

# Selling your house is down to a fine art



Tastefully furnished houses sell much faster. This is one of the best ideas I have seen in a long time.

Mairi Eckford



Last year alone we helped sell more than £25m of properties through our "style to sell" service.

Loraine Chassels



Once the furniture has earned its keep

WHAT is less well-known is that one side of Loraine's company, EX>Showhouse furniture, deals with the sale of all the furniture and furnishings once it has been out for hire. The public can buy this furniture after it has been in a show house or on a film shoot.

It might be considered that after some time on a film set or in a show house that the furniture would be a bit jaded. "It is only just out of its pyjamas," says Loraine, "the initial wrapping paper might be off, but what kind of use does a sofa or a bed have in a show house? None."

"We sell the furniture for less than the retail price right across the board, yet the wealthiest of people come to us. They like our style and what we do, no-one need pay retail prices. What you might spend £3000 for retail, you could get from us for £1300 and it would be delivered at the weekend."

The furniture is not mainstream and it is different from what you will find in retail stores. Selling off the furniture is quite a smart idea and it means that new pieces can be added to the collection and when they come back from hire they can in turn be sold to the public in mint condition.

Chinese whispers go at an alarming rate and when someone finds an emporium of wonderful furnishings from around the world where you can get absolutely everything the word soon gets around. Anyone visiting Loraine's "studio", as she calls it, in Bearsden will find the most amazing collection of interesting pieces of furniture from occasional to mirrors, paintings, tables, lamps, sofas and all at a price that is surprisingly low. Anything can be bought from one article to a complete room set or even three, four or five roomfuls of furnishings.

The public can get access to everything but it is by appointment only. This is largely due to every square inch of floor space being occupied and only so many people can comfortably view the furnishings at a time. To make an appointment it is necessary to contact Loraine or Carlo on 0141 942 0519

Your home can be furnished to showhouse standard to help make it sell, writes Andrew MacKay

PROPERTY investors looking to dispose of some of their portfolio are currently selling some excellent housing stock. But it isn't always easy to sell an empty shell to a prospective buyer. It may have a kitchen that is crowded with famous names, has relaxing river views and has quality wood flooring, however, it is not quite complete because it lacks the ingredients that turn a house into a home. This is when Countrywide, in association with Loraine Chassels of XS Interiors, can help change your spiritless property from being a sad and uninviting place to one that has been given vitality and life.

Mairi Eckford, managing director of Countrywide, is enthusiastic about this new facility. "The 'style to sell' service is available to all Countrywide clients," she says. "From my experience, properties that are tastefully furnished sell faster and achieve higher prices, this is something that I have seen time and again. Unfortunately, not everyone has the skills of an interior designer or is able to source the right furniture at such competitive prices."

"This service provides exactly that and you don't even need to buy the furniture - you can lease it. After it has served its purpose you just hand it back. Every property will, of course, have its own individual look."

"Empty flats and houses can be turned into designer pads or lovely family homes overnight. Countrywide is a progressive Estate Agency, always, ready to embrace new ideas to help our clients achieve the best possible price for their properties." It is not just anyone that can create the correct mood and although an apartment or house can be fully furnished by XS Interiors in one week from first survey, it is down to the expertise of Loraine that the style and furniture selection comes together in an effective way. It also helps to have warehouses with enough furniture to fit out 50 houses and that her husband and business partner Carlo is there to mastermind the logistics of the operation.

As an interior stylist and furniture importer, Loraine Chassels' company has supplied the furnishings in the homes of the rich and famous. Her knowledge has been sought by film directors, TV set designers and property developers for more than a decade. Consequently, her business has been organically created and things have naturally happened that have allowed her to gather the specialist

knowledge and develop her abilities as a house furnisher.

Loraine was born in Glasgow but at the age of two she was whisked off to live in Canada and latterly in the US where her father was involved in the Apollo Space Project. She recalls being taken around the fantastic properties that Frank Lloyd Wright had built in California and consequently the seed was sown that gave her a sense where she appreciated beauty.

