

Losing Patience With the Open House



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

Emily Hutters and Trey Hatch packed up Henry's toys each Sunday before the open house in their Brooklyn apartment.

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For six months, Emily Hutters and her husband, Trey Hatch, spent five hours every Sunday morning taking turns caring for their son, Henry, so they could clean up their loft for open houses.

They packed up Henry's play mat and toys, tried to remove smashed raisins from every crevice of his highchair and moved his hefty nursing chair to a neighbor's apartment. Fifteen minutes before the open house began, they broke down his [ExerSaucer](#), dropped him in his stroller and headed for the door.

"He was generally up for the adventure," Ms. Hutters said about how Henry, who turns 1 later this month, handled the schedule. Still, she said, he "doesn't have unlimited patience."

So against the advice of their broker, the couple recently accepted an offer for their two-bedroom apartment at 423 Atlantic Avenue in Boerum Hill. The broker wanted them to hold out until spring, when he predicted they would get more money. Ms. Hutters could not be swayed.

“I had enough,” Ms. Hutters said. “That whole morning we would spend cleaning up, tidying things, and that was time we couldn’t spend playing with him.”

It can be exhausting for buyers to trudge from open house to open house for weekends on end, and it can be even more so for the seller who has to prepare for all those buyers. It takes time to create the appearance that a home is both lived-in and cared for by housekeepers, especially when small children have had the run of the place.

Not long ago, buyers were offering the asking price, even before the first open house. But in a slower real estate market, the broker, Antonio del Rosario of Rutenberg Realty, said, more clients may be growing weary of working all week and then preparing for and disappearing from the open houses they must hold every Sunday.

He said that even though Mr. Hatch and Ms. Hutters received an offer close to their \$825,000 asking price, they could have received nearly \$900,000 if they had waited until spring, when buyers would not have to trudge through snow and ice to see their home.

But Ms. Hutters and Mr. Hatch reached their breaking point. And they do not appear to be losing money on the deal, since public records show they bought the home in 2007 for \$749,000.

Ms. Hutters said that the summer’s relentless heat, followed by the snow-covered winter, meant there had been few Sundays when it was pleasant enough to spend the entire afternoon outside.

During open houses, they went out for lunch and, to take up time, tried to eat as slowly as possible. They went shopping for groceries, and after Henry could sit up they visited the playground. When visitors occasionally stayed past the end of the open house, they would stay in the hallway, rocking Henry in his stroller.

After a two-week break around Thanksgiving, Ms. Hutters found it especially difficult to return to the weekend open house groove. They accepted the offer in late January and returned to spending Sundays playing with Henry.

“We were happy to take our offers,” Ms. Hutters said. “At some point, after hiding things every weekend, you kind of just want to lay them out on the floor.”

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Mitchell Wexler, a Corcoran broker selling a one-bedroom in a fourth-floor walk-up at 15 Butler Place in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, knew that the apartment had flaws. He tried to address the problems in advance with a little signage. Halfway up to the apartment, he posted a sign telling buyers they were nearly there. He hung a sign over an oversized refrigerator suggesting that it be replaced. At other apartments he has hung photos in an unfurnished room showing what it looked like with furniture, and on overcast days he has hung signs on windows stressing the sunlight. What were the results? Mr. Wexler said he soon got an offer close to the asking price, which was accepted.

IF THE POOL COULD TALK

After Robert Kaufman, Evelyn Van-Zeller's brother, died in 1995, she inherited his five-story town house at 232 West 15th Street. The place has more contraptions for relaxation than do most Manhattan spas, including an eight-foot-deep swimming pool, a sauna, a hot tub and a sun deck. It also came with a libidinous history. For the past 16 years, New Yorkers have approached Ms. Van-Zeller to regale her with stories about the parties her brother, who was a bachelor, and a previous owner held there. Now, a broker, Maggie Kent of Core, is selling the house for \$10.9 million — history included.

NO MORE FLIPPING OUT

The Federal Housing Finance Agency has [backed away from a plan](#) to bar Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac from buying up loans in buildings that have flip taxes. Since many condominiums and co-operatives depend on flip taxes — a small portion of an apartment's sale price, usually paid by the seller — the rule could have driven prices down by making it harder for buyers to find mortgages. New York brokers sent the agency more than 600 letters pleading against the change and got their wish on Feb. 1.