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## InStyle Stages to Sell

InStyle Staging | Houston, Texas





# InStyle Stages to Sell

**By Kathy Bowen Stolz**

Staging luxury homes makes them sell fast. And that is where InStyle Staging steps in. This Houston company, which is owned by Selena Mackay, interior designer, and John Paul Tamborello, builder, utilizes the skills of its owners to create the kind of Wow! factor that will cause potential buyers to say “I want to live here” when they enter a house InStyle has staged.

“Our commitment is to make the house user-friendly, beautiful and upscale,” Selena said. “We don’t take generic furniture from discount stores to stage our houses.” Instead, they create a custom interior design, staging it as if it were a project she was designing for a particular client of her interior design company, Studio Mackay. “Our luxury staging gives buyers the ability to picture themselves in these homes without wondering what they will do with the interiors...without having to hire a designer.”

The staging company works for builders and realtors, leasing their staging elements for three months and

charging 1 percent of the selling price. Their niche is new construction houses priced in the \$2 million-and-above bracket – homes that are usually 6,000 to 10,000 sq. ft. A typical installation starts by designing the décor’s look, which takes around three weeks, followed by a four-day installation.

Both she and Tamborello have extensive experience in what clients at this level want in their homes, Mackay said. “We think about how people live in the neighborhoods we work in and the architecture of the house. We focus on what a buyer wants,” she added. All five houses they have staged since starting the business in late 2017 sold within the three-month lease, with two selling within 10 days.

Selena said they work to stay consistent with the architectural design of the houses. Their three goals are to make the house feel welcoming and comfortable, to make the house feel more luxurious with a rich environment and to redirect attention away from any objections that a





buyer may have, such as spaces that may be challenging to furnish. “We do what the house calls for; we make the interiors work for living,” she stated.

“We can brighten up the space and give it a bit of personality. We feature giant rugs, amazing artwork and high-end furniture. We use grounded neutral shades with a punch of color in pillows, accessories and artwork. We want people to see themselves living there as they walk from room to room,” Selena commented.

Although they don’t stack dishes in the cabinets or food in the pantry, they do use decorative pieces to make the kitchens memorable. They put large accessories on oversized islands to provide color and proportion. Every room should be beautiful, the kitchen should not be an exception, according to Selena. In the bathrooms and bedrooms, they stage with soaps, towels, pillows and linens, although they put nothing in the closets. “I don’t like clutter. I like clean,” Mackay noted.

While they want to show how spaces might be used and furnished, they are careful not to include any elements, such as religious symbols, that might offend prospective buyers.

InStyle has a great team that shares the vision of the company. They live and breathe good design. “We have a collaborative way of working. Everybody takes responsibility. John and I direct and edit, but many times we are on our hands and knees making a house amazing!” Selena said.

Mackay and Tamborello partner with local art galleries to showcase high-end art in every room of the house, according to the company website, [www.instylestaginghouston.com](http://www.instylestaginghouston.com). “Adding fine art and turning these homes into a gallery turns an everyday showing into an amazing experience.”

InStyle rents some of the artwork from galleries and owns other pieces. “There’s a lot of transitional art on the market





featuring happy colors and uplifting images,” Selena said. “These pieces elevate the space and are available for sale with the home.”

Their primary client at this time is Smith Family Homes, a custom building firm that has contracted with InStyle to select all of its finishes and stage all of its homes for



the remainder of 2019 through the end of 2020, a total of more than 30 homes. “John and I know the market so well that Smith Family Homes trusts us and gives us free rein,” Selena said.

Because they stage very large homes, they often have to create custom furniture pieces, such as consoles and tables, to fit the spaces. Tamborello, owner of Top Notch Design Renovations, works with several tradesmen to create those pieces, which are also for sale.

Selena and John are creating an inventory of furnishings that can be used in their staging company. They regularly buy pieces rather than rent items from furniture companies. Fortunately John Paul owns a strip of warehouses where they can store their items.

They use two moving companies, who are exceptional, according to Selena, to transport their furnishings in and out of storage. The movers wrap all of the pieces in plastic and wear white gloves to handle the artwork.

She said InStyle Staging also has a furniture cleaner on call, but she has been surprised that they have seldom needed his services because the realtors are diligent about protecting the staging company’s pieces. And their diligence is a plus because Selena loves to decorate with white furniture!

Admitting that both John and she are Type A personalities, Selena said they want to grow, grow, grow the company to





include a retail outlet and perhaps collaborate with other partners. Stating that it's always great to reinvent yourself, after 20 years as an interior designer she would like to evolve her design business into a service that does not require "hiring a designer." In a perfect world, the home buyer would buy the house and the furniture, and her work would be done!

The biggest surprise they've had so far is how well the business is doing, she said. They expected to stage one house per month, but now they've got four more on the horizon.

Although they're putting all of the money earned back into the business' operation, she said the company is a success if for no other reason than "how happy we feel when we do this!"

"I love doing the staging. It's like Install Day every day. It's exciting to see the builders walk in and be blown away because the staging looks so good. It's really fun!"



*For more information about InStyle Staging,  
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