

De-Clutter!

Kim Goeltom Makes Space for an Inviting Home

by Greg Lilly, Lifestyle Editor

Whether sprucing up a house for the real estate market or de-cluttering a home for the current owners, Kim Goeltom has the skills and ideas to make a house feel roomier and grander.

People tend to collect things, according to Kim; possessions that at one time seemed important, needed, or vital. However, as time passes those same items lose their luster.

“One of the neat realizations I found from doing home staging is to be conscious of the things around me,” Kim says. “Most people don’t think about the things they have, they just acquire them. They’ve had them for years. I think when you’re living in a ‘staged’ house you feel calmer and enjoy the house more. You start noticing things and want to make sure everything in your home is something you love.”

About five years ago, Kim and her husband moved to Williamsburg from Bethesda, MD to be closer to her grandparents and uncle. “Plus I got tired of the hectic city lifestyle,” she adds. They had managed rental properties and after a renter would move out, Kim would clean and arrange the place for an open house. “For a long time, I didn’t know what I was doing was ‘staging’ and that it was a natural thing for me to do.”

She became an accredited Home Stager and began helping people ready their homes for the tough real estate market. As her clients saw how great their old houses looked after Kim staged them, they invited her to assist them in setting up their new homes. “I stage houses for selling and I help de-clutter and organize homes that people plan to stay in,” she explains.

Television shows have made everyone into amateur home stagers. “But, there are so many more subconscious nuisances to it than what people see on HGTV,” Kim says, “like the why and how of the changes. You are creating an illusion of a bigger and grander feel so people can see the space, and they aren’t distracted. We want them to love what they see in the sense of furnishings and accessories, but we don’t want them more involved with the furnishings and accessories than the space.” She tries to minimize those distractions and allow a potential buyer to focus on the important elements of a house like room size, ceiling height, chair rails, wainscoting, and crown molding.

For selling a house in the current market, Kim advises that it must appear to the potential buyers as if it is an open and welcoming house ready for their belongings, not that they have walked into someone else’s home and interrupted the family’s life. “I try to bring warmth into a per-

son’s home,” Kim says. “You want it to be warm and cozy, but depersonalized. That’s the trick.”

Depersonalization is tough for some sellers and that shows in the number of days the house is on the market. “When a seller is willing to detach from a home and depersonalize, that’s when a house is going to sell,” Kim explains. Part of the process is to de-clutter the house. Kim suggests that only one third of the furniture should stay in the house. “Because

most people have too much,” she adds. “It’s one thing to have furniture for living in a space. But it’s another when you’re displaying a house for sale. It’s a completely different mindset.” Unless the room is a media room, she says to move the televisions and other electronics out of sight.

Another of her tips is: “Neutral paint, neutral paint.” And she means it. “I don’t know how many times we walk into a house,” she explains, “and the foyer is yellow, the dining room is bright red, the formal living room is royal blue, the back of the house is pale yellow and each bedroom has a different color. That is overwhelming and over stimulating to a potential buyer. It’s obviously still the homeowner’s personality.” The house’s personality should be shining through, not the current owner’s. She adds that multi-colored rooms can be a

detracting factor since a potential buyer will realize the house is not move-in ready. “Even though paint is such a simple process, it can be a huge hurdle, same with wallpaper,” she says.

When potential buyers are scheduled to view the house, Kim recommends turning on lamps to help the house seem bright, playing soft jazz in the background to relax the viewers, and burning a cookie-scented candle to add a cozy aroma to the kitchen. “Appeal to all the senses,” Kim adds.

She has found that one of the advantages of working in home staging is that she’s more aware of the part possessions play in her life. Where a staged house helps appeal to potential buyers the same concepts have guided Kim to realize that the de-clutter process works wonders for people wanting to clean up their current home.

“Having a staged house is very empowering,” she says. “Not to the point that you have to depersonalize. That’s different. That’s for selling. You can have personalization, but some people tend to go over the top and every single space on the wall is something. It’s a balance. Have your special treasures on display. Evaluate some of the things you have and decide if it’s something you really love: is it something that represents me today or is it holding me in the past?”



