

# How to Sell a Haunted House (or Not)

Even the most skeptical real estate agents say they think twice about the existence of ghosts, especially after unusual encounters.

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Ellen Weinstein



By **Tammy LaGorce**

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A real estate agent, Mike Fabbri, still remembers the chill of opening the door of an apartment near Washington Square Park in Manhattan.

His client, a media planner in her mid-20s, was on the hunt for a quiet, one-bedroom in Greenwich Village. She walked in and immediately walked out. “She said, ‘I’m fine with a nice ghost, but I felt really evil energy in that apartment,’” Mr. Fabbri recalled.

He sympathized. “I said, ‘You know, there are things you can change in an apartment, like the wallpaper. But you can’t change an evil spirit or a demon without priests. Let’s move on.’”

Mr. Fabbri helped her find what he called a “charming” unit in a prewar co-op. No ghosts.

Haunted houses, if one believes, can be problematic for real estate agents. The New York Times talked to agents who have embraced the macabre or have at least learned how to navigate it, as believers themselves or as sympathizers.

They are the kind of agents who confess to would-be buyers that something might be amiss — an acknowledgment that many agents are not necessarily bound to. According to a [2023 Zillow analysis](#) of state laws, only Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey and New York require agents to disclose suspected haunting or paranormal activity.

Some houses considered “stigmatized” are the sites of grisly murders or criminal operations. Others have been rumored to harbor ghosts. The rumors aren’t always just rumors, in the experience of [Cindi Hagley](#), a real estate agent in the San Francisco Bay Area.

“I try to disclose everything,” Ms. Hagley said.

Ms. Hagley, who says she grew up in Rome, Ohio, in a house haunted by a shadowy presence, is considered an expert of sorts in selling houses with spectral presences. Among her specialties listed online are “professional athletes” and, of course, “stigmatized homes.”

Spooked agents from across the country, she said, have called her for consultations. She said she was called to provide guidance on a five-bedroom house in the Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles. The house, notorious for a gruesome 1959 murder, has changed hands through the decades. It sits empty because of what Ms. Hagley calls its “dark energy.”

When a situation is too much to handle, she calls in [Mark Nelson](#), a psychic in North Carolina.

“He’ll talk to the spirit and do whatever he needs to do to find out why the spirit is there,” she said. “Maybe it doesn’t know it’s dead and needs help crossing over.”

He tries to clear a gentle path for them. Mr. Nelson does not perform exorcism, but burning sage and splashing holy water are sometimes necessary. “It can help push out negative spirits,” he said.

Ms. Hagley is a believer in Mr. Nelson’s tactics and the results. “I know it sounds nuts,” she said. “But I trust him 100 percent.”

Most agents just go it alone.

Mr. Fabbri relies on his personal experiences. “I’ve had a fascination with the paranormal since childhood,” he said.

His vacation home in Litchfield, Conn., has spirits — benevolent ones, he said. So does his apartment in the Gramercy neighborhood, he added.

He’s prepared for ghostly energy, particularly in New York’s historic neighborhood. The haunting of the apartment where he supported his client in walking away wasn’t a surprise, he said. “Because it’s an old part of town,” Mr. Fabbri said. “There are bodies buried all over Washington Square Park.”

Other agents are more skeptical, but they have had encounters that have made them think twice.

Julie Brown, an agent in Marshall County, Ala., recently sold a house to a couple relocating from the Northeast. “Right after they bought it, they called and said, ‘There’s a little brown dog dancing every night in the living room,’” she said. The couple didn’t know that the seller’s wife, who had recently died, had a small brown dog who had also recently died.

She’s now not as eager to dismiss them as hoaxes anymore. “I still don’t know if I believe in ghosts. But maybe,” Ms. Brown said.

Jennifer Stauter, a real estate agent in Wisconsin, recalled how she listed a house whose owners mentioned it was haunted by a ghost who liked to make phone calls. At an open house, she heard banging noises coming from the basement. Then the landline rang three times, with only static on the other end.

“If you tell me your house is haunted, I’m not going to say you’re crazy,” she said.

In Bensalem, Pa., Scott Geller sold what he believes may be a haunted townhouse in his own neighborhood twice: first to a woman who told him she felt an eerie coldness in the front bedroom, and years later to a man who stopped to chat with his wife on the street. “He described the exact same thing,” Mr. Geller said.

Before, “when people would tell me about flickering lights or cold spots I would say, ‘OK, call an electrician or an HVAC person,” Mr. Geller said.

He is still mostly doubtful ghosts exist. But “I think there could be something going on, some kind of spirit energy that gets left behind.”

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