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LOVED. LIVED IN. LISTED AS AN ESTATE SALE.

REAL ESTATE | Constance Rosenblum | June 11, 2010

Others brokers, like Burt Savitsky and Elayne Roskin, both senior vice presidents of Brown Harris Stevens who often handle estate sales as a team, take a different approach.

“We don’t flag them as such,” Ms. Roskin said. “This is partly so people don’t expect unrealistic bargains, but also so they’re not wrongly put off.”

She cited a listing for a prewar duplex on the East River that mentioned amenities like wood-burning fireplaces and a butler’s pantry, but not why the property was on the market.

“The estate definitely needed updating,” Ms. Roskin said. “But the photos showed the property in a good light. And as you can see, there was no mention of the word ‘estate.’ ”

Nevertheless, potential buyers learn to read between the lines, to recognize tip-off phrases like “rarely available,” or photos heavy on flowered rugs and fussy, old-fashioned furnishings.

Sometimes there are other clues. As Ms. Roskin and Mr. Savitsky wrote in a listing for a 13-room co-op on Park Avenue, “This lovely residence awaits a creative touch to restore it to its original grandeur.”

“There were lovely pictures,” Ms. Roskin said. “But the place needed a total redo.”

SHOULD YOU TAKE AN ARCHITECT OR CONTRACTOR WHEN YOU VISIT?

“Not on the first visit,” Ms. Roskin of Brown Harris Stevens said. “The first time, go alone or with your spouse. Look at the layout, the space, the views, the light. Then, if you like these things, come back with your architect and your contractor. Otherwise, you’re not making the best use of their time.”


ARE ESTATE SALES MORE COMPLICATED THAN OTHER REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS?

Sometimes, which is why brokers like Mr. Savitsky and Ms. Roskin specialize in such sales. Brokers handling estate sales have to be knowledgeable about the intricacies of probate. They also have to be able to deal tactfully with still-grieving relatives.

Such transactions often involve multiple executors, who may not be in the same state or, more important, on the same page when it comes to issues like pricing and how to dispose of the contents of a house or an apartment. (That’s a polite way of saying they may fight like cats and dogs over what to do with Grandma’s Duncan Phyfe sofa.)

Clearing out room after room filled with decades’ worth of accumulated stuff, ranging from the priceless to the trash-worthy, adds yet another layer of complexity.

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Elayne Roskin
Licensed Associate Real Estate Broker
eroskin@bhsusa.com
212-906-9336

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