



**Onsite
Solutions**

Do Your Models Reflect Today's Renter?

BY LISA TROSIEN

When was the last time you took a long hard look at your model apartments? Sure, they may be attractive, but are they fresh and up-to-date?

Models need to be far more than pretty, decorated spaces. Today's models need to send strong marketing messages if they are to assist your leasing team in closing more future residents. Here are some of the exciting trends and design features from a survey of model apartment homes across the country:

Lifestyle Models

These models convey an actual "lifestyle" of a typical resident. A quick look at Executive Getaway showed an apartment home decorated (and more importantly, accessorized) in the theme of a busy executive packing for a much needed vacation. The master bedroom features an open suitcase, hurriedly packed with beautiful clothing, Fodor's Guide to France and various other travel paraphernalia. The refrigerator in the kitchen features a "To Do" list that not only carries out the theme, but helps to sell resident services at the community: Call leasing office and ask them to water plants, pick up mail and check apartment while on vacation.

"Rentertainment"

Today's models need to entertain as well as educate the prospect. Second bedrooms, typically designed as home offices or guest rooms, now sport pinball machines, jukeboxes, Sony Play-stations and the like. Smart leasing directors have found that the entertained prospect is one who is far more likely to lease. Kitchen refrigerators are also stocked with bottled water (featuring the community's logo), sport drinks and more. McNeil House in Austin, Texas, shows a video demonstration of the apartments high-tech features in stereo surround sound.

Feng Shui

With the popularity of Feng Shui at an all time high, companies are hiring Feng Shui masters to ensure that their models (or even their entire buildings in some cases) have good chi throughout. Can't afford a Feng Shui Master? Don't despair. Try these Feng-damentals:

- Only use dining room tables with rounded edges.
- Place a mirror (that's right, a mirror) above the stove.
- Don't hang pictures too high.
- Place beds against solid walls, not windows.
- If possible, have an aquarium or live plants in your model (or at least in your office).

Signature Scent, Sound and Color

Taking the concept of branding to another level, communities are establishing signature scents for their entire portfolio (Glad Plugins are great for this), signature sounds to play in the models, offices and on-hold music (jazz is very popular), and painting one wall in each room with their company's signature color. Also, today's decorators will tell you—white kitchens and white floors are white elephants; color sells.

Model Shortcuts: Trying to keep a model as fresh as possible is a full time job. Here are a few shortcuts you can use:

- Oil the stainless steel sinks with baby oil and rub to a beautiful sheen.
- Use Scott's Liquid Gold on the countertops and cabinets.
- Label the circuit breaker panel so that you can shut all the lights off in a few quick clicks.
- Change the doorknob and lock hardware regularly to keep it shiny and new.

- Remove doors to rooms and closets to allow ease of movement by prospects.
- Accessorize the model so it looks lived in (by a neat person with great taste).
- Utilize the brightest wattage bulbs possible in your fixtures. (Wattage limitations should be listed on the appliance.)
- Consider using Enrich bulbs by General Electric. They make colors appear richer and brighter.
- Install "no nap" carpeting so vacuuming can be kept to a minimum.
- Splurge on a Bose Wave Radio for your background music—it's pricey, but worth it.
- Use scent lightly to brand your community, but don't be overbearing with it.
- Put pet food dishes on the kitchen floor if your community is pet friendly.
- Remove the blinds from the windows to ensure as much light as possible streams into the model apartment home.
- If your community allows welcome mats, place one with your logo on it outside the entry door.

And last, but not least, hang a wreath on the door that says, "Welcome Home!"

These tips and decorating techniques will improve your prospective residents interest—and possibly turn an interested resident into a member of your community. ■

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