

# 13 Real Estate Horror Stories & How to Avoid Them



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While real estate can be a glamorous and fulfilling career, it does come with major challenges—from faulty contractor work to stolen valuables during showings, strange client requests, strangers on the property, and even frozen pipes. Real estate horror stories can happen to the best and most experienced agents. Thus, we gathered 13 of the scariest and most nerve-wracking real estate agent horror stories so you can learn how to avoid these situations in your everyday dealings with clients and other real estate professionals.

## 1. Leaky Ceiling During the Final Walk-through

The final walk-through before closing can be a relief, but also a stressful situation for agents and clients alike. Depending on the terms of the deal, many buyers and their agents have not visited the home since the initial showing, and they want to make sure that the home is ready for them to take possession.



Real estate agent and licensed attorney **Bonnie Heatzig** of South Florida experienced this real estate horror story firsthand during a final walk-through in a \$2 million waterfront home. The buyers were visiting from Austria, saw her advertisement in the local paper for the home, and immediately wrote up a contract. The inspection went well and the sale was going smoothly until the final walk-through on a stormy morning.

As the buyers and Bonnie conducted the walk-through, she noticed a stream of water leaking from a 33-foot ceiling behind them. Before she could even mention it, another leak sprung, and another, until water was streaming down the sides of her face and bouncing off the top of her head. Fortunately, they were able to hold money in an escrow account until the roof was repaired, and the closing still went off without a hitch.

## How to Avoid:

Although it can be waived, real estate agents should encourage their clients to get a thorough inspection of the home from a **licensed real estate inspector** before moving forward with a purchase. The inspector should examine all portions of the property, including the roof and ceilings, for any water damage or leaks. A report will be issued of these findings to both parties involved, so repairs can be made before taking the next steps.

Also, most homebuyers like to view a property on a beautiful sunny day, so they can see the amount of natural light in the home and get a picturesque image of their potential new home. But, especially in this circumstance, there are also benefits to viewing a property on a cloudy and rainy day. While it's great to see a home in its "best light," seeing it in its worst will provide buyers with an unbiased view and show if there are damages, leaks, or other issues that a beautiful day can overshadow.

## 2. Full Remodel for a False Owner

Not only can real estate horror stories happen to agents, but also to other real estate professionals like appraisers, inspectors, and contractors. Rick Berres of Minneapolis, Minnesota, ran into this issue when a client reached out to him for an estimate on a home remodel.

The client wanted a full kitchen remodel to create an open concept, including knocking down walls and adding an addition that went into the backyard. Rick went to the home, took measurements, gave the client his estimate, put a team together, and showed up at the home a few days later to get the project started.

The surprise was on Rick's team when a woman was there, instead of the man he previously spoke with, and she told him that the home did not belong to the man who hired his team. Although the man said it was his house and signed for the construction to be done, he did not even put an offer on the house, let alone own it. Rick called to confront him, and the man told him that he never said it was his house.

## How to Avoid:

Real estate professionals, and in this case, licensed contractors and subcontractors, should always ask for proof of ownership prior to committing to any transactions. Proof can come from documents, such as a deed, mortgage statement, and tax documents, stating the owner's name and address. In addition, all purchases are public records and can be looked up online in your state or at your county records office.

# 3. Unfavorable Items Found at Showings

Unfortunately, when **real estate agents** show homes, they can't control someone else's property's condition, cleanliness, and decor. While most people will want to present their home in the best possible fashion, everyone's version of that is different. Native Austinite Heather Hudson of Compass found herself in a real estate investing horror story where she ran into several unfavorable items left at a home.

Heather was showing three investors a \$2 million **multifamily property** that was being rented at the time by 10 students from the University of Texas. When she brought the investors in, she was greeted with a coffee table completely covered in empty liquor bottles and two to three bong. Then, as they proceeded to the attic, she opened the door to reveal an adult toy in the corner. Luckily, with her

long flowy skirt, Heather was able to stand in front of the items and use her skirt to block them. However, the investors didn't even flinch at anything they saw and continued through the property.

