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the HOME STAGING MAGAZINE

BY THE HOME STAGING ASSOCIATION

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for RESIDENTIAL
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*An INSIDER LOOK at the
JAPANESE STAGING INDUSTRY
by leading company
HOME STAGING JAPAN
Kon'nichiwa, Home Staging!*

Not surprisingly, the home staging community continues to spread worldwide. As we expand our insights into home staging, we get to experience the idiosyncrasies each country brings to the industry. From different colour palettes to the feng shui of a home, it's fascinating to see how the techniques are expressed in each corner of the world to the corners of a room.

With this global mindset at heart, the Home Staging Association reached out to **Lukas Kucharski**, the owner of the leading home staging company in Japan: *Home Staging Japan*.

Since 2013, *Home Staging Japan* has broken new ground in the Japanese home staging industry, completing over 10,000 projects and continuing to create tailored homes for each client.

Although Lukas has lived in Japan for over 13 years, where he has been running a successful Home Staging business for 8 years, he was born in Poland and grew up in Germany.

The idea of starting a Home Staging business in Japan came to him in 2012 when he was asked for help with selling an apartment in the centre of Tokyo.

Since no one was offering Home Staging services and properties in Japan were sold un-staged at that time, Lukas decided to take matters into his own hands and stage the apartment by himself in order to prepare it for the market.

The apartment was sold after 2.5 weeks at 10% over the asking price.

"I was quite surprised by the positive result and thought it would be the right time to start a Home Staging business in Japan," said Lukas, insightfully.

The Home Staging Association are enthusiastic to sit down with Lukas Kucharski and absorb his creative take on home staging and the art it holds behind its proven marketing efficiency worldwide.



HSA: an interview with LUKAS KUCHARSKI

Home Staging Association - What was it like to be one of the first (if not the first!) Home Staging company in Japan? What challenges did you encounter?

Lukas Kucharski - Since there was no home staging service provider in Japan when I started my business, I first searched the internet and looked at how it was done in other countries, where Home Staging had already been a common practice for many years.

US, Canada, Europe and especially Australia were very inspiring. I noticed that in other countries Home Stagers were dealing directly with homeowners and thought in Japan we would need to proceed in the same way. Therefore, I started to look for homeowners, who wanted to sell their homes instead of approaching real estate agents.

The biggest challenge was that almost no one in Japan knew about Home Staging and it was difficult to convince sellers to invest an extra amount of 1-3% of the sales price in Home Staging, in addition to the brokerage commission which is 3% in Japan.

After the first year, Home Staging Japan had done only two projects and I had to consider closing the company. Fortunately, although I was about to give up, we still had our website online when we suddenly received an inquiry from one of the largest real estate companies in Japan, which laid the foundation for my

company and paved the way for future development of Home Staging in Japan in general.

Because there wasn't anyone in Japan who was offering Home Staging services, there was no opportunity to learn from others who already had experience in running a Home Staging business. It was basically a try and fail process and we had to learn from our own mistakes.

Nowadays, I am thankful for all the mistakes we have made. All of them have led us to where we are. In the beginning, we didn't have a warehouse and I had to store large part of the staging furniture in my own house. I would say that the company was literally started in my own living room. If I had known how exhausting it is to build a Home Staging business, I probably wouldn't have had the courage to start. Being a little bit naive was actually helpful at that time! Sometimes it's better just to get started without knowing and worrying too much.

HSA - Is Home Staging popular in Japan? Have you seen an increase in interest since you started your business?

LK - Thanks to our main client, who happens to be one of the largest real estate companies in Japan, Home Staging quickly became a widely recognised and well-known service. They used our service for many of their properties and also helped us with promoting



the concept of home staging. Their activities were noticed by other real estate companies who had no other choice than to start offering home staging as well.

Over the years, other Home Staging companies popped up and even Japan's largest furniture retail companies such as Nitori started to offer Home Staging, as it also provides a good opportunity to market furniture.

HSA - On average, how many properties do you stage per month?

LK - Up until two years ago, we staged around 170 projects per month. We had to decrease the number of projects since we started to concentrate more and more on high-quality, full-staging projects, focusing on larger properties.

The beginning of the global pandemic in 2020 also led to the fact that many real estate companies had to cut down on their Home Staging budget. At the moment we have around 130–150 projects per month.

