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Eric Reed Staff Photographer

Pasadena home stager Michelle Minch, walking through a San Dimas home she helped sell, was voted the Real Estate Staging Association 2010 Professional Stager of the Year at the International Conference in Las Vegas.

Sold on design

Pasadena-based home-staging business gets results

By Kevin Smith Staff Writer

PASADENA — In real estate, first impressions can be everything.

When a potential buyer walks into a home, the color scheme, decor and overall mood of the home can make or break a sale.

No one knows this better than professional home stager Michelle Minch. Her Pasadena-based company, Moving Mountains Design, is able to quickly transform a home from a disorganized mess to a sleek and stylish showplace.

And once the home is staged — a process that typically takes just a few hours — it will usually sell much faster and often at a higher price.

"I have a crew that I bring in," said Minch, 54, who lives in Pasadena. "The cost varies, but you can spend as little as \$150 to get a home-staging consultation, which is really a road map for homeowners who might want to do it themselves."

A bare-bones home-staging service is available for about \$1,500.

"We'll just bring in a limited amount of furniture and accessories so the homeowner can do most of the work themselves," Minch said.

The minimum staging price for a vacant home is about \$2,000. On average a home staging runs anywhere from \$2,500 to \$5,500, although luxury homes can be considerably more. Each home is assessed individually.

"The home will have the furniture for 60 days, but most of the homes we stage sell within two weeks," Minch said.

Russell Beare, 52, of San Dimas knows that to be true.

Beare used Minch to stage his 2,538-square-foot San Dimas home, and the results were immediate.

"We had the home staged and got one offer at the first showing," he said. "Then we had another showing and got three or four more offers and accepted one. We had tried to sell the house a couple times ourselves over the past three years

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but had to pull it back off the market. The staging made a huge difference — it was like night and day."

Minch's expertise has not gone unnoticed. Last month she was named the Real Estate Staging Association 2010 Professional Stager of the Year at the association's International Conference in Las Vegas.

It was her fourth year as a finalist.

The award recognizes excellence in home staging, best home staging business practices and a proven track record of ethical conduct and commitment to raising awareness about home staging.

"To be chosen as the best of the best by my peers is very sweet," Minch said. "It's fabulous, but along with it comes some responsibility about raising the profile of the home staging industry."

Minch began her career in design as a stylist and visual merchandiser for commercials, music videos, TV and feature films.

"Part of the outgrowth of working in feature films is that people would see the sets I designed and then they'd want me to help design their house," she said. "Some of them started selling their homes and asked me to help get them ready for sale. There really wasn't a staging industry at the time. I learned by experimenting."

David Sack, 41, of Valley Village is another client of Moving Mountains Design.

"I have no doubt that my home would never have sold as fast or for as much without being staged," he said. "I would not recommend trying to sell a home without staging it."

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