

STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID SOKOL

Home owners Chris Fleuriel, left, and Merrill Kaitz, right, flank their children Shoshana and Sam Kranish as crew members from the television show "Sell This House" prepared their living room for staging on Tuesday afternoon.

Smile, you're on ... 'Sell This House'!

National makeover show will showcase Whittier Street home

By Kevin Doyle
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AMESBURY — Realtor Mary Holmes knew homeowners Christine Fleuriel and Merrill Kaitz required assistance to prepare their rambling 11-room Whittier Street Victorian for proper presentation on the marketplace.

After reading a recent issue of the Massachusetts Association of Realtors newsletter, which announced that the cable television show "Sell This House" was

seeking homes in the Greater Boston area to showcase, Holmes had a hunch where to get that help.

"I sent an email with our listing information to the show and we corresponded back and forth. We found out about three weeks ago they'd be coming. They chose to do two homes in Greater Boston. This is just so great for Christine and Merrill and for Amesbury in general," said Holmes, who works for Century-21 Heritage and was barely able to contain her excite-

ment during filming on Tuesday.

Under the bright lights and with a full production crew on hand, a whirlwind of activity focused on three areas in need of sprucing up — the front entrance, living room and dining room.

"This was Mary's idea. She told us about the show and, after we were chosen, we started to watch to see just what we were in for," said Kaitz. "It's been great. We were planning on it being

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pretty disruptive, so I'm not too surprised."

The show -- which has been on for two and one-half years and airs on A&E on Sunday at 5 p.m. -- isn't devoted to complete makeovers and renovation. According to the show's Web site, "Sell This House" is best described as "This Old House meets Candid Camera."

Before any work is done, a group of prospective buyers tours the home and offers observations. The group then returns when the work is done for a second walk-through.

According to the show's host, Tanya Memme, the concept is simple and it works.

"The footage can be pretty raw. People come in, look at the house, and say what they want about it. We try to get as many of them back as possible for the second walk-through. Eight-five to ninety percent of our homes get sold and we've sold some on that second walk-through," she said.

The entire process, from start to finish, takes less than three days. The key, Memme says, is presentation.

"Our show has to do with sell-

ing and staging a home, not necessarily with re-design. I feel like we're actually helping people to sell their house with what we do," said Memme. "It's also a how-to show and quite educational. Staging is a simple concept but (designer) Roger (Hazard) is amazing with the things he does."

