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New Yorkers Have Real Estate Superstitions? You Bet!

As if it's not tough enough to find the right property in New York City, given the absurdly fractional vacancy rates, lack of inventory, skyrocketing valuations and "American Ninja"-type competition among stark-raving buyers. For some home hunters, however, there's an additional consideration that must be taken into the already-difficult equation: Superstition.

"It's all about the culture, right? There are things you know and things you don't know," said Douglas Elliman broker Jacky Teplitzky, who has seen all kinds of superstitious buyers and sellers.

"For example, there were buyers from Latin America (Brazil) who are very sophisticated and very rich. They are looking at (my client's) apartment that they love on the Upper East Side. The wife says, 'there's a problem.' The way the master bed is positioned, your feet are facing the window. That is bad luck if your feet face the window. So we wonder, 'Is there another way to position the bed in the room?' No – it's not feasible. So we bring in an interior designer to create a built-in unit so the bed would be floating and it was designed so the feet would not face the window," Teplitzky said.

Teplitzky spent a lot of time and effort to make it work, but this example is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to buyer and seller superstitions in NYC real estate.

Feng Shui Experts



A smudging stick is used to cleanse an apartment.

For example, some buyers are so adamant about the way rooms or apartments face, or the way doors or windows are positioned, that they sometimes refuse to buy property that they otherwise love.

"I had a buyer just this week who brought in her Feng Shui consultant and the bed was on the same wall as the door. The consultant looked in and said, 'No, no no!' and there goes the deal. It's a very real thing," said Frances Katzen of Douglas Elliman.

Deanna Kory of The Corcoran Group said sometimes sellers get impatient if their home is not selling as quickly as they would like and will resort to a practice called "smudging," which involves bringing in a Feng Shui expert.

"They will do things to the apartment to enhance the energy flow. Perhaps it is burning sage, but it could also be a 'salt water cure,'" Kory said, adding: "I have seen new homeowners do an energy cleansing to erase the energy of the previous owner, too. These are 'New Agey' things, but they do happen," she said.

Numerology

A large part of the superstition game in real estate centers around numbers. For instance, in Chinese culture, the number 8 is considered lucky. It's not only because the "8" is seen as the symbol for infinity, but because the word "eight" is associated with wealth, prosperity and power.

That means some buyers are especially eager to have an address with the No. 8 in it, or are compelled to write purchase offers that include the No. 8, just as some superstitious sellers will list a property with the "8" in the price. Conversely, the number 4 is considered unlucky in Chinese culture because it sounds like the Chinese word for death.

"People will offer a certain number (for a listing) because they feel it will bring them good luck. Or the final sold number. They are ridiculous numbers that don't make sense," said Katzen.

09/15/2015	#18AB	\$17,261,337	Sold (asking: \$16,950,000.00 1.84%)
09/11/2015	#15C	\$5,445,000	No Longer Available
09/09/2015	#15C	\$5,497,135	Recorded Closing
09/08/2015	#16D	\$1,733,025	Sold (asking: \$1,700,000.00 1.94%)
09/02/2015	#13D	\$3,744,518	Recorded Closing
09/01/2015	#16B	\$2,262,515	Sold (asking: \$2,220,000.00 1.92%)
08/31/2015	#11B	\$1,733,475	Sold (asking: \$1,700,000.00 1.97%)
08/25/2015	#11A	\$2,698,362	Sold (asking: \$2,650,000.00 1.82%)

The yellow highlights show examples of odd "sold" prices.

CORE's Patrick Lilly of the Patrick Lilly Team said his Chinese buyers will not look at 4E, 444 East or anything with a 4. "But, on the other hand, 8's are a favorite," Lilly said.

Karin Dauch of Core NYC agreed. One of her buyers wanted to avoid the 4th floor or a street number or building number where "four" is prominent.

Same thing with the No. 13 and the No. 7. Plenty of buildings in New York skip over the 13th floor entirely to eliminate the possibility that anyone would get spooked by seeing the number in the building, let alone have to consider living on that floor, or unit. This is in spite of the fact that research has shown that most people don't really believe the No. 13 is unlucky. Still, only about 5 percent of NYC condos have a 13th floor.

As for how far some buyers will go? Deanna Kory was all ready to close on a property when her buyer made a big request: Secure a phone number with some very specific combinations.

“The buyer was about to close and lived out of town. The number had to have some combination of the numbers 6,8,1,3 and 2. And this client said having the number 1 ‘enhances’ the number behind it. Like, ‘18.’ She said she wanted an ‘auspicious’ phone number,” Kory said, adding that she worked directly with the phone company and got three phone numbers for her client to consider.

“She chose one that was an ‘omen for living,’ ” Kory said.



Many NYC buildings do not have a 13th floor.

Stigmas

For sellers of more suburban properties, there’s a tradition of burying a statue of St. Joseph in the yard. As the patron saint of real estate, St. Joe has been called upon many times to help prime buyers into bringing in offers.

There are other kinds of factors that keep people from being able to buy into a certain place. This is what’s called stigmatized properties, and that can certainly include residences where a person has died. It is an unpleasant truth about real estate, since properties did belong to previous owners or residents. Whether someone died or committed suicide in a place is something that some buyers will, indeed, ask about.

Teplitzky said that in one transaction, a buyer became very nervous about closing on a property because they were under the impression that the previous owner had passed away there. It took a lot of research, documentation and reassurance to show the buyer that the previous owner had died in the hospital, not at home.

But there are other more personal predilections that real estate agents must contend with. Natalie Rakowski of Core NYC had a very unique experience with a stigmatized property. A client wouldn’t buy a certain building because it had once been a police station.

Looks like it’s not just numbers, ghosts or cultural influences that feed into real estate superstitions.