

Los Angeles Times

REAL ESTATE

Sunday, December 17, 2006



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Joining the festivity

Sellers buck conventional wisdom, decorating for the holidays. Some even entertain.

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TINY red-and-green Christmas lights snake up a railing above the "for sale" sign in front of a home in the Hollywood Hills. More lights twinkle from the roof and the trees on the front lawn.

Inside, a Christmas tree sporting tiny candy canes stands waiting for Santa, and cranberry-scented candles alternate with clusters of red and white poinsettias along the mantle in the living room. A second tree, decorated with white snowflakes, is in the dining room.

So, is this seller sabotaging a chance to hook a buyer or just doing the holiday version of "stage it and they will come"? Whether to decorate a home that's for sale during the holidays — no matter the holiday — is a question of some debate.

Purists recommend depersonalizing a home — down to removing family photos — to speed up a sale, but some agents and professional stagers say that dressing up a house for Christmas helps potential buyers visualize how they would celebrate in that home. But what if a home seeker doesn't celebrate Christmas? Is it off-putting, and can potential buyers see beyond the reindeer on the roof?

No one wants to make buyers uncomfortable.

"We're not putting the Christ child out," said Holly Purcell, an agent with Prudential California Realty John Aaroe Division in Los Angeles. She and partner Phil Missig have the listing on that two-bedroom, one-bathroom Hollywood Hills house priced at \$938,000. "We're getting into the holiday spirit."

Not everyone shares her vision.

"My first instinct is that I wouldn't want to alienate anyone because of their religion. If I were to decorate for Christmas, that could be a problem if the buyer was Jewish," said Dana Dickey, vice director of Interior Redesign Industry Specialists, a trade group that includes stagers who furnish empty homes to make them

more appealing to buyers. For the holidays, Dickey said she prefers a festive color scheme featuring gold and maroon.

Some homeowners eschew Christmas decorations on religious grounds. For instance, they may be Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, atheists or agnostics. Others choose not to decorate due to the hassle factor or because they believe the holiday has become overly commercialized.

"You don't want to offend anybody," said Sandi Sinicrope, president of ASF Interior Redesign Inc. in Alhambra, who added that she wouldn't put a Christmas tree or Nativity scene in a house.

Instead, a welcome wreath — grapevine studded with tiny yellow flowers — hung on the front door of a Pasadena home her company recently staged.

"You want to make it universal," said Ana Lossada, an agent with Coldwell Banker, George Realty in Alhambra, who has the listing on the three-bedroom, two-bathroom hillside house priced near \$1.2 million. "You don't want to go overboard, but holidays are holidays, and people have their traditions."

In the living room, a huge wreath tied with a red velvet bow filled the wall above the fireplace. Three stars and gold tinsel covered the mantle. A large, faux terracotta Santa Claus stood on the hearth.

There are "holiday touches all the way through," Sinicrope said, pointing out a crystal vase in which small red ornaments peeked through ivory potpourri. "We're not over the top. There's no big Christmas tree with lots of lights."

Like those two trees at the Hollywood Hills house listed by Purcell and Missig. They promised live music and holiday cheer at their recent open house, and sent out invitations with silhouettes of a glamorous lady in a spangly red dress and a white feather boa dancing with a man in a black tuxedo, each holding a glass of Champagne.

At the open house, serious [See Selling, Page K14]



CLASSIC TOUCH: Two simple wreaths decorate the gates of a home in Beverly Hills.