Virtual home staging
The Occasional Wife

Key innovation: staging a home on the market using oversized photos of furnishings
Biggest client: real estate agents
Where they're based: New Orleans
Top executive: Kay Morrison, founder
Year introduced: 2008

SINCE STARTING The Occasional Wife in 2007 to provide an extra set of hands with things such as event planning, personal shopping and day-to-day chores, Kay Morrison and Mary Gaudin have expanded their repertoire to help sell homes.

"The market is so competitive, and so many houses on the market are empty," Morrison said. "It makes the house a lot harder to sell. It's hard to picture yourself there."

But it can cost hundreds or thousands of dollars a month to rent furniture for a house that might ultimately need to be moved out.

So the pair came up with a labor-free, cost-effective way to create the same effect with just a camera and a computer — they take pictures of furniture, draperies and accessories and digitally place these images into photos of inside the homes using Adobe Photoshop. They then take these photos, enlarge them to poster size and place them in the empty homes for potential buyers to see. The result is a godsend to Realtors, they say.

"What these ladies have come up with I must say is the most innovative marketing item I have seen in the real estate investment market in the last 10 years," said Andy Severino of Highland Construction and Real Estate Investors. "They have created a cost-efficient and effective form of home staging in a very competitive and down-turned real estate market."

The two plan to market the patent-pending program to furniture stores and real estate agencies. Hoping for it to catch on nationwide, they will unveil the product at the National Realtors Convention in Orlando, Fla., in November. They will also open their first franchise store in Dallas this fall and a store on Canal Street by the end of the year.

"We always knew we'd be doing a wide variety of things. We say everyone needs an occasional wife … and that could really encompass everything and anything," Morrison said. "The most fun and interesting thing is that we never know what our days are going to be like."•

— Lauren LaBorde

PHOTO BY FRANK AYMAMI

Mary Gaudin, left, and Kay Morrison of The Occasional Wife show a home for sale using their virtual home staging system.