



Kelly Watts considers her options as she gets ready to decorate a home for an open house in the south Nashville area.

# Prix de Solde freshens homes, helps them sell

By LISA BENAYIDES

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Call her Martha Stewart meets Ms. Cheap.

Kelly Watts, owner of the three-year-old Prix de Solde home staging company, specializes in literally sweeping into houses about to be put on the market and transforming them into more salable residences. From boxing up and removing clutter to putting new artwork on the walls, adding fresh flowers and bringing in new furniture, Watts prides herself on working with what people already have.

"I'm not an interior designer. I'm more an undecorator," she says of her simple style, which can either be a stage-setter for a one-day open house or a permanent part of a new tenant's life.

Beth Dantel called in Watts when she was ready to sell her West End-area home about a year ago. Watts

cleared out the clutter, did some touch-up painting and even freshened up the landscaping.

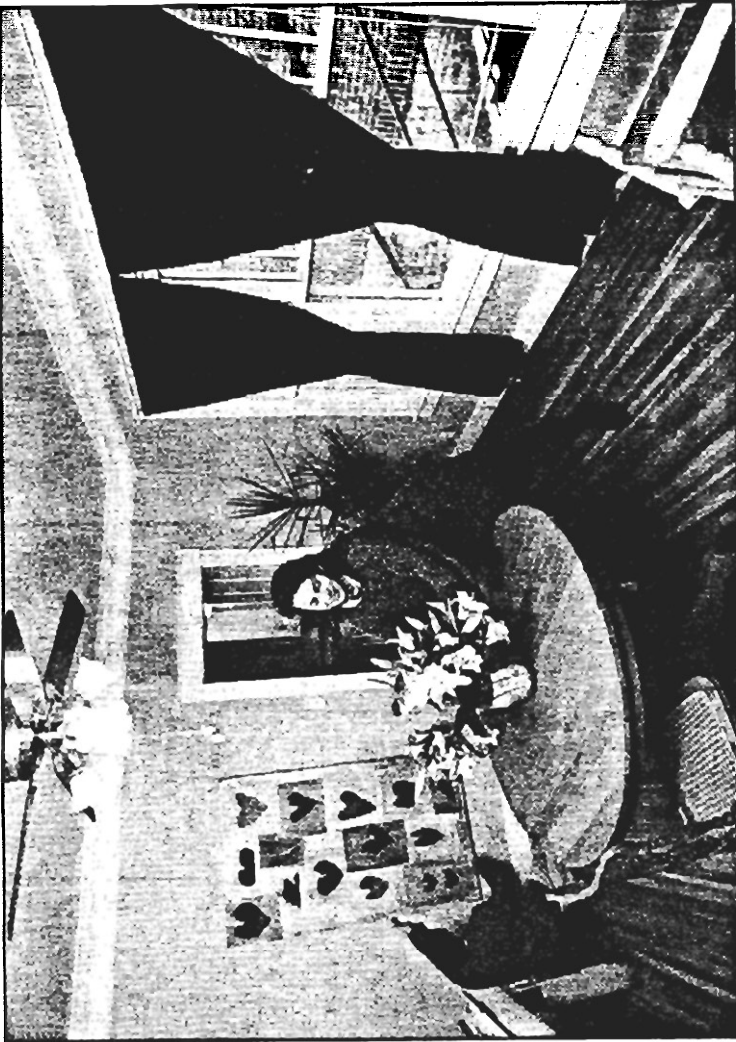
"She made the place look more spacious, mainly by eliminating. Less is more and that's certainly appealing to buyers," Daniel said.

"I think that this would help anyone who would want to sell their house in a hurry — even if you think, like I did, your house already looks wonderful."

Watts' fee depends on how extensive the work is. She can work on just a few rooms or an entire house, inside and out. Most clients spend 1%-3% of their asking price, she said.

"Most people spend five weeks killing themselves, trying to get their house in shape," she said. "They think they can do it all themselves. Then they realize they need to call someone in."

Watts developed her sense of



PHOTOS BY FREEMAN RANSEY/STAFF

Watts makes final adjustments to the same, redecorated room.

style during the 12 years she sold designer clothes in California. Then her husband, a songwriter, moved to Nashville, and Watts stayed home caring for their two young children.

Two years later, Watts got a divorce and realized she needed to find a job.

"I had always had a talent for making a room look good on a small budget," Watts said.

So when her girlfriend decided to put her house on the market, Watts put all her home-magazine advice and personal savvy to work. The home sold immediately and the light bulb went off in Watts' head.

The beauty of the business is that it required no initial investment. Over the years, Watts has built an inventory of props ranging from vases to furniture to couch covers. Most of her business, 70%, is referred from real-estate agents, and often she is hired to 'stage' an empty house.

"It's hard for people to imagine where a couch will go or how a

room could work," she said.

Staging differs from interior design work in that Watts' top priority is making the home saleable, not pleasing a client. She also works on a condensed schedule, often called into a home days before it's to be ready for an open house.

Initially Watts did all the work herself, but now she has two full-time and eight part-time employees. She mostly handles the administrative end, but still works weekends, attending the open houses she stages to make sure everything is in place.

Demand for her services is more than she can keep up with, convincing Watts to take the next step and franchise her business. Other cities have staging companies, but Watts thinks she can compete with her philosophy of making a home user-friendly.

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**KELLY WATTS**

Owner of Prix de Solde

"Some staging companies won't have a television in the room and bring in all their own furniture," she said. "I think men want to know where the television is going to go and want to do this affordably." ■