HSA - What are the peculiarities of Japanese properties and how does it reflect on the way you stage them?

LK - Japanese homes aren't built to last and function rather as a short-lived consumer product than as a long-term investment.

Most apartments or houses in Japan are very similar in terms of size and layout. They are built following a similar scheme. Even the apartments of a modern and stylish building may appear as little boxes, without any charm or uniqueness. Though most people are used to it and therefore willing to accept that conformity, many of them seem curious and interested in new possibilities and ways in how to achieve a touch of uniqueness. (That may explain why in the past few years DIY and imported wallpapers became extremely popular in Japan).

That lack of uniqueness actually creates a huge opportunity not only for experimental architects but also for Home Stagers. The challenging part for us is to find ways and techniques on how to make a small room look bigger and show potential buyers how functional it actually is.

Additionally, we try to create that missing unique look by choosing modern western furnishings and décor items that appear to many people as very inviting and make a home stand out and be remembered.

"...expectations towards housing are changing and the way we design our living space is becoming more and more important."



HSA - What do Japanese home buyers seem to like the most when viewing a property?

LK - Tokyo, for example, is a mega-city where commuting can take a lot of time. Many people will prioritise that and look for a home that not only fits their budget, but is also convenient according to their lifestyle.

It is a widely-held view that houses in Japan usually function as places where people go back to sleep. Life at home has a different meaning than in Western countries. For example, people rarely invite friends over or host dinner parties at home. Therefore, most people don't pay much attention when it comes to the interior and decoration of their home. That's rather secondary.

Through our Home Staging projects, we have the opportunity to show numerous people different ways of furnishing and designing living spaces. We mostly follow western ideas and concepts and try to create an environment that is appealing to most people, something that they like and that they may not have seen before.

Of course, Home Staging primarily serves as a great strategic marketing tactic to sell a property, but we don't necessarily focus solely on that. We think of every person who enters

that property, regardless of whether they buy it or not. If they don't buy the property, they just might be inspired by our arrangement, therefore rearrange their current place or even end up buying new furniture.

I think that this type of inspiration is what those who visit our properties like the most, because it will be remembered whether they buy a new home or not. Especially now, since the beginning of the pandemic, as working and spending time at home has become more common, expectations towards housing are changing and the way we design our living space is becoming more and more important.

HSA - What do you think are the main differences between staging in Japan and the rest of the world?

LK - Our projects mainly relate to Tokyo and its surrounding area.

Tokyo is one of the world's largest real estate markets and full of opportunities for home staging businesses. One advantage for home stagers when it comes to real estate in Japan is that apartments and houses are smaller than in western countries. Most homes are very similar in terms of layout and size and can therefore be staged more quickly.

"Home Staging primarily serves as a great strategic marketing tactic to sell a property, but we don't necessarily focus solely on that."

The challenge, however, is to make sure that not all apartments look the same. In Japan, home staging is still in its beginnings. It is a very common practice to stage only the living and dining room and leave other rooms unstaged since most of them appear in standard sizes. Our goal is to change that by offering full home staging plans in order to make use of the apartment's fullest potential.

Another difference is that home stagers don't deal directly with homeowners. 99% of all inquiries we are receiving are from real estate companies. They offer home staging services to homeowners for free as an additional service, which is covered by the commission fee (3%).

HSA - What is on the horizon for Home Staging Japan?

LK - We will continue to spread the idea of Home Staging in Japan. Our goal is to push the home staging industry forward. We want not only real estate companies, but also the general public to know more about home staging.

As soon as it becomes possible again, we want to organise events and seminars, as we already did in the past, for everyone who is interested in home staging.

Since we are also selling some of the furniture that we have been using for our home staging projects, we plan to bring more western furniture and home décor ideas and products to Japan.

I am personally very glad that we have the opportunity to be in touch with **Paloma Harrington-Griffin** from the **Home Staging Association UK & Ireland** and therefore get the chance to find out how home staging has been practiced in countries outside of Japan. In the future, we would be grateful for every opportunity to exchange home staging ideas with other home stagers from all over the world.

HSA - Please share how people can find out more about you and your company.

LK - Even though our website, which we recently updated, it is available only in Japanese at the moment, I would be happy if anyone who is interested in our activities in Japan would take a look at it.



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