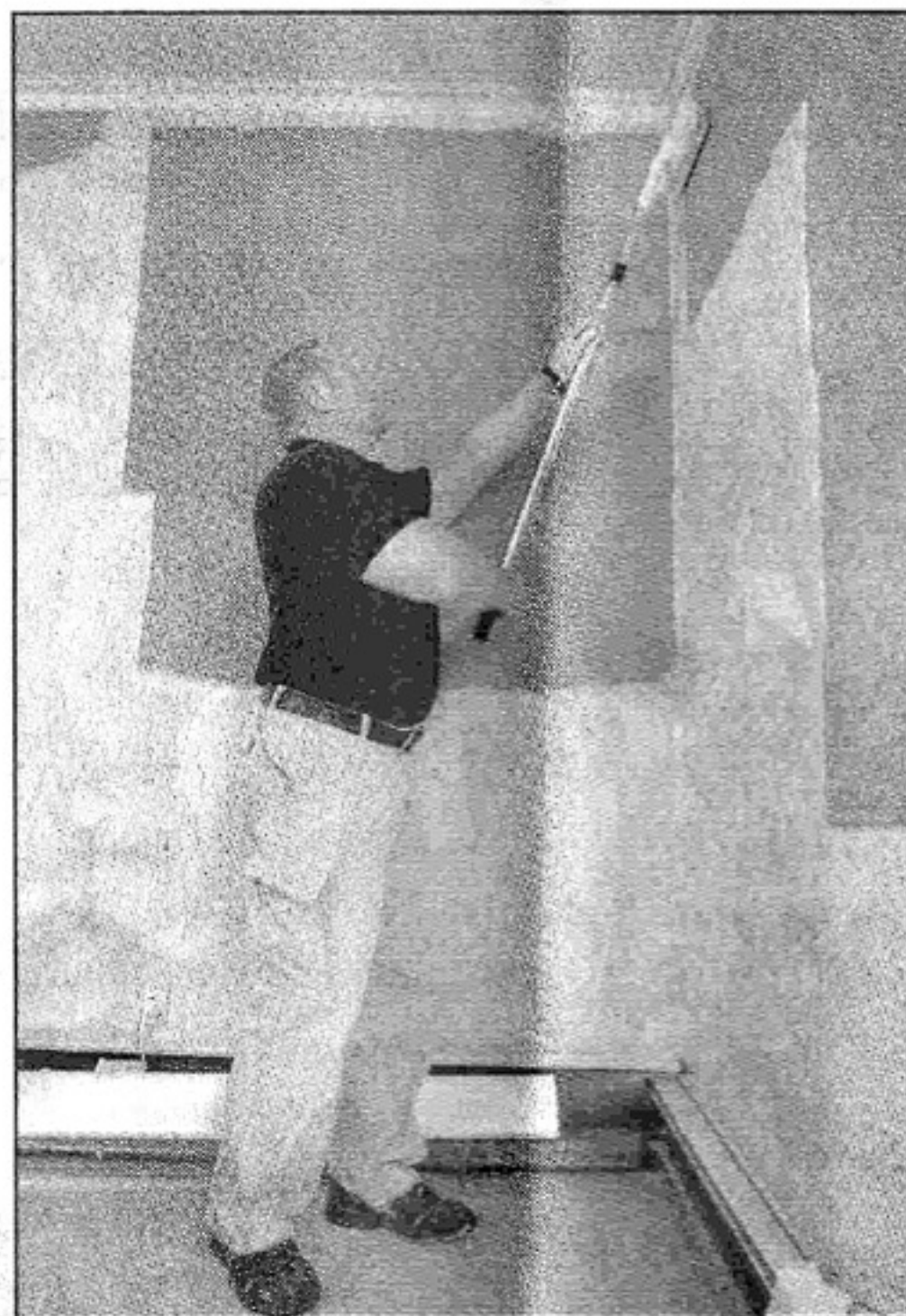
And, these makeovers are done on short money.

"We have a \$500 budget. That covers things like paint, slip covers, draperies, candles and fresh cut flowers," said Memme. "The biggest thing in staging a house is de-cluttering and cleaning. People may have a cleaning lady come in but we find the houses still need cleaning. And that doesn't cost anything -- that's just work."

It didn't take long for Hazard and his crew to identify details which needed to be revealed, such as intricate wainscoting long hidden by furniture.

"Our job is to show the bones of the house and this one has really good architecture that's not being highlighted. There was just so much going on and we needed to expose the bones, from the floor to the ceiling," said Hazard.

"We want to brighten it up, and



Designer Roger Hazard paints the living room walls brown during the filming of "Sell This House" in Amesbury on Tuesday.

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BY DAVID SOKOL

show square footage and architectural detail. A lot of the square footage was hidden by furniture. We had to highlight those areas. Buyers want to see themselves in the house -- they're not buying who lives there," he said.

Joanne Rodriguez, the co-owner of "Staging Spaces" with offices in North Andover and Newton, N.H., took part in the initial walk-through and agreed with Hazard's assessment.

"Our company does exactly what they do on the show and this home is a perfect example of one that needed to be staged. Most homeowners need help when they're preparing to sell. I think the show is very good and provides an incredible tool on how to do that," she said.

"When buyers come into a home, they have to be able to visu-

alize how it's going to look with their furniture and with their family living in it," said Holmes.

Memme -- who says her job on the show is equal parts "host, therapist and best friend to the homeowner" -- said the episode featuring this property will likely air in December.

Holmes, for one, can't wait.

"I'm a huge fan of the show and I'm just thrilled they came here. I'll be sending out reminders to everyone I know when this show comes up. They filmed the entire neighborhood as well as Town Park. There will be a lot of great Amesbury scenes on this show that the rest of the country will get to see," she said.

For more information, visit the Web site www.aetv.com, click on All Shows and scroll down the menu to "Sell This House."