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SCENE STEALER The cast and crew of a film designed to sell a 4,000-square-foot condominium in Nashville, Tenn., asking \$1.795 million. Director Curt Hahn is at center in a light blue shirt.

Helicopters, a SWAT team, an actress in lingerie, and a tightrope walker: Movies, complete with actors, musical scores, and original dialogue, are the latest pitch tools for selling a home.

By Candace Jackson

ON A RECENT AFTERNOON, actors stood around a kitchen pouring glasses of fake sparkling wine. A cameraman operating a dolly stood ready.

“It needs to look like, ‘I want to be in in that house, be in that group,’” said Curt Hahn, a director of thousands of television commercials and producer of the 2008

movie “Two Weeks”, starring Sally Field. Now, he was at work on his latest project.

The camera focused on a man in a vest pouring drinks, then panned to show the movie’s real star, the 470-square-foot kitchen with walnut floors, granite countertops, under-cabinet lighting and a large central island under a skylight. This film has one purpose: to sell a 4,000-square-foot condominium with

two wood-burning fireplaces and wide, gallery-style hallways in the West End neighborhood of Nashville, Tenn., listed for \$1.795 million.

Mini-movies and Hollywood-style trailers complete with scripts, musical scores and even action sequences are cropping up as a new way to pitch pricey houses and condominium buildings. According to the National Association of Realtors, 14% of



HOME MOVIE Two Nashville, Tenn., agents commissioned this film. It depicts a man following a series of clues in his Colonial-style home.



CLOSING IN The man finds his daughter, grinning as she shows him a Harvard acceptance letter. The film caught the eye of buyer Judy Neal.



HAPPILY EVER AFTER Ms. Neal and her husband flew over from London to see the home and wound up paying \$1.435 million for it.



AND ACTION A movie for a home in Australia features a SWAT-team rescue of an underwear-clad woman tied to a chair.



THE REVEAL The rescuers remove their masks. According to the film-makers, the film has been viewed over 5 million times on YouTube.



DARING DUO The rescuers turn out to be listing agents Ian Adams, left, and Adrian Jenkins. The home sold for \$3.45 million.

Your House Is Ready For Its Close Up

sellers used video to help sell their homes in 2012, up from 9% five years ago. Mr. Hahn, the director and CEO of Film House, said he shot his first real-estate mini-movie in September of last year. He has since shot nearly 10, doing about one a week since June.

Real-estate agents and developers who commission the films say that perfectly lighted rooms and aspirational story lines help grab buyers, and are the next extension of a home-buying experience that has increasingly gone online. Budgets for such films are often a percentage of the home's listing price, and can range from a couple thousand dollars to \$1 million or more for large-scale productions marketing condo buildings. The cost is paid either by the listing agents or sellers, and sometimes split between them.

"Particularly when buying high-end houses, people really don't want to spend time looking," said Tom Patterson, the 4,000-square-foot condo's listing agent. "The video shows it in a much stronger light [than photos] and with a little story for it, it adds a little emotion."

After the kitchen shoot, Mr. Hahn and Mr. Patterson met with Sherry Howell, a retired business executive, and Everette Howell, a retired neurosurgeon. The couple are asking \$2.8 million for their 6,000-square-foot hilltop contemporary home. Mr. Hahn pitched a three-act story line centered on a charity auction where guests would bid to spend a week at the home. The final scenes would take place in the living room, to maximize the home's dramatic views.

"Then fade to black?" asked Mr. Howell.

"Well, fade to Tom's logo," said Mr. Hahn.

The Howells gave the film the green light. "This is cutting edge and we're like the beta test for it," said Ms. Howell.

Movie making is particularly popular in slower-selling markets. Though sales are picking up, homes in Nashville priced over \$1 million still typically take a year or more to sell, said Anne Nilsson, a Nashville-based agent. She and partner Keith Merrill commissioned Mr. Hahn to create his first real-estate mini-movie last year, a three-minute film depicting an actor following a series of clues on Post-it Notes through a 6,000 square-foot Southern Colonial-style home, leading to an actress playing his daughter, grinning as she shows him a Harvard acceptance letter.