Q & A

An Interview with Kathy Chambers

PRESIDENT OF WILLIAMSBURG AREA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®

Email Kathy at info@waarealtor.com

record breaking activity of 70% increase in sold listings over 2008. Numbers like these have not been seen in several years. Under contract listings were up 33% which is

a forward indicator that the 2010 first quarter may produce positive numbers as well.

First quarter months are traditionally slower. However, there are important factors which prove to be encouraging. The US Congress passed new legislation to continue the first-time home buyer credit of up to \$8,000. The new expanded tax credit of up to \$6,500 for repeat buyers is expected to help the middle market sales to continue to inch up. The deadline for taking advantage of the tax credits is April 30, which means buyers must have a written binding contract to purchase on or before this date. Also, the contract must close by July 1st.

Many buyers, who have historically timed their purchase based on the school year or the coming of the summer months may want to start their buying plans earlier to take advantage of the tax credit. This could lead to another surge in home sales early this spring.

Prices have not yet stabilized, but there is good news ahead. According to the National Association of Realtors® Chief Economist, Lawrence Yun: "We should reach self-sustaining housing conditions and firming home prices in most areas around the middle of 2010."

What advice do you have for Buyers and Sellers this year?

CHAMBERS:

If you are a Seller, one thing remains constant: Buyers continue to compare houses with location, price and condition still being the top determining factors in purchasing their next home.

If you are in the market for a new home, check to see if you are eligible for one of the home buyer tax credits. Either way, act now as mortgage interest rates will not stay this low forever.

For detailed local market statistics and general real estate information visit the Williamsburg Area Association of REALTORS® website at www.WAAREaltor.com. For more about this article or any other real estate matter, contact your local Realtor®.

Clutter interferes with your life. "When you walk into a room that is cluttered," she describes, "you are reminded that you need to clean it out, you're reminded each time you see it. That includes closets!"

Closets and garages tend to be places where people stuff boxes and things that they aren't ready to part with, but don't really want to look at every day. Kim says to ask yourself: Am I living in this space permanently? Why keep things in boxes? For the stuffed garage, ask: What is my car worth? What's the value of the things packed in those boxes in the garage? Does it make sense to keep my valuable car outside in the elements when I have a garage full of less valuable things?

Kim has steps to de-clutter your home: First, give yourself six months to do it. "If you try to do it in one weekend," she warns, "you'll have a nervous breakdown."

Secondly, create three piles: never going to use it; love it, but doesn't have a place; it doesn't match anything.

Third, take action on the piles. For *never going to use it*: throw it away, donate it, or take it to a consignment shop. For *haven't found a place for it*: keep and re-evaluate in six months. For *doesn't match*: decide if you have a future with this item then add it to one of the other piles. "How much time and energy can we give to an item we paid twenty dollars for?" Kim asks. "If we need it, we can buy it later. Recycle it, donate it to someone who needs it, or try to re-sell it on consignment."

Her final advice is: "Don't take it personally." Your style may be current, but the problem is that not everyone will like that style. "Not everyone loves my style either," she adds. "That's why we try to keep things neutral, to what 80 to 85 percent of buyers are going to fall in love with. If you keep a house neutral and devoid of a particular style then that's how a potential buyer can envision themselves and their style in the space." NDN



How would you summarize the real estate market in 2009 and what are your predictions for this year?

CHAMBERS:

Good News! The 2009 Williamsburg Area housing market finished on a high note. Third and fourth quarter closed sales and under contract sales produced positive numbers for the first time in over two years. After a downward spiral of the housing market beginning in 2006, the market appears to have begun to turn the corner.

Historically low mortgage interest rates spurred home sales. The first-time home buyer tax credit provided a strong incentive and sense of urgency for buyers to get in the market before the November 30th deadline.

Third quarter closings were up 1.5%. Under contract listings rose to 21.6% over 2008 figures.

The 4th quarter produced

Williamsburg Area Association of Realtors®

757-253-0028

5000 New Point Road, Suite 1101 Williamsburg, VA 23188-9418

www.waarealtor.com

