

THE TENNESSEAN

SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2013 • NASHVILLE

Mini-movies are next step in marketing of luxury homes

Local filmmakers getting involved in real estate ventures

By Bill Lewis
THE TENNESSEAN

Local filmmakers are getting involved in a new creative venture that blends the city's film, music and real estate — yes, real estate — industries.

Mini-movies, created by Worth Properties and Film House, a Nashville film production company, have been successfully used to sell \$3 million-plus homes in the city. More will be coming soon to YouTube and other websites.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you see it more in Nashville because of the wealth of talent at our fingertips. We're definitely going to do it," said Keith Merrill, a Realtor with Worth Properties.

The three mini-movies produced so far last three minutes each and feature actors enjoying themselves in the homes. One features an original song by singer-songwriter Michael Shoup.

The producers of "Nashville" came across the mini-movies and selected one of the homes — a Parthenon Avenue mansion on a hill overlooking Centennial Park — as a location for the television series. Their fees covered the cost of making the mini-movie, said Film House CEO Curt Hahn.

"We have a huge talent pool in town. It's the same process as when we shoot a feature film. It's just three minutes long instead of an hour and a half," he said.

Film House, which has 40,000 square feet of studio, editing and office space in Nashville, is the largest producer of films for the federal government and produces films for corporate clients including McDonald's, Du Pont and Whirlpool, he said.

The company also produces commercials, documentaries and feature films such as "Deadline," starring Steve Talley and Academy Award nominee Eric Roberts.

Hahn isn't surprised that Nashville's film, music and real estate industries



An actress lounges in the greatroom of 4001 Estes in a mini-movie.

have intersected. Technology has changed the way homes are sold for years. First there were photographs in printed MLS books. Then came "virtual tours" on the Internet. Mini-movies were the next logical step, at least for high-end homes.

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Worth Properties Realtor Anne Nilsson approached Merrill and Hahn with the idea after learning that short films were being used to sell homes in Toronto, Los Angeles and Sydney, Australia.

Many of those resembled Victoria's Secret commercials and were "over the top," said Merrill. He and Nilsson decided on a quiet approach focusing on the homes, not under-clothed actors. The project gained momentum when Nilsson contacted Hahn, an old friend.

The final piece fell into place in true Nashville fashion. Nilsson said she met Shoup, the songwriter, while she was having her hair done.

He wrote and performed an original song, "Sweet Refuge," for the video featuring the house at 4001 Estes.

"I love this about Nashville," said Nilsson. "It's nice to be able to talk to all these competent people with all these skill sets."

The video for 4001 Estes went online in January. Within a month the seller had two offers and the house sold for close to its \$1.295 million list price.

"It's almost like a music video. Almost like a love song to the house. I don't think it was an accident a music person bought the house," said Hahn.

Mike Martino decided to commission a mini-movie after his house at 3123 Parthenon Ave. had been on the market for several months without attracting an acceptable offer. The video went online Oct. 24, 2012. Within days the producers of "Nashville" were on the phone. Soon after Thanksgiving, the house was under contract with a buyer for \$1.249 million.

"When the idea of the movie came up, I immediately saw that this is a way to show how the house lives, to speak directly to the consumer," said Martino.

The movies aren't cheap — Hahn said the cost equals about two months of mortgage payments on a million-dollar-plus house — but Martino said the results speak for themselves.

Hahn is taking the idea nationwide. Film House has hired marketing directors in nine cities. Martino was so impressed he agreed to be one of them. 