"I called my husband into my office in London and said, 'take a look at this,'" said Judy Neal, a retired directors' representative, who said she liked how the video emphasized the home's estate-like feel and walkable, in-town location. She and her husband flew over to see the home and wound up paying \$1.435 million for it.

David Samuels, who owns an entertainment-advertising agency in Los Angeles, said his real-estate broker, Eric Lavey, offered to create a film about a midcentury modern bachelor pad he was selling in the Hollywood Hills that had been on the market for about a month at \$950,000. The film centered on a young man coming home from work and getting ready for a night out on the town, including shots of nearby Sunset Boulevard.

"Most videos, it's like elevator music and camera tilts and pans across the room, and then you see another room," said Mr. Samuels. The home sold for \$920,000 less than a month after its video made its debut online.

Another film, shot in a \$6.495 million listing Mr. Lavey has near Palm Springs, features an actor portraying the home's owner getting picked up from his private jet. The house is still privately listed for sale.

High-end condo developers are using short films to help drum up interest in properties still months or years from completion. Developers for the Mansions at Acqualina, a building expected to be completed next year in Sunny Isles, Fla., spent \$200,000 on a short film to market the building's 15,000 square-foot, \$55 million penthouse. With no dialogue, the production features live actors portraying a family going about their day in a hyper-realistic CGI rendering of the sprawling environment.

These films are distributed in a number of ways. A film produced to promote Jade Signature, an oceanfront condo building under construction in Sunny Isles, Fla., will be sent first to early buyers this fall by DVD or iPad and will then debut in the building's sales office when it opens in early 2014. (Prices of the building's units will range from \$1.8 million to over \$26 million.)

Sellers of a \$35 million Malibu home loaded a short film onto gift-wrapped iPads last summer. Titled "The Spider and the Fly," the movie features a mysterious woman clad in black running through rooms of the house, as maids and cooks prepare the home for a party. (The film

is also viewable online at Vimeo.) The property, owned by real-estate developer DeeAnna Staats, is still on the market. Ms. Staats declined to comment.

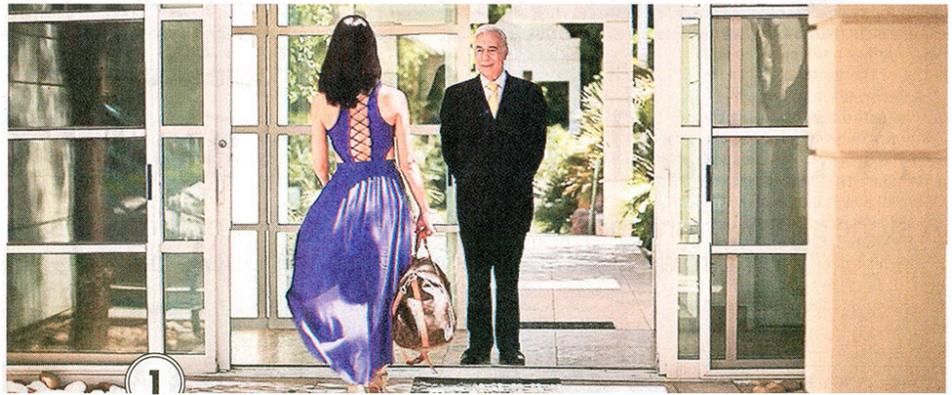
Some moviemakers try to push the creative envelope. For 432 Park Avenue, slated to be the tallest residential building in New York when it is completed in 2015, developers created a cheeky, dreamlike sequence set to Mama Cass's "Dream A Little Dream." The film stars Philippe Petit, the high-wire artist famous for balancing across landmarks and skyscrapers. At one point, King Kong climbs the building, revealed a few minutes later to be the co-developer, Harry Macklowe, in a costume. The film is viewable only at the building's sales showroom.

Others are defying the long-held belief that sex is off-limits in real-estate ads so as to not offend any potential buyers. One real-estate mini-movie for a luxury home in Queensland, Australia, features an underwear-clad young woman tied to a chair in a large glass-filled house as helicopters fly overhead. A SWAT team with machine guns swarms the property. The final scene includes two men rescuing the woman; they later pull off masks to reveal themselves as the home's listing agents.