## **How to Avoid:**

Prior to a showing, visit the property ahead of time or at least get there a few minutes before your clients arrive. This gives you ample time to remove unwanted items and make sure the property is ready for a showing.

If you're unsure of the home condition or already know it is not in the best condition, give your clients a gentle disclaimer. You can say something like, "This home might not be your taste in decor, but let's focus on the size and layout to see if it's a good fit for you" or "Unfortunately, I wasn't able to visit the home prior to the showing, so please excuse the owners if it's a little untidy."

## **4. No Insurance Policy**

Insurance is a pivotal cost for any new homeowner and is often required as a condition of the sale. A client of Marina Vaamonde, owner and founder of HouseCashin, found that out the hard way when purchasing a home.

During the closing process, the client was setting up her homeowner's insurance, but the insurance agent was coming back from vacation the day after closing. The insurance agent advised her to push the day of closing one day further so that the insurance policy and closing would be on the same day. Against this advice, the client decided to take possession of the home without insurance for one day.

The day Marina's client took ownership of the home, a terrified deer crashed through the sliding glass doors that led to her backyard. Unfortunately, since her insurance policy had not started yet, she had to pay for the entire repair costs herself.



## **How to Avoid:**

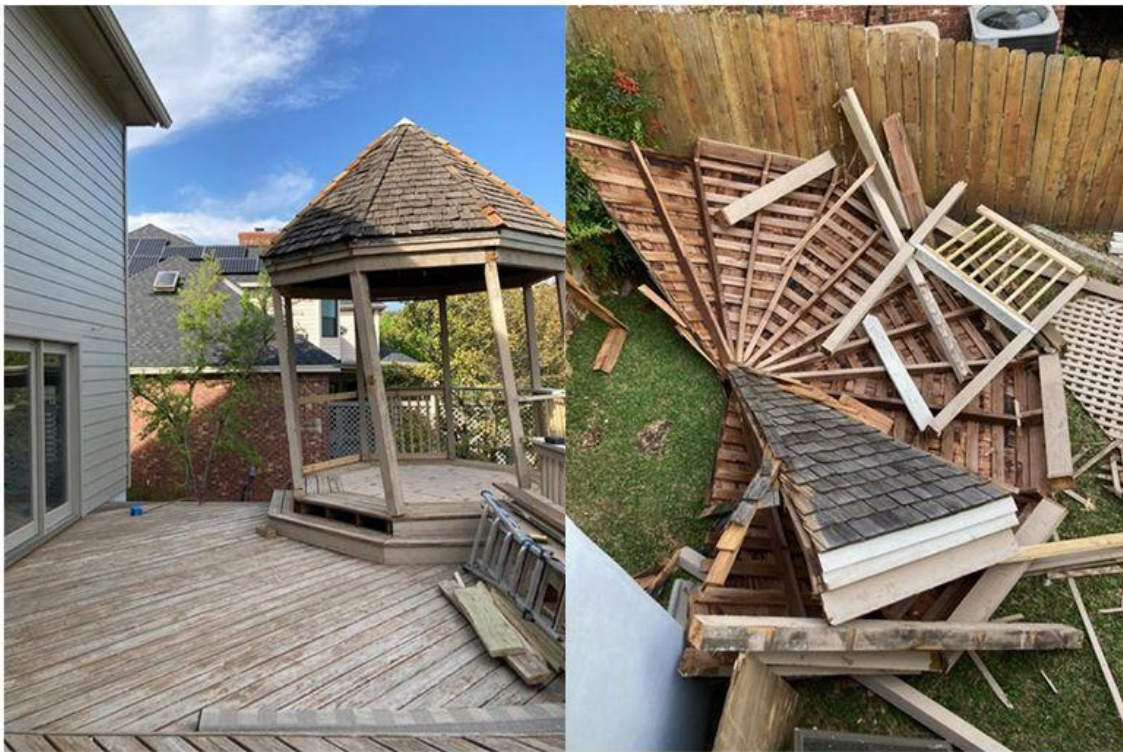
Although sometimes overlooked, insurance is an essential part of being a homeowner. It's there to protect clients in the event that there's any damage, repairs, or catastrophes that happen to occur at or on the property. Once an offer is accepted and the buying process is underway, real estate agents should encourage their clients to begin the search for an insurance provider. Agents can also provide their clients with a list of insurance brokers they've worked with, so they can choose the company and policy that best fits their needs.

