How to Sell a Haunted House (or Not)

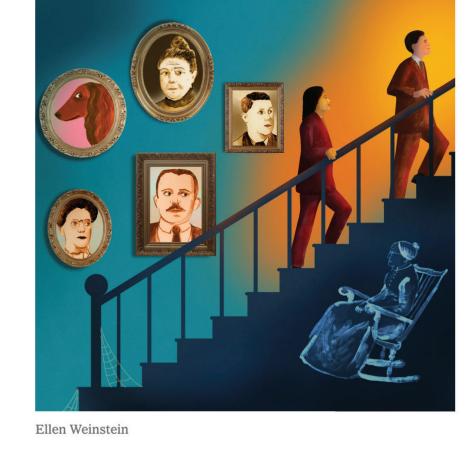
Even the most skeptical real estate agents say they think twice about the existence of ghosts, especially after unusual encounters.

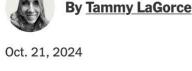
Listen to this article · 4:55 min Learn more











Bay Area.

homes."

said.

Hagley calls its "dark energy."

psychic in North Carolina.

Most agents just go it alone.

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

opening the door of an apartment near Washington Square Park in

A real estate agent, Mike Fabbri, still remembers the chill of

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

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

Mr. Fabbri helped her find what he called a "charming" unit in a

an evil spirit or a demon without priests. Let's move on."

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

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

analysis of state laws, only Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey

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

"I try to disclose everything," Ms. Hagley said.

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.

When a situation is too much to handle, she calls in Mark Nelson, a

"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

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."

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

"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

banging noises coming from the basement. Then the landline rang

three times, with only static on the other end.

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."

A version of this article appears in print on Oct. 27, 2024, Section RE, Page 7 of the New York edition with the headline: How to Sell a Haunted House? Be Transparent.. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe



Share full article