The script for the three-minute \$15,000 film was dreamed up by Australia-based real-estate film company Platinum HD. U.S.-based owner and President Duncan Schieb, who produced the action film, said his goal is to make a splash with real-estate videos that "go viral" online. The more scintillating the story lines, the better. The Queensland home sold for \$3.45 million, and the movie, which was posted on YouTube, has been viewed more than 5 million times, according to Mr. Schieb. Platinum HD opened its first U.S. office last year in New York.

Ryan Serhant, a broker with Nest Seekers International and a star of the reality show "Million Dollar Listing New York", recently commissioned a film for a penthouse at 200 Eleventh Avenue, a 19-story building known for its en-suite sky garages and celebrity buyers. The film, which will be in the style of a Hollywood movie trailer, will cost at least \$20,000 and will include helicopters, "fast cars" and models, said Mr. Serhant. Mr. Schieb said it would also combine elements of the Hollywood films "Inception" and "Memento."

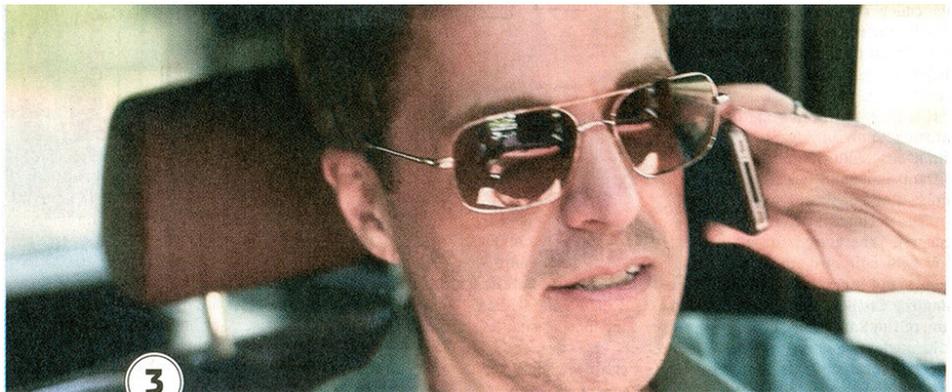
"It's going to be a bigger-than-life apartment," said Mr. Serhant. "I can't have a dinky little listing video."



1
THE HIGH LIFE A woman heads to a home—actually a \$6.495 million listing near Palm Springs, Calif.—and lounges by the pool.



2
TOUCHDOWN The woman receives a phone call from a man, who arrives by private plane.



3
LIVING WELL The man receives a card from the woman that reads, "Happy Birthday Dad." Many movies have aspirational story lines.

Not all agents are sold on the tactic. Stephen Shapiro, chairman of Westside Estate Agency, a brokerage with offices in Beverly Hills and Malibu, said he thinks Hollywood-style trailers and marketing videos are, in general, a waste of time and money because most of them don't include enough of the type of information buyers want, such as location or square footage. Mini-movies and trailers are more for the benefit of agents in a market where competition for a scarce number of listings is increasingly cutthroat. "[Agents] are always looking for the one additional thing that the competition doesn't have," he said. "They're used as listing tools, not as selling tools."

Some brokers are skipping the story lines and are creating more elaborate home-tour movies. "I prefer not to focus on anything other than the property," said Rob Giem, a

Newport Beach, Calif.-based broker who has been producing films to sell some of his higher-end listings. A couple of years ago, he spent close to \$100,000 on a film to market a contemporary-style home in Cabo San Lucas. It features sweeping shots of the oceanfront home shot with high-definition cameras from a helicopter. Mr. Giem says the home will probably hit the market officially later this year.

The moviemaking trend does face one major stumbling block: the improving market. Many homes have been selling within one or two days of hitting the market, said Mr. Lavey, pre-empting the need for an elaborate movie. In Palm Springs, however, very high-end homes often still take a year to sell. "There are a lot of houses that would be amazing in videos," he said.