

# Quick! Call a doctor

House doctors do more than light scented candles and paint everything magnolia – they can add serious value to your property and get a quick sale at the right price. *Mollie McGuigan reports*



If you think the smell of baking bread will sell a property, it's time to give your selling tactics an overhaul. The art of home staging – also known as house doctoring – is big business in the US and its virtues are slowly cottoning on here.

In short, a house doctor will work both superficially and structurally to present your property at its best – to get a better sale price, to increase the rental yield, to sell it quicker or just to make it a better place to live. Forget the bowls of potpourri and ethnic throws,

house doctors will decorate, renovate and furnish your property, and will even overhaul your garden if it means it will achieve your property goals.

Adam Luttrell of Shift by Design says the most common

clients are sellers. "Usually it's someone who has had tenants in and wants to give their property a makeover before they sell it, or it's a vacant property that's for sale," he says. "You have a very short time to convince a buyer that it's the property for them and things like grinding coffee beans and putting in pot plants just doesn't cut it."

Luttrell says his most successful project was a unit in Hobart, Tasmania. The owner couldn't sell it for the

\$150,000 asking price so they called in Adam and spent \$3,000 on colour adjustments and styling – within three weeks they had sold it for \$157,000.

"Vendors and landlords are in a prime position to present their properties better than the vast majority of the marketplace because house doctoring is a fairly immature industry here," says Richard Armstrong of The Makeover Group. "Anyone who does think about it is going to make a solid return on it because the competition is very ordinary."

Armstrong mainly works with vendors and investors who are looking to optimise their cash flow. "Investors will often phone us before they even buy a property, which is the ideal time to do it – when you're doing your feasibility studies," he says. "We'll look at it and say you can do X, Y and Z and it will enhance the cash flow by this much a week. It's a case of harnessing those things to make sure the cash flow has a net positive gain."

The agents take it seriously too. At



Case study 1

**What:**

Three-bedroom house

**Where:** Coomera Waters, Queensland

**Asking price:** \$560,000

**What was done:** This property had been on the market for three months, with no offers. They called in White Down Home Staging, who removed all clutter, added lighting and cleaned the property. All furniture – including rugs, sofas and beds – was replaced with rental furniture, and soft furnishings such as bedspreads and cushions were replaced with ones in neutral colours. The homestagers also hung new art work on the walls and maintained the garden.

**How much was spent:** \$4,000

**Sale price:** The property sold within three days for \$610,000

**Who did it:** White Dove Home Staging: (07) 5526 2832; [www.whitedovehomestaging.com.au](http://www.whitedovehomestaging.com.au)



Before

Century 21 Cordeau Marshall, the company offers complimentary home styling tips to all of their clients.

“The tips are very valuable,” says Michelle Plax at Century 21. “We had a unit in Hornsby (in Sydney’s north) that we were trying to rent, and there were seven others for rent in the same block – after we had it styled with new furniture, it was rented before any of the others.” ■

Quick fixes

Three things you can do to improve your property’s saleability



**De-clutter**

Clear all horizontal surfaces, remove anything stuck on the fridge, clean

out cupboards, empty bins and reduce wall hangings to one or two per room.



**Curb appeal**

Sweep the paths, mow the lawn and prune back the trees. Check that all doors,

gates, garage doors, light fittings, guttering and hand rails are in good working order.



**Leave it spotless**

Clean the whole property, paying particular attention to

the kitchen and bathroom. Replace mats and towels and ensure paint work is touched up – if not re-done.



## Case study 2

**What:** Three-bedroom house

**Where:** Hobart, Tasmania

**Asking price:** \$450,000

**What was done:** After six months on the market, the owners of this property enlisted the help of Shift by Design. They re-oiled and repaired the verandas, re-painted the windows and fencing and cut back the garden. Inside the house, they sanded and lacquered the pine work bench in the kitchen, re-painted the walls in neutral colours, fixed rising damp on the ground floor and repaired damaged flooring. Finally, rental furniture replaced the existing pieces.

**How much was spent:** \$12,000

**Sale price:** The house sold within four days for \$495,000

**Who did it:** Shift by Design: 0408 744 381; [www.shiftbydesign.com.au](http://www.shiftbydesign.com.au)

