

October 8, 2015

Selling (and Staging) With An Animal At Home: 3 Key Tricks



It's an old saw at this point that when it comes to unloading an apartment, sellers should minimize the personal touches, and stay far, far away from the open house. But what about your pet?

Charmed though some buyers might be to be met by a cute furry (or feathered) friend during a visit, the fact is that your pet will likely complicate matters. "To maximize the potential of getting top dollar for your apartment, you want to do whatever you can to make your property look and feel pristine," says Platinum Properties agent Teresa Stephenson. "This means that it cannot look, feel, smell like a pet lives there."

Even in the best case scenario—you get a potential buyer who's a major pet lover—your critter companion will draw attention away from the apartment itself, which is exactly what you don't want. "When I had a listing where the owner had this beautiful cocker spaniel, everyone would walk through this 2000-square-foot loft looking down at the dog" and not at the apartment itself, says CORE agent Tony Sargent. If you're selling (and you and Mr. Bigglesworth haven't moved out yet), here are three crucial strategies to keep in mind:

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

Almost every broker will tell a seller to make themselves scarce during the open house, and the same goes for your pet. "The same way people have a personal reaction to color, they have a personal reaction to a pet," says Sargent. "Whether they're lovable or scary to someone, that's going to distract them from the apartment."

This could mean sending your pet to stay with a relative for a little while, putting it in daycare, or even taking it for an extra long walk during the open house. For sellers with dogs, Sargent notes, "We'll ask for 24 hours notice from brokers or buyers so we can have time to set up a dog walker."

Cats, admittedly, are a little more difficult. For a recent sale of his own family's apartment (shared with two cats and a dog), Compass agent Eugene Litvak tells us they "sent the cats to my mother in law's place to stay, had a friend babysit the dog, and would present the apartment without any pets in it." At the very least, Sargent says, try to confine your cat to one room in the apartment (though not a crate, as they'll likely get agitated).

Put it this way. "I don't know any buyers who would say, 'I'll pay \$50,000 more because you have a dog,'" says Litvak, "But someone might decide they don't want it because they visit and the dog's there."

CLEAN AS THOUGH YOUR SALE DEPENDS ON IT (BECAUSE IT DOES)

Granted, this is good advice anytime you're selling, but it's especially important if you've got animals running around. "If you're not doing it yourself, hire a housekeeper to keep the apartment extra clean," says Sargent. "It's an investment in your investment."

It's particularly important to keep the place well vacuumed to minimize dander for potentially allergic buyers. If there's a litter box on site, clean it frequently to keep any smells from lingering in the air. "If there are any smells, consider replacing any carpeting, removing rugs, and/or painting the walls," adds Stephenson.

You may even want to resort to some diversion tactics. "I start with scent, or scent coverage," says Mirador Real Estate Managing Partner Karla Saladino. (We've got more tips on that front here). "I also hit up Etsy to find the best looking cat box covers—they're worth the \$100 or so cost."

CLEAR THE CLUTTER

Besides clearing the apartment of your pet's excess fur (and odors), you'll want to remove or stash their personal effects as well. This means ditching toys, feeding dishes, scratching posts, beds, and more. (Litvak, for his part, sent his scratching posts on vacation along with the cats, and took his dog's crate off-site for showings.)

This is all doubly true for litter boxes or wee-wee pads. "I once had a buyer come through an open house, and all they could talk about was the wee wee pad that was out," says Sargent. "'What did it do to the floors?'" Not exactly the response you want from someone you're hoping will for over hundreds of thousands of dollars for your home.