't gripping. It's all the more bewitching when you know that the star of this production is the home itself. This is like *Through The Keyhole*, only the house looks better and each shot has a more filmic, high-end look. It confirms a long-held anecdotal observation: there is now no length to which people will not go to get the best price for their house.

The days are long gone when a quick whiz around with the Hoover, a blitz of the bath or a tidy of the dishes made a house adequately presentable for a viewing. Now, making a home movie doesn't necessarily mean pointing a camcorder at the family. Professional productions are the new way to get ahead, get your home noticed, and stir up competition from would-be buyers.

From making slick feature film-style clips of their home to extreme top-to-toe makeovers, there are few limits to how far people will go in order to secure the perfect buyer or tenant.

The movie-making premise is simple. Forget the faded, dull photographs that hang lankly in estate agents windows or on websites. Don't even think about using a handheld camera to take a jolting and washed out 360-degree view of the property. Instead, turn to the professionals to produce slick feature film-style footage of the property, put it on a DVD or web stream and show it off to prospective viewers.

One such pioneer is the company Propertyclip. It was while filming the Discovery series *Superhomes*, about multi-million pound properties, that producer and director Hamish Beeston was struck by the idea of making movies for the property market.

"A film is a much more effective way of showing off a house in all its glory," says Beeston. "We approach property projects as we would a programme for BBC1 to be shown at 8pm. We don't believe in dropping standards.

"We film with [pound]50,000 worth of TV-quality cameras and edit the footage into a quality film with a proper storyline, script and music."

Today, the company shoots films of upmarket properties for individual homeowners, estate agents such as Savills, and developers including the London Basement Company, Northacre and Sambala. The average home requires one day's filming followed by a second day of editing, resulting in a three-minute film, with prices starting at [pound]1,500. Tiggie Butler, a restoration expert, turned to Propertyclip when she considered selling her home in Mayfair, the beautifully restored Holland House.

"A film is so more effective than a brochure," says Ms Butler. "It brings things to life and creates a three-dimensional feel. It also saves an awful lot of time in relation to viewings."

While a number of offers were made for the property above market price, Ms Butler eventually decided not to sell for personal reasons - but would not hesitate to use a film to sell a property in the future.

"Hamish chose quite funky music which worked very well," she adds. "The house is quite grand but it is also a family home and the film captured that perfectly."

But making a film is not the only way of getting the most out of a home. Some companies are going a few steps further than suggesting clients bake fresh bread or light scented candles to make the place more homely. Instead, they are offering complete top-to-toe makeovers.

pad of london

Pad of London offers homeowners keen to sell or rent a range of extreme services - neatly dubbed detox, makeover and facelift. The company has a store of furniture as well as curtains, plants, toiletries and other house goodies to be arranged by their in-house interior designer, and then returned once the home is sold.

Each job is completed within seven days and the transformation of an average one bedroom unfurnished flat starts at around £2,000 - which can be payable upon completion of the sale.

“First impressions are incredibly important when it comes to finding a place to live,” says Lucy Feeney, business manager for Pad of London.

“If it’s drab, dreary and smelly, the chances are it won’t be easy to sell. Depending on how much work we feel needs to be done, we offer a service that completely makes over flats and gives them a real wow factor.”

When Anthony Dixon was unable to sell his flat in Goldney Road, Maida Vale, he decided that extreme measures were in order. “It had been on the market for a few months with no interest and I was considering either taking it off the market or reduce the asking price,” he says. Step forward Pad of London’s team of house doctors. New furniture, bed linen, bathroom mirrors, table settings, plants - a raft of household items were brought in within days in order to transform the property.

“When I walked through the door, the change was phenomenal,” says Mr Dixon. “It was incredibly stylish and the whole thing looked amazing. We got an offer for the asking price a few weeks later. It was definitely worth the money.”

And the trend is welcomed by estate agents. “People don’t realise how big a difference it can make when you create a lifestyle in a property as opposed to an empty or tired shell,” says Emma Stead, director of the Fulham office of Savills.

So, if you want to shift your home quickly, think twice before simply putting some flowers in a vase, squirting some air fresheners and throwing out the gathering pile of newspapers.



Another way to bump up a property price is transform drab rooms (above) with simple makeovers

How to get the most out of your home on your own

■ Declutter, declutter, declutter. This mantra is repeated time and time again by experts. Get rid of unnecessary clutter for good and don't just hide everything in cupboards - people often like to peer behind closed doors and won't be fooled by lack of space if they are messily filled to the brim.

■ **Light is massively important, according to Jo Wooler, director and interior designer of Pad of London. Wash dirty windows, pull back curtains and leave on lamps in naturally dark rooms.**

■ **Invest in a touch of luxury, Ms Wooler advises. Buy some luxurious throws for the bed, place interesting artwork to bare walls and use coloured cushions to bring tired rooms up to date.**

■ Those on a budget should explore the possibility of making their own film. However, you should always use a tripod to avoid unprofessionally wobbly shots, according to Hamish Beeston. Standing right back into the corners in order to get wide-angle shots is also advisable, Hamish continues. Create pools of lights with mood and task lamps. And don't shoot directly towards windows - only professional cameras can cope with the light contrast.

■ Finally, try and end the film neatly with a well-framed image, edit it simply and keep it short and simple - it doesn't need to be longer than two minutes to entice viewers, according to Hamish. If you invest in only one thing, organise a professional clean, Emma Stead of Savills advises. The cost of a total spring clean of a one-bedroom flat - from washing soft furnishings to dry cleaning curtains - is around £300.

Copyright 2007 Independent Newspapers UK Limited. All rights owned or operated by The Independent.

Danielle Demetriou "Star of the home movie". Independent, The (London). July 4, 2007.