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Does Sex Sell? Properties For Sale That Bare It All

Real-estate agents describe uncomfortable experiences showing homes where the owners have furnishings that could be rated X

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Tracy McLaughlin, luxury-property specialist, Pacific Union International, Christie's International Real Estate, Marin County, Calif.:

I had a \$3.25 million listing about six years ago in Ross, Calif. The seller wrote very dark murder mysteries. The house, a Midcentury Modern home with very tall ceilings, had great furniture and a lot of very beautiful paintings. But a few of the paintings were very disturbing, with an element of darkness, and they were overtly sexual. They were also huge—maybe 6-by-7 feet.

They might have been OK in a wild party loft in New York City, but these were very edgy for a house in Ross. I suggested that the seller remove them to appeal to a broader base of buyers. He said no, he thought they were integral to the home's décor.

Everyone who saw the house sort of had the same reaction like, "Oh wow." And every time I'd show the house to a family on the weekends, I'd have to warn the parents that there might be some art that's disturbing for children. Or I'd try to reroute the kids when we'd go into key rooms like, "Hey do you want to go play outside?" One time, I was not successful and I heard, "Mommy, what's that?"

I did sell the house, even though it was not a good time in the market. It sold for \$2.95 million in 2011.