

The Ultimate NYC Open House Guide for SELLERS (Part 2): You are not welcome here

by Teri Karush Rogers | 8/31/10 - 6:16 AM



In the second of our three-part series on best open-house practices, we look at setting the scene and keeping out the riff raff (you, mostly).

The cleaner, the better

By the time of your first open house, we hope that you have already taken steps to declutter and stage your apartment.

Now for the routine maintenance.

Your place needs to be thoroughly cleaned before each open house; don't forget the inside of the refrigerator and the windows. Change the cat's litterbox and check for burned out lightbulbs too.

You should also temporarily stash any personal effects that survived the staging purge.

"For each owner we work with, we recommend they have a few boxes to store their stuff—one for toiletries, one for magazines, etc.," says Jeffrey Schleider of [Miron Properties](#). "Before each showing they box everything up and put the boxes in the closet. It's a pain to do, but the best 'shows' are when the apartment literally looks like nobody lives there so that potential buyers can project their own lives onto the space."

The goal is for your place to look like "an open canvas, ready for the buyer's stamp," as [Kenneth Brown](#) of Charles Rutenberg Realty puts it.

On a sidenote, remove rugs and bathmats with curled-up edges: A visitor could trip, fall and sue you, points out Michele Conte of The Corcoran Group.

Tactical ambiance

Beyond basic cleanliness, your apartment should appeal to both the senses and imagination:

- Check for strong unpleasant odors and address them--but don't over correct. "Lighting scented candles or burning incense immediately raises a red flag to a buyer," says [Soozy](#)

Katzen of Fox Residential. Baking cookies or even warming cinnamon sticks in the oven is a better way to handle this, says **Douglas Heddings** of The Heddings Property Group.

- Blast the a/c in the summer and have bottles of ice cold water on hand for visitors, suggests Schleider. In the winter, make sure the heat is turned up high.
- Make sure any background music is playing softly and has multigenerational appeal, advises broker-blogger Malcolm Carter. He also suggests setting an inviting dinner table so that visitors can imagine themselves dining there.
- Turn on all the lights and open the window coverings, unless you face a brick wall.

Go away, and take the gerbils with you

If there was a universal lament among brokers, it was about uninvited guests: You, and your pets.

Send in a spy or rig up a nanny cam if you must, but you need to go and stay gone or risk inhibiting your visitors. Nor should you stake out the lobby and stalk buyers on their way out.

“The biggest mistake sellers make is loitering in the lobby and trying to chat up people who visited the apartment,” says **Max Dobens** of Prudential Douglas Elliman. “Buyers go to an open house to have a hassle-free experience, and getting accosted in the lobby by a gregarious (read: nosey) seller does not bode well.”

Some brokers say your pets—all of them, except possibly fish—must go too.

“Your beloved animal companion does not want you to sell their home, doesn’t care about your real estate goals and may even make a point of their displeasure and lack of decorum by peeing on a buyer’s leg,” says **Chris Randolph** of Barak Realty.

He described a recent experience with a buyer who was not only allergic to pets but hated them, especially cats.

“The second open house I took him to featured the owners’ weird hairless cat sprawled out on the granite countertop. It was the first thing you saw and the last thing my highly valued pre-approved buyer wanted to see. All he will remember about that apartment is a bizarre ‘cat from another planet’ tauntingly staring at him from the counter where my buyer would have liked taking his meals,” says Randolph.

Exotic pets are even worse, even if they don’t interact with buyers.

“No one wants to buy where birds fly and lizards slither,” explains Randolph. Moreover, “a large snake is literally the kiss of death. No one wants to think about how and what they eat and people can’t shake the creepy feeling that it’s offspring or relatives are hiding somewhere in the apartment.”

Hamsters, gerbils and guinea pigs?

“Your kids think they’re so cute. Your buyers think rodents,” says Randolph.

If you can't find a temporary foster home, at least make sure the cages don't smell.