

# REAL ESTATE & HOME

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2005 • SECTION G

aveling gives gardeners fresh ideas **YOUR GARDEN, G3**

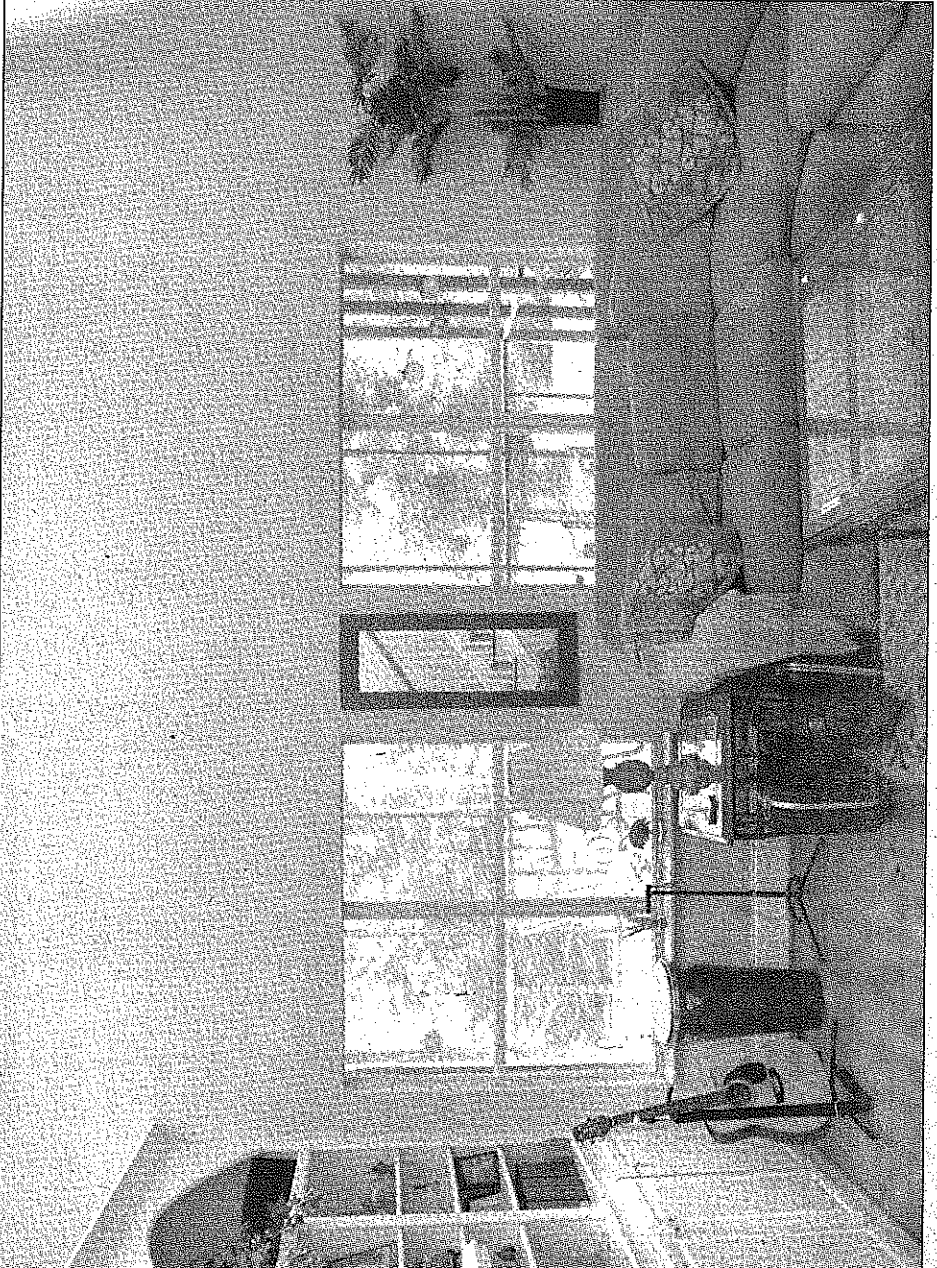
**OWE A BIG MORTGAGE?** | Don't worry, be happy (for now): Your home is now your ATM | **REAL ESTATE, Page G6**

**In less than a minute spent examining a house,**

a potential home buyer is thinking either 'yes' or 'no.' But the subtle art of 'staging' can change that equation.

