



25 Home Showing Offenses That Could Cost You Offers

Real estate experts reveal the common missteps that are turning off today's home buyers. Real estate pros see it all—from cluttered closets to dark, dingy rooms with lingering odors. But today's buyers are expecting better, especially given the higher cost of homes nowadays.

Buyer expectations have been ratcheted up by television images, say real estate professionals. More than half—58%—say buyers are disappointed when the homes they visit don't live up to what they see on TV, according to the National Association of REALTORS®' [2025 Profile of Home Staging](#).

"If a buyer notices something wrong before they notice something right, you've already lost ground," says Sue "Pinky" Benson, PSA, RENE, managing partner and trainer at RE/MAX Alliance Group in Naples, Fla.

Home staging expert Cathy Hobbs, founder of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes in New York City, agrees. Buyers are making snap judgments faster than ever—"often within minutes of stepping into a property's front door," she says. "While price and location matter, the emotional impact of a showing can determine whether a buyer moves forward or walks away."

Even relatively minor issues could turn buyers off and prevent an offer, agents say. Here's what real estate pros from around the country say are the worst showing offenses they see.

1. Lingering Odors

"Sellers often think a wall of scented candles or plug-ins masks a pet or musty smell. It does not. It just smells like a lavender-scented litter box. Buyers today are hyper-sensitive to allergens. They want to smell nothing. If I walk in and my eyes start watering from fresh linen spray, I assume you are hiding a mold issue or a deep-seated carpet stain." – Greg Field, HomeSmart, Phoenix, Ariz.

2. Feeling Watched

"Cameras in every room—[there's] nothing more unsettling than feeling watched. Buyers focus more on what are doing than experiencing the home." – Sydney Robertson, sales associate, Loring Woodruff Real Estate Associates, Charlottesville, Va.

3. Too Much Seller, Not Enough Home

"Over-personalized spaces hurt showings. Walls filled with family photos or bold design choices make it harder for buyers to picture themselves living in the home. I always advise sellers to remove most personal photos and tone down statement pieces so as not to take the focus away from the layout of the home and its features. Showcase the home's character, yes, but make it neutral enough to feel welcoming to anyone." – Dan Yonker, owner and CEO, Yonker Realty Group, Paradise Valley, Ariz.

4. Curb Appeal Neglect

"One of the most common mistakes I see sellers make is not doing any landscaping or yard maintenance. The yard is the first thing a potential buyer sees—both online and in person. And if they don't like what they see, they will scroll right past the home or drive away without ever stepping a foot through the door. Having attractive curb appeal also attracts buyers who drive by the property but who never had any intention of seeing it before then. Adding potted plants, flowers and even topiary is an easy and cost-effective way to spruce up these outdoor spaces." – Lindsay Fanali, LHC, C2EX, strategic real estate adviser, Real Estate Bees, Wellington, Fla.

5. Bathroom Clutter

“Toiletry items should be hidden away in bathrooms as opposed to on display, especially during showings. It is best for personal items to be tucked away in drawers and closets. Bathrooms are typically always where potential buyers want to look and inspect. [They] should be flawless and spic and span.” – Cathy Hobbs

6. Overstuffed Storage Spaces

“Buyers hate when they can't snoop through closets and cupboards because they are so packed full of junk it's impossible to see to the back of them.” – Lyndsay Lamb, design specialist and owner, Lamb & Co. Real Estate, Snohomish, Wash.

7. Sly Cover-Ups That Mask Bigger Problems

“The biggest turn-offs I see right now come down to ‘lipstick on a pig syndrome’—high-end staging used to mask fundamental failures. Buyers have become incredibly savvy about long-term ownership costs. If they see a thick layer of dust on the intake vents or hear a loud, grinding HVAC compressor, they aren't looking at your staging. They are mentally deducting \$15,000 from your asking price before they even hit the kitchen.” – Greg Field

8. Not Worth It

“Overpricing is the new bad smell—buyers can sense it the second they walk in. In markets like Naples, Florida, especially at the higher price points, buyers expect conditions to match the price. Many don't want to do even minor work like painting. If a property needs updates, sellers either need to price accordingly or handle them upfront. Today's buyers interpret flaws as a sign to keep searching, not a reason to negotiate.” – Sue “Pinky” Benson

9. Bad Lighting

“Yellow and dim lighting makes a house look smaller and uninviting. On many of my listings, I change out the lighting from yellow to white. It makes the property show much better and often helps the property sell quicker.” – Lilli Schipper, ABR, CRS, broker associate, LoKation Real Estate, Hollywood, Fla.