## **5. Faulty Contractor Work**

Hiring a licensed contractor is crucial when you're renovating your home, especially when you're preparing it to be sold directly after renovations. A second realtor horror story from Heather Hudson

involved a renovation blunder at a home she was listing for \$1.87 million.

Although she was questioning the contractor's work a little bit, everything seemed to be going smoothly until she received a text from her client stating that she was worried about the backyard gazebo. It was an extremely windy day, and Heather's client thought the gazebo was going to blow down—and the workers had already left for the day. She sent a picture of the gazebo leaning over several feet before disaster struck.



**The gazebo leaning**

**The gazebo 10 minutes later**

A short 10 minutes later, the gazebo fell completely to the ground and smashed into pieces. This set the launch date back a week later, but all ended well when they received a cash offer for \$300,000 over the list price.

## **How to Avoid:**

It is necessary to check the credentials of individuals working on the home, including contractors, **appraisers**, plumbers, and electricians.

Also, all of these individuals must have insurance policies to protect against issues that can arise during the construction process.

Also, when doing any work on a home, especially one that is going to be listed shortly, budget in a few extra days or weeks to guarantee that you'll be ready for showings and open houses. While sellers are typically on a tight timeline to get their home listed, it's best to make sure you're prepared and presenting the home in the best light to ensure you're **attracting qualified buyers**.

## 6. Strange Smells

The smell of garbage in your home is one that most clients are not fond of. James Vasquez, a licensed broker in San Antonio, Texas, had this real estate agent horror story when he was purchasing a home.



When he approached the seller's home, he could smell a very strong odor. Upon entering the property, he saw seas of trash about waist deep. There were no personal belongings, only trash like banana peels, empty soda cans, and pizza boxes. The trash looked and smelled like it



had accumulated and sat there for years. He did end up purchasing the home with the trash in it and made a profit on the sale.

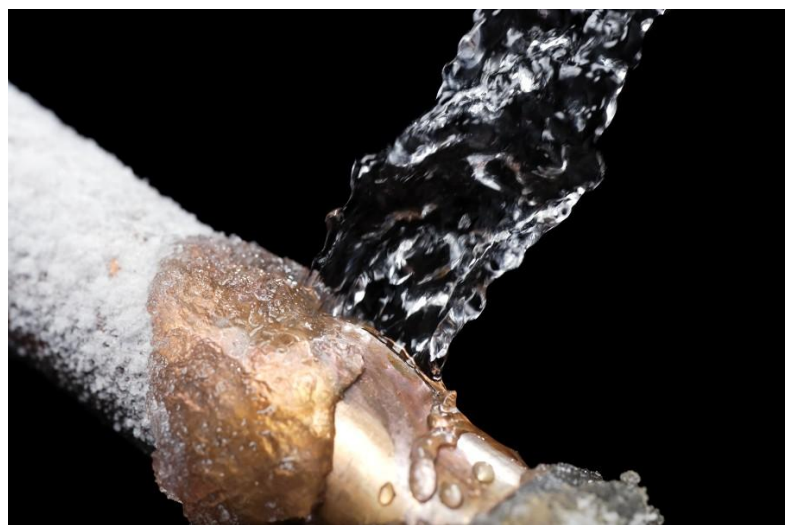
## How to Avoid:

There are a lot of investors who are open to fixer-uppers or who like to flip houses for a profit, so an unsightly mess and smelly homes aren't much to worry about. But some clients would never purchase a home like this one. When you speak to your clients, get a full picture and understanding of their needs, wants, and preferences in a home before taking them to properties. If your clients are looking for a **turnkey property**, showing them a home full of trash should not be an option.