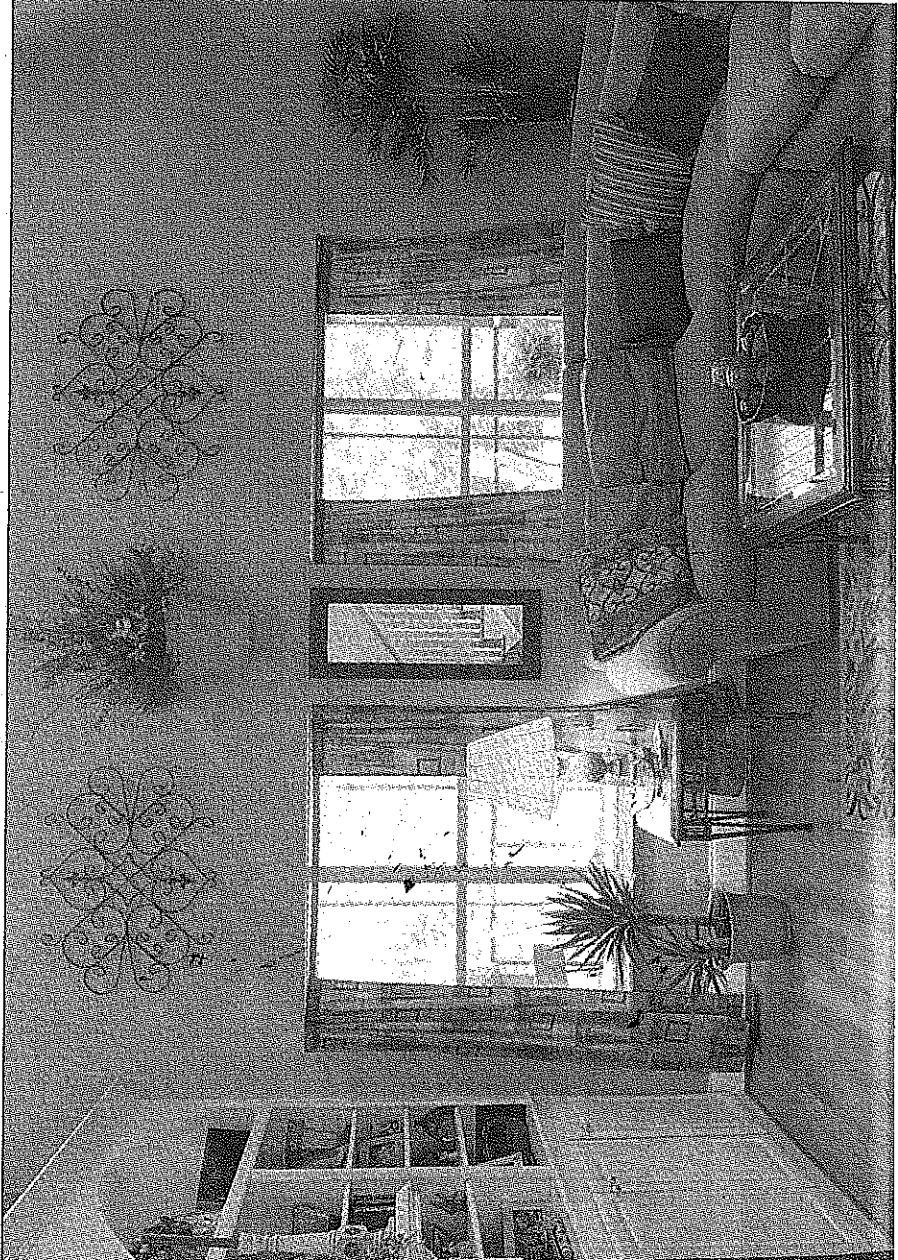
## BEFORE | THE LIVING ROOM

Don and Laurie Whiting's house, 129 Hilton View Estates on Lake Murray



## AFTER | THE LIVING ROOM

Don and Laurie Whiting's house, 129 Hilton View Estates on Lake Murray



By **MEGAN SEXTON**  
Staff Writer

**I**T TAKES POTENTIAL home buyers less than a minute to look at a home and decide whether they have any interest in buying it.

That conclusion typically comes down to this: Can they see themselves living in the house?

If the answer is no, the big question for sellers becomes how they can change that perception.

The solution for some is staging the house so that it looks more attractive to buyers. One of the hottest trends around the country, real estate staging is starting to catch on in the Columbia market. Staging can mean anything from deep cleaning and decluttering a home to changing the wall colors and moving furniture. On the popular HGTV show "Designed to Sell," it can mean substantial construction projects such as new countertops or flooring.

The key is to highlight the best features of the home to help sell it faster and at the top price.

"You look at what it's going to take, how a buyer will view this house, and what do you consider worth changing that will not cost more money than you'd possibly make back," said Marianne Hatton, a Realtor with Re/Max Real Estate Services.

"Time is money, and that's true in real estate," Hatton said. "If you spend a little money to correct outdated wallpaper and albatrosses, the quicker you

move your house. And generally speaking, the sooner you get an offer, the more you get for your house."

Kathleen Garnett, an organization specialist who runs Room for Change, stages homes for sale and teaches a class for real estate professionals at the Real Estate School of South Carolina. "You're trying to appeal to a broad market," she said. "That doesn't mean just whitewash everything, but neutralizing is a good idea. Declutter. That just makes sense."