When the family moved back to Scotland, it was Loraine's entrepreneurial spirit that led her to launch a cosmetics mail order company and then a monthly lifestyle magazine. Loraine's world was clearly one where beauty was the key. From designing fashion shoots to interior layouts, from photography to styling, she developed and fine-tuned her creative and artistic skills.

Today there are dozens of television programmes, even channels, that are dedicated to making home interiors more beautiful. But despite the knowledge that the lay person may acquire from such shows there is much more to bringing together pieces of furniture to achieve the right look and mood, especially when working to a deadline.

"To furnish a property professionally, not as a lay person who might take 12 weekends cherry picking bits and pieces of furniture hoping to pull a 'look' together from all sorts of places, you have to be a real strategic planner," says Loraine. "Everything from the ground up from the rugs, mirrors, lamps, dining suites, sofas, occasional furniture, beds, bedding has to be thought out, planned, prepared, colour co-ordinated, created, shown, delivered and installed to meet the deadline."

The main part of her business is industry and trade related and means furnishing builders' show houses or supplying investors or developers who want to resell or rent their properties with furniture.

Loraine has done a huge amount of work with the various film company's that come to Scotland. Sometimes she will be hands on and be told what the character and location is like but there are times when she is kept in the dark and it is only perhaps one year later when the film is released that she discovers where her furnishings have been.

Recently she supplied the set furnishings for a production that starred Roger Moore, Honor Blackman and Jane

Seymour. Much of the shooting took place in the north of Scotland but for Loraine the excitement comes much later when she sees the finished film complete with furnishings from her storerooms. For Countrywide's clients it is Loraine and Carlo's "style to sell" service whereby they can turnkey a whole project, a whole property in a very short time that is being offered. The service is well-suited to the person with say two investment properties that are empty and are to be sold to get the top value.

First things in the equation are the location of the property and its size. What happens next is that a survey is carried out or plans of the property are submitted. Loraine would be able to ascertain roughly the volume of furniture that would be required to style it and set it up. Other things that enter the equation are the value of the furniture, to where it is going and for how long.

Typically, a property could be surveyed on a Tuesday and the furnishings planned on a Wednesday. By the end of that week the whole house whether it be from two bedrooms to 10 bedrooms or one public room to four public rooms could be styled, furnished and set up to art on the walls to bedding on the beds,

everything in its entirety in 48 hours. She works closely with her husband Carlo, who has himself an extraordinarily keen eye for aesthetics, furnishings and styling although he takes care of the warehousing side of the business. Almost every day, containers arrive from all over the world with furniture. Everything has to be racked and stacked in their enormous storage facilities. It is from here that all furnishings are delivered to various projects and it is Carlo who takes care of the installations and exits, the stockholding, vehicles and the personnel required to put the room sets together.

As a property furnisher, Loraine knows her company's limitations. She knows for example that no matter what she does to the inside it will not help a property sell if its guttering is hanging off or the grass in the garden is three feet high or the wallpaper is tobacco stained and past its best. She will quickly point out: "There's not much point in putting a plaster on something that is much deeper."

Clearly, Loraine Chassels has not come through what might be a traditional route for the interior designer or house furnisher but she probably has more work and more clients than any other

**SOLD ON STYLE:** clockwise from bottom left. Colour and modernity create stylish vignette; Spanish designer furniture creates a wow factor; relaxing calm in lattes and chocolate; hall sideboard and lamps; Loraine in her private Bearsden studio.

interior designer in Scotland. She has mixed her talents in strategic planning with her artistic flair and as an aesthete "paints" rooms with furniture. Her real skill is in making rooms look beautiful and ensuring that where the eye goes there is visual pleasure. It is this that Countrywide's clients will get the benefit of so that their property can be turned into a home until it is sold. And if the buyer is really keen on the furniture it can also be bought at a fair price.