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Can Artwork Help Sell a Home?

by Jacky Bischof

For serious art collectors, a home is not just a place that provides shelter. It's also a place to showcase an art collection, which may be as prized as the space itself. But what happens when that home goes on the market? Does the art stay or go? In many cases, it depends on the art, brokers and staging professionals say.

Claudio Papapietro for The Wall Street Journal

The listing broker for this apartment, the Manhattan pied-a-terre of avid art collectors, decided to leave the art collection on display for prospective buyers. See more photos of the apartment in our slideshow.

This differs from other decisions about how to arrange a home on the market, such as leaving pets off marketing materials and removing personal items. But art collections are trickier, as brokers and stagers have to assess whether a prospective buyer will be drawn in or put off.

Wednesday's New York House of the Day is the Manhattan pied-a-terre of a couple who use the space to display around 30 pieces from their art collection that has grown over 35 years. "I don't know how anybody lives without art," says Sue Berland, who owns the property with



her husband, Joseph. Speaking from the Venice Biennale, a large contemporary art show held in Italy every two years, the Berlands say they were

drawn to the apartment in part because it had the "feel of a loft," and large wall spaces, so their art could be displayed without "feeling squeezed in," Ms. Berland says. The layout also appealed to them, with the bedrooms grouped together in a wing on one side of the apartment. "We always had people coming up to go through our art collection," says Ms. Berland. "You don't want them to go into your bedroom."

The Connecticut-based couple recently listed the Upper West Side apartment for \$3.85 million, citing less time spent in the city and more travelling as a reason for the sale. Their collection, which includes works by contemporary artists Sol LeWitt and Roxy Paine "certainly reflects my husband and me," Ms. Berland says.

Broker Les Meyers of Citi Habitats says he felt the displayed works "were a perfect match with the design flow of the apartment." Having nothing on the walls would make the space feel barren he says. "The important consideration is to not overhang or over represent a collection that may confuse or distract someone viewing the home," he says, "but when presented correctly [the works] can make a space come alive and create an immediate connection between the home and the one viewing."

An extensive art collection can be a challenge for both brokers and staging professionals who try create a sense of anonymity in a space but don't want to offend homeowners by suggesting some works be put away.

Claudio Papapietro for The Wall Street Journal Having the art built into the walls presents a different challenge in a sale, as in the case of this West Village townhouse, featured as a House of the Day in February.

Shell Brodnax, CEO of the Real Estate Stag-

ing Association, says deciding on whether an art collection should stay depends on whether the collection fits with the property as well as the demographic the seller and broker is trying to reach. "There is clearly artwork that would not be appropriate," she says, for example pieces that might be deemed offensive by some.

But, "if it's a beautiful collection and it fits the architecture of the home, and it fits the demographics of the person who is buying, then it's a must," she says.

Cheryl Eisen of the Interior Marketing Group says that she will often ask homeowners to store their art, or will cover immovable art such as frescos. "We don't want buyers noticing the art, remembering the art — anything that can take their focus or vision away from the home is to its detriment," she says. Occasionally though, her company will install pieces from their own art collection to bring color to a space. "We don't want it to be boring and lifeless," she says, "but it can't be figurative—nothing that's going to draw attention to itself."

Having the art built into the walls presents a different challenge, as in the case of this West Village townhouse, featured as a House of the Day in February. Designed by a collective of architects and artists in the 1980s, the home had



motifs coming out of the wall that were representative of the homeowner, including archways, a mantelpiece and a table with riding hat with gloves and crop.

The home was listed for slightly under \$6.5 million with Danny Davis of Town Residential and recently sold for \$6.2 million. Describing the home as "whimsical," Mr. Davis admits the art installations "were not for everybody." Usually Mr. Davis advises home sellers to be "neutral" when showing a home.

But in the case of the West Village townhouse, "all it took was that one person who enjoyed the installations and thought it had a lot of character, and they loved it," he says of the purchases. "It was exactly what they were looking for."