She also suggests her clients "prepack. That's a nice way of saying, 'Get rid of all your stuff.'"

"The whole idea is to allow a potential buyer to see themselves in your home," Garnett said. "You're not showcasing your stuff, you're showcasing your home."

Interior designer Bonnie Younginer of Cobb/Younginer has worked with real estate agents to stage homes. In one home in Blythe-wood, she changed the paint color in the bathroom, put up a shelf and added accessories "and it was like night and day."

Younginer said she staged her own home when she sold it nine months ago.

"I took down all the hobby things and collectibles. I brought stuff in that looked more like a showhouse. I added plants. I scaled down the bookcase and edited it," she said. "It worked."

SEE STAGING PAGE G9

# Set the stage for a sale

Wondering how real estate staging works?  
Here's a look at one home's transformation

By **MEGAN SEXTON**  
Staff Writer

**T**HERE IS NO QUESTION THAT Don and Laurie Whiting's house in Chapin is impressive.

Views of Lake Murray. Heavy molding. Open floor plan. Tray ceiling and built-in cabinets and dressers in the master bedroom. Decks and screened porches overlooking the lake. A huge master bath. Three floors with 3,800 square feet of space. But, with an asking price of \$650,000 and plenty of other houses for sale on the lake, it needs to stand out.

Enter Tiffany Sowards. Now a Realtor with Century 21 Bob Capes, Sowards has a background in interior design. She stages every house she lists, moving furniture, painting walls and adding decorative touches.

**STAGING COSTS**  
Paint, \$1115

Scaffolding rental, \$70

Design fee and labor, \$400

Accessories, \$401

Landscaping and plants, \$586

**Total spent: \$1,572**

**Borrowed items  
for listing:**

Two iron grills for walls; two iron screens; iron urn and plant stand; lamps; terra cotta pots; mantel clock