

# Connecticut COTTAGES & GARDENS

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## Spirited Style

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A Garden of Delights  
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### DEEDS & DON'TS

to the distress of the homeowners, who were divorcing. "I staged it in a week, yanking carpeting off the stairs, repainting and refurbishing," says Irvine, whose prior background designing Manhattan window displays and movie sets comes in handy when creating lightning-fast, super-stylish interiors. "I told the homeowner that I believed she would get multiple offers the first week, and she did. In fact, a couple who had seen the house before it was staged was convinced to look again—and they bought it."

Some real-estate industry insiders remain skeptical of stagers, contending that making homes marketable is part of the package of services realtors should—and do—provide. True enough, but Irvine, whose company is aptly named Scout, knows how to wheel-and-deal her way around galleries, wholesalers and showrooms to pull in furnishings and artwork beyond the reach of many realtors.

One stunning example of Irvine's talent is the \$7.5 million home on desirable Tokeneke Trail in Darien. When the bachelor owner died, the executor of his estate hired Irvine to modernize the drab décor, which detracted from the 4,764-square-foot, chateau-style home. It took Irvine and her crew just 10 days to empty the house, bringing in replacement pieces—most of them for sale, with the prices posted in case clients are interested—from a long list of local businesses (including Steinway, Braswell Galleries, Dovecote and SeaCloth, to name just a few)

### STAGE RIGHT

Say you've got a not-so-spiffy-looking house that needs to sell quickly—maybe there's a divorce, or it's co-owned by squabbling heirs. Or perhaps you need the proceeds from its sale in order to jump on another property. You could set your asking price low in hopes of generating both traffic and offers. Or you could pay up front for the process known as staging, which involves the kind of quick but comprehensive spruce-up that's specifically designed to enhance a home's marketability—doing work that's more about looking at the home than living in it.

These days, smart money is opting for staging, which ends up costing the homeowner less due to higher offers paid for seductively staged interiors. Stager and stylist Christine Irvine cites as an example a Darien home that languished on the market for five months, much

who were only too happy to have their merchandise showcased in the swank setting. Fittingly, when the home came to market, Irving and listing agent Rachel Walsh of William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty threw a sparkling cocktail party featuring Champagne served by the pool, Frank Sinatra crooning from the sound system (borrowed from Audiocom) and guests viewing paintings by Diego Rivera and others (lent by a gallery) or settled into antique French bergères. Want to see for yourself? Call Walsh at (888) 245-7488. Irvine can be reached at (203) 653-4771.



**Stage Direction** | Take some stress out of readying your home for sale by enlisting a stylist. Christine Irvine of Scout dressed up this dining and living room with artwork and antiques borrowed from local galleries.

# Councill

Modern masters of fine furnishings.

2004-400 Sideboard, Brownstone by Councill

As seen in Connecticut Cottages & Gardens magazine.