

Fresh touches by apartment managers add appeal to renters

By Christian Toto Special to The Denver Post The Denver Post

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Rental properties touched by Sandy Saul look nothing like your standard apartments.

Saul, president of Design Lines in Greenwood Village, uses imaginative wall accents, vibrant colors and furniture to flesh out rooms and update them without making them feel overcrowded.

A down economy and the realization that a professionally prepared apartment unit simply rents faster have brought apartment management companies to her client base.

Saul, now designing units in the Windsor at Meridian complex in Englewood, said her work is aimed at renters who care about presentation.

"It makes it feel more like a home," she said of her handiwork, adding that some of today's renters are former homeowners who made the switch by way of the down economy.

Saul's methods include king-size beds to show renters just how much space is available.

"Getting the scale right is one of the most important things about hiring an interior designer," she said.

Michelle Conway, property manager with Windsor at Meridian, said using an interior designer involves "substantial" costs, but the benefits exist.

"There's not an immediate payoff, but it's well worth it," she said. "We're renting a lot more apartments than we would normally."

Windsor at Meridian occupancy rates were up to about 95 percent as of July, she said.

William Bronchick, president of the Colorado Association of Real Estate Investors and an apartment property owner, said he has all of his units spruced up before they hit the market.

Like Saul, he doesn't fully furnish units, but he displays dried flowers, hangs towels in bathrooms and uses an occasional piece of furniture so people can envision the potential.

"It really just dresses up the place," Bronchick said.

Bronchick said he finds units rent quicker with his approach, but most apartment companies "never thought of it or are too lazy to do it."

Some owners are simply content to drop the rental price rather than invest in some creative packaging, he said.

A number of apartment companies will personalize units, according to Laura Russmann, executive director of the Apartment Association of Southern Colorado.

They'll offer renters a chance to pick their own accent wall colors and, occasionally, choose carpet color if

the unit is due for new flooring.

"Owners see it as a good investment. It has pretty dramatic results," Russmann said.

Another option is to show a model apartment to let renters see how their unit can look.

"It's a renters' market right now," she said.