

Selling Your Waterfront Home (When You Have Pets)

by Joe Catalano

The Long Island agent was taking the buyers with whom she was working to see their fourth home of the day, and this house appeared to be the one for this young married couple. The buyers were enticed into the home by the manicured lawn and bushes. The two-story entryway was light and airy, encouraging them to see what the next room looked like.

Everything was perfect until they reached the family room. The wife began to back up to get a better view of the brick fireplace when she hit against what she thought was a Plexiglas case. When she turned to see what she'd really hit, she let out a shriek heard across Long Island Sound as she came face to face with a large snake sitting on a fake tree limb in a glass-enclosed cage. The woman, visibly shaken, turned and went running from the house. She was deathly afraid of snakes. It didn't matter how much of the house the woman had liked prior to seeing the elongated reptile. There was no way she was going to further consider purchasing this house or ever coming back to it.

While you may think of your dog, cat or even snake as a member of your family, potential buyers may have a different opinion. Some buyers are deathly afraid of barking dogs. Others fear cats may jump up on them and damage the clothes they are wearing. Even those that like dogs may not want to enter a house when they hear a deep, continuous bark coming from the other side of the door after the doorbell is rung. And if the buyer is afraid to enter your house, how can he be seduced by the fantastic water view or other great attributes of your home? Should a buyer be brave enough to go in when a cat or dog is present, the pet can turn

into a distraction during the entire showing. Some buyers may walk through quickly, for fear that the dog they hear barking in the distance might jump up on them at any point.

Conversely, some buyers may be so enamored by the cat or dog that they begin petting, hugging and playing with it. In either case—fear or love—buyers are paying more attention to the pet than the property they've come to see. When they leave and think back on their day, they'll remember more about how cute the dog was than the home's layout or deck overlooking the water.

Agents, realizing how owners feel about their pets, often have to broach with great care the subject of what to do with Fido or Garfield during showings. What most agents will recommend is to remove all signs that a pet exists. Take away the cat toys, feed bowls and other accessories. As for what to do with the pet, see if you can leave it with a neighbor or relative for the day. Another option is to board the animal for the afternoon with a local vet or kennel.

Some owners lock their dogs in a room, basement or garage. Others place them in the backyard. But buyers want to see all the areas of a house. Should the dog be in the basement and the buyer wants to go downstairs, moving the animal can be an ordeal for either the agent or owner. Likewise, placing your dog or cat in a cage can be tricky. Most pets aren't used to being confined in a small carrier. What often happens is that there is continuous barking or meowing, which becomes a distraction to the buyer. In addition to removing the animal and his accessories during a showing, make sure that there are no lingering

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