10. Poor Kitchen Presentation

“Many buyers put a heavy importance on kitchens and bathrooms. They especially look at whether they are renovated, clean and modern. While potential buyers admire expansive countertops, they are often turned off by crowded countertops.” – Cathy Hobbs

11. Visible Dirt

“I always tell my sellers to have a professional deep cleaning done. Many sellers don't realize how big of a difference it really makes. It gives the home a whole new look and feel. I've seen that alone, make or break a home sale.” – Lindsay Fanali

12. Not Move-in Ready

“It's often the little things about the home's condition that add up—dirty air filters, wood rot around the front door, worn out carpet, overstuffed closets, custom finishes that will be hard to remove or replace. Buyers these days do not want to take on a laundry list of work after closing. Sellers should present a home that's tidy and well-kept—and doesn't leave a lot of work for the next buyer.” – Lauren Newman, sales associate, Carolina One Real Estate, Charleston, S.C.

13. Color Overload

“Dark or bright colors can sometimes be a turnoff to buyers. If the seller just spent a little bit of money to put a nice new fresh coat of paint on the property, it would improve the showing experience.” – Lilli Schipper

14. Messy Garages

“A seller is selling the whole home, not just the house and the garage as a storage locker. Garages should be clean and tidy.” – Cathy Hobbs

15. Online vs. In-Person Letdown

“Sellers often over-edit photos to make rooms look bigger or brighter. While this might seem like a harmless boost, most buyers notice the difference the moment they walk in. Listing photos set expectations. A home that surprises buyers in the wrong way, looking worse than the listing, makes buyers feel misled. Honest, well-lit photos that show the home as it really is help build trust. And when buyers trust what they see, they're much more likely to fall in love with the property.” – Dan Yonker

16. Pet Disarray

“From food and water bowls to pet paraphernalia, some potential buyers will be turned off by evidence of pets.”
– Cathy Hobbs

17. DIY Regret

“I often notice how quickly buyers zero in on any hint of shoddy work, like uneven tiles, mismatched paint, wobbly cabinet doors or caulking that’s poorly applied. DIY repairs that aren’t done well, don’t add character. They raise red flags. Buyers naturally assume bigger issues may be lurking.” – Dan Yonker

18. Too High-Tech

“If a buyer sees a wall-mounted iPad from 2019 that controls the lights, they see a proprietary nightmare that will be impossible to repair. In 2026, buyers want invisible intelligence. They want smart thermostats and leak detectors that work in the background, not a robot butler that requires a software engineering degree to operate.” – Greg Field

19. Personal Photos

“A seller may wish to display family photos and memorabilia, [but] for many potential buyers the visual impact comes across as cluttered and overly personal.” – Cathy Hobbs

20. Exterior Neglect

“Buyers will notice peeling exterior paint, rotted wood and [worn] siding, and will immediately have a negative feeling before even stepping into the home.” – Veronica Morss, broker, eXp Realty, Seattle

21. Deferred Maintenance

“What mistakes instantly sour my buyers? Any deferred maintenance, like chipping paint, gutters that are coming unattached, foggy windows or a leaky shower head. It just screams, ‘What else did the seller neglect that I can’t see?’” – Lyndsay Lamb

22. Polarizing Decor

“[Watch the] political signage. You want buyers to be able to picture themselves in the home—not be distracted by the political feelings of the owner.” – Sydney Robertson

23. Inconsistent Finishes

“Mismatched flooring throughout. [Buyers] don’t like to see four different flooring types on one floor.” – Veronica Morss

24. Comfort Issues

“Buyers are hyper-aware of hot or cold rooms. If the master bedroom is five degrees off from the rest of the house, the buyer immediately assumes the ductwork is shot or the insulation is non-existent. You can stage that bedroom with the finest linens, but if the buyers are uncomfortable while looking at the closet, they are not making an offer.” – Greg Field

25. Dismissing Staging

“Not staging the home, especially when it’s vacant. Buyers want to visualize themselves living in the home, and it’s hard to have this experience in an empty property. Staging the home almost always pays off. If the home is already furnished and the seller isn’t interested in staging, decluttering at the least, along with the professional deep cleaning also helps.” – Lindsay Fanali