

Beware of open house don'ts

by Ilyce_Glink

I spent some time over the weekend visiting open houses. While I'm not seriously thinking about moving, I like to see what's going on in my neighborhood. The thing I've learned recently is how sophisticated sellers in my neighborhood have become. For the most part, each home is a shining example of how to make lemonade with the lemons that exist in your own house. Mostly, the houses looked as if they'd been staged to be really appealing. But one house I visited had a classic case of what I call the "Open House Don'ts." These are things you don't want to do if you've listed your house for sale:

- DON'T leave dirty clothes all over the bedroom floor, your bed, in the bathtub or even in the laundry room. No one wants to see your dirty underwear, or even your son's sweater draped over a chair. Dirty clothes belong in a hamper. And, don't forget to make your bed.
- DON'T leave dirty dishes in the sink, on the counter, or anywhere except in a dishwasher. Even then, you should run the dishwasher so you have time to empty it before you get out of the way for the showing. No one wants to imagine what you made for dinner last night. Be sure to sweep the house for coffee mugs, sippy cups or other remnants of late-night snacking.
- DON'T leave a filthy house, hoping the buyers will see past the dust balls near the couch; they won't, and as they run their fingers over your dusty window frame they'll wonder what other maintenance projects you've let slip.
- DON'T allow odors from pets, babies or other unappetizing smells (think bathrooms, garbage and smelly cheese in the refrigerator) to permeate your home. If you think the house might smell bad, ask a neighbor to give it a "whiff test." If it does smell bad, don't try to mask the odor with a spray. Buy a roll of refrigerated cookie dough and slice and bake some cookies just before the showing. Your house will smell good enough to eat.
- DON'T assume Mother Nature is your friend. Prepare for whatever weather is seasonally appropriate. If it's winter, be sure your walk is shoveled and salted. If it's wet, leave out a tray for wet boots. And while we're on the subject .
- DON'T assume prospective buyers will treat your house as if it were already theirs. If you don't want muddy shoes or boots on your white carpets, create a nice laminated sign that nicely asks everyone to remove their shoes. Then, provide a basket of booties or socks for buyers and agents to slip on as they walk through your home.
- DON'T leave vacant rooms filled with junk, toys or spillover messes from other rooms. If you're lucky enough to have too much space in your house, make sure empty rooms are pristine.
- DON'T leave personal information like mail or bills out in the open. Be sure to shut down your computer and lock up your laptop and any other expensive, easy-to-pocket electronics, like iPods, before showings.
- DON'T leave money, jewelry or other valuables out in the open or even in typical hiding places like the top dresser drawer. Invest in a safe or put your valuables in a brown paper bag and hide them somewhere unusual, like in a box at the top of the closet, or in the basement.
- DON'T use boxes and extra furniture to hide problems in your basement or attic. Don't use paint to cover up perennial problems. In other words, fix the leak, don't just paint over it.
- DON'T leave your house in the dark. People want to buy light, bright homes. As you walk through the house for the final check before you clear out for a showing, be sure to turn on all the lights, including closet lights. While you may pay a few bucks more on your electric bill, a dark house simply won't sell.

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