

Open house is excuse to spy: poll

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These folks take the idea of an open house too far.

Only 41 percent of the people who go to open houses in Manhattan and Brooklyn are serious buyers -- and many admit to snooping in owners' closets, checking out their shoes and even reading notes on their refrigerators, according to a new survey.

"It's true," said Emily Beare, a real-estate agent at CORE, which specializes in Manhattan luxury units. "I know from open houses I have that people are curious to see how their neighbors live."

According to the survey, conducted by Entitle Direct, a Connecticut-based title-insurance company, some 57 percent of people check out personal belongings, including artwork, clothing and notes on the refrigerator.

Others are just looking for a nosh.

"They go crazy over sushi," Beare said. "That's a big one."

Edward Baum, Entitle's director of sales and marketing, said that an open house is so much cheaper than dinner and a movie, and is an easy way to check in on the Joneses.

"New Yorkers are thinking about real estate a lot," Baum said. "It's virtually a competitive sport. They're looking at how they're doing in relation to their neighbors."

"People like to know where they stand, so they're doing the research. They also enjoy the entertainment of looking at other folks' apartments."

Baum's group surveyed nearly 200 people who attended Manhattan open houses, in the East Village, Upper West Side, West Village, Gramercy and the Upper East Side; and in Brooklyn, in Park Slope and Brooklyn Heights.

Realtor Charles Curkin said brokers tolerate the looky-loos because of real-estate's age-old axiom: You never know.

"They might hit the jackpot and come back tomorrow," Curkin said.

At an Upper West Side open house yesterday, a neighbor admitted she was spying to gauge the market.

"I'm thinking possibly of selling," the neighbor said. "I wanted to see how my place compares and what they're selling for."

But serious buyers say the snoopers just get in the way.

Parents Julie and Parker Bagley, who attended a West 74th Street open house yesterday in their search for a bigger place to accommodate their growing family, said they don't have time to wait in line behind gawkers.

"I don't think we've ever window-shopped or kicked tires," Parker Bagley, a lawyer, said at the showing for the three-bedroom condo. "Some people just like to look. It's a little weird. If people aren't serious, then they shouldn't be out looking at apartments. It's inconvenient."