

THE GUIDE

# Say hello to the Instagram estate agency

Sellers are starting to use influencers to shift their properties through social media

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December 7 2018, 12:01am, The Times

Instagram

Social media

United States



Mr & Mrs Clarke gives homes a makeover, personality and backstory to display on social media

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You spend time making your home look stylish, but when you're ready to sell, it ends up languishing, unloved, ignored and badly photographed, on an estate agency website. There is, however, a solution, and it comes from Los Angeles, where sellers are bypassing the conventional market and using social-media influencers and Instagram to shift their homes.

Thea Carroll, a senior buying consultant at the Buying Solution, a buying agency, says the practice is commonplace in the US. "To differentiate themselves from the endless open houses, where cheese and wine offerings have edged into monotony, agents have sought new means."

Experts believe that Britain's property market has been slow to wake up to the Instagram influence, but they are finally seeing the first indications that it is arriving in the UK. Here's how to get ahead of the game.

### **What works well on Instagram?**

Be realistic — is your property really that special? "Is it of a certain architectural period?" asks Jess Simpson, a buying agent specialising in the country house market.

"Do you have a productive vegetable garden or food angle? How about a swimming pool, wild

swimming area, or great entertaining space?  
Do you have stables or woods?”

Once you've decided what makes it stand out, you have two options: start looking for an influencer to drum up some attention online or choose one of a growing number of agents who specialise in styling and photographing properties, especially for social media, to ensure that your home is out there in all its glory.

### **What is an influencer and how can I find one?**

A social-media influencer is one of a growing breed of (usually Instagram) stars who display photographs on a niche interest, and attract more than 10,000 dedicated followers. In the property and interiors industry, there are many. One notable site, [@hillhousevintage](#), is run by an interiors-obsessed mother of three called Paula who has developed a cult following of 49,500 by posting pictures of English country interiors under [#loveofcountryhouses](#). Another, [@country\\_interiors](#) (69,000 followers), has many hundreds of snapshots of beautiful rural homes, interiors and exteriors, while

[@archdose](#) is dedicated to promoting outstanding architecture.

Here's the tricky bit: a lot of influencers make much of how they choose what they post — it's crucial for their brand. In reality, Simpson says, quite a few of these property-lovers will be happy to display your home if you approach them informally.



Katy Campbell posts images of Cotswold cottages on her Instagram feed, which has 19,400 followers  
KATY CAMPBELL

Kofi Bartels-Kodwo, a 25-year-old property developer, runs the Instagram feed [@millionpoundhomes](#), which displays properties in the million-pound bracket or upwards that are for sale throughout the country. Although he doesn't take payment to post properties on his page, he hopes to in future, because he expects sellers to utilise social media far more than they do at present. "Social media can be used to showcase properties in a far more effective way; we're

only just waking up to this,” he says.

### **Am I expected to pay?**

Some influencers will expect a small fee for a picture (about £100 per post), but in many cases, Simpson says, a case of wine or a hamper would be a nice gesture and may secure a repost in a week or two. This isn't the case on the US west coast, however, where the market is far more developed and fees can commonly run into five figures — a glimpse of the future for the UK once the domestic market develops, perhaps.

“Often influencers [in Los Angeles] will live in the house for a week or so, snapping content to garner further visibility,” Carroll says. “It can be a useful marketing tool, however, it will come at a cost. Those with more than 100,000 followers have high-payment aspirations and it's not unusual for fees to run into tens of thousands of pounds, depending on the scope of work. In the wrong hands, and targeted incorrectly, it could be nothing more than a very expensive window-shopping exercise.”

### **Find an Instagram-friendly estate agency**

As well as using an informal influencer market, a growing number of niche estate agencies specialise in styling properties for Instagram. At the forefront of this revolution is Mr & Mrs Clarke ([mrandmrsclarke.com](http://mrandmrsclarke.com)), a

web-based agency that gives homes a makeover, personality and backstory to display on its website or social media.

“We send a team of stylists and photographers to homes who carefully create a personality around the property that we sell,” says Paul Clarke, the agency’s founder. “Often we’ll spend two days at each home — we treat it like a magazine shoot.”

Carefully styled homes have sold promptly through Mr & Mrs Clarke’s Instagram site. One, a country cottage in Snitterfield, near Stratford-on-Avon, sold for £375,000, while another, a grand Leamington Spa grade II listed Regency townhouse built in 1827, sold for £925,000. “We released that house early through our Instagram feed, saying that it was soon coming to the market. Someone saw it, called us up, said they were moving from London and put in an asking-price offer,” Clarke says. “That was that.”

Social media-savvy buying agents also use Instagram to inform their clients about features of the wider area that they cover. Katy Campbell, a Cotswolds-based buying agency, posts images of chocolate-box cottages from Gloucestershire villages on her Instagram account ([@katy\\_campbell\\_house\\_hunter](#)), which has

given her a following of 19,400.

### **Don't forget your own feeds**

Don't hesitate to use your own social-media account — and those of friends — to post pictures. Remember to utilise hashtags to create a buzz around your property among those who might not otherwise spot it. Even a profile showcasing your pets, such as #maxtales, could sell your lifestyle.

“Create a bespoke profile for your house such as #oldrectorycambridge,” Simpson says.

“Remember you are selling a lifestyle, so feature delicious food or cakes in your kitchen, or your pets by the fireplace and muddy boots after your walk. Country views and comments about the local area, including a great pub, also add to the story you are creating, as well as pictures of your house at Christmas, or the garden in summer. “Start thinking about your styling and posts now, for a spring or summer launch.”

### **Beware of 'over-exposing' your property**

Don't saturate social media with your pictures. “If it's all over Instagram, it can become stale quickly and diminish in exclusivity,” warns Jemma Scott, a partner at the Buying Solution. “In a marketplace that demands discretion and exclusivity, Instagram exposure may damage an address. As ever, the important

details will often be well hidden behind the eye-catching Instagram pictures and headlines.”

### **Remember, Instagram isn't real life**

If you're a buyer, the fact that everything looks so beautiful on Instagram can be hugely deceptive. Clarke insists that buyers using Mr & Mrs Clarke conduct viewings, as they would with any conventional agency, and do as much diligence as they would in any “normal” transaction to avoid any nasty surprises.

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