



If your property has been on the market but nobody's making offers, don't panic. **Zoe Dare Hall** meets the new house doctors

Your house won't sell? No problem

In an ailing market, estate agents and companies offering "house doctor" services are coming in their own, with a raft of remedies to help properties that have been on the market for months.

Take Pad, a London-based house doctor service, which offers "cosmetic surgery", "facelifts" and "detoxes" for your home. "Clients pay on average just under one per cent of the property's value for our service and we haven't yet had a property that hasn't sold. In most cases, they make a profit which more than covers our costs," says Pad's interior designer Jo Wooler.

One recent example was a one-bedroom loft apartment in a converted school in Victoria Park, East London, which was on the market for a year. "There were tenants on and off for six months so the flat looked tired and beaten up and wouldn't shift, even during a strong sellers' market last year," says Tim McBryde from Urban Spaces estate agency, which dropped the price from £430,000 to £399,950 but still couldn't find a buyer.

Pad gave the flat a facelift, painting throughout, replacing old furniture with a select few new items, and over an open weekend

two competing bidders pushed the sale price to £432,000.

"Besides the usual decluttering, cleaning windows and repairing cracks, we create a social environment which shows purchasers how to live in the property," says Wooler, who is currently sprucing up a property developer's large two-bedroom garden flat in Crouch End, North London, which has stuck on the market for four months at £449,950.

"We zone living rooms and dining rooms with a fabulous dining table or U-shaped seating areas," she says. "Potential buyers are thinking that if there are hard times up ahead, they want a home where

they can imagine entertaining their friends and feeling happy in."

Helen Searle, a charity worker, was still struggling to sell her four-bedroom house in London after four months, so she hired Hampshire-based house doctors The Final Touch to partially re-carpet, redecorate, dress the roof terrace, update the kitchen cupboard doors, and clean

and declutter – for a total cost of £3,565.

"We couldn't get any offers over £650,000 initially. A friend of ours had used a house doctor, so we decided to try the same. The house sold within three weeks in December for £665,000," says Helen, 38.

Simon Buhl-Davis, who runs ~~the~~ interior services, offers a house doctoring service that ranges from a three-hour report, costing £150, that gives the client a thorough breakdown on how to improve each room, to complete refurbishments that cost six figures, but can add up to 65 per cent to the property's value, as was recently the case with a Kensington townhouse.

But one-bedroom flats can similarly benefit from a bit of doctoring, says Buhl-Davis. "What we essentially do is liquidise and spoon-feed the lifestyle that the buyer could have if they buy that property – and that can apply to any kind of property. Everyone thinks they can be a developer or an interior designer in a rising market when properties are easy to sell, but when the market starts to stick, you