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How to Ace Your Next Open House

There are two ways to look at open houses—as cage-match brawls between ferociously competitive urban apartment hunters, or as informative afternoon diversions between agent-led showings. No matter your point of view, make use of these open-house survival strategies.

Let your agent do the talking.

If you visit an open house with a broker, let him or her speak with the broker for the seller while you take the time to view the space. After all, your broker is going to be negotiating on your behalf, so it's never too early to watch him or her at work.

Practice smartphone smarts.

No matter how much you love a home and want to remember every nook and cranny, ask before taking photos or videos, indoors or outdoors. And definitely refrain from posting photos of décor—the good, the bad, or the ugly—on social media.

Don't be too curious.

While you can open closet doors briefly to see how big the space is, you should avoid opening kitchen cabinets and dresser drawers. If you really love an apartment and want to measure doorways or walls before making an offer, don't make a show of it—do your best, instead, to make mental notes of room sizes and layout.

Ask questions.

If you're visiting an open house on your own, don't hesitate to ask the seller's broker what renovations have been done to the space, the timeline for the sale, and any other questions you might have.

Hold that thought.

There'll be lots to love—and not—about every apartment, but contain your snappy critique of the pink powder room or the owners' taste in black-velvet art until you're back out on the street.