## 7. Frozen Pipes

If your clients live in cold weather environments or climates where temperatures fluctuate, freezing pipes should be a concern that's top of mind. When the water temperature gets to 32 degrees and pipes aren't being used, the water will sit inside them and start to freeze, which in turn causes the pipes to freeze and burst.

Bill Gassett, the founder of Maximum Real Estate Exposure, had a client who experienced this nightmare firsthand. The client was relocating out of state and left his home vacant. As winter approached, he forgot to automatically schedule his oil delivery, so his heat eventually went out when the oil tank became empty.



When Bill went to check on the property, he heard strange noises inside that reminded him of a rush of water. As soon as he opened the door, he

saw the floor flooded with two feet of water and a waterfall coming from the ceiling that removed the ceiling altogether. In addition, because of the standing water, the home was filled with black mold.

## **How to Avoid:**

When you are representing a seller, it's important to note if the home will be vacant during the sales process. If the home is occupied and in a cold-weather environment, your clients will most likely keep the heat on, so freezing pipes will not be an issue. But, if the home will be vacant, you and your clients need to prepare for below-freezing temperatures in order to avoid frozen pipes.

Keep the heat no lower than 55 degrees even when the home is vacant. Insulate the pipes or use heat cables to keep the pipes warm. For any uninsulated pipes, like below the kitchen or bathroom sink, leave the cabinets open so the pipes can stay warm from the heat in the home.

# **8. Clients Using the Bathroom at Showings**

It's inevitable that on a long property tour, you or your clients will have to use the restroom along the way. But, as Bill Samuel from the Chicago area found out, clients going to the bathroom at a showing can turn out to be a real estate horror story.

One time, Bill's client used the restroom without flushing the toilet, which left a surprise for the owner when they went to use the bathroom later. Even worse, a different client used the bathroom at a showing and clogged the toilet. The client didn't mention it to Bill, but he later found out when the homeowner told him the toilet overflowed and needed repairs.

## **How to Avoid:**

A **real estate tip** to avoid this is to keep a watchful eye on the bathroom after your clients use it. Although this may seem a bit disgusting and overkill on your part, an issue such as this can ruin a deal before it begins.

Another way to avoid these real estate horror stories is to schedule times throughout a long day of property touring to stop for bathroom breaks and meals. Not only will this help avoid any bathroom mishaps, but it will also give you time to discuss the properties you've seen and build rapport with your clients.

## 9. Stealing During Showings

John Riedl from Tampa, Florida, had a nightmare client who used to steal items from people's houses. Every showing they would attend, the client would take something like a TV remote, spoon, pillowcase, **books**, and even one time, a lighting fixture. John found out because he received several calls from homeowners and their agents reporting the incident. He also had to deal with several confrontations, which led him to letting the client go.

### How to Avoid:

Theft is a fairly common issue for agents hosting open houses. To avoid this problem, make sure you lock up all valuables and keep them out of sight. Just as important, make sure dangerous items like medication, weapons, and cleaning products are also locked up. If you're concerned about **realtor safety**, have another agent join you at the open house, and be sure they accompany all visitors as they tour the property.

Similar to John, you can also avoid this problem by firing your client. Although it may be uncomfortable to do so, it's better to let a client go than to tarnish your own reputation as a real estate professional. If you're not sure what to say, read our article **How to Fire a Client (+ Free Breakup Letter for Agents)**.

# 10. Demolition Mix-up

Mistakes happen, and sometimes there's nothing a real estate agent can do about it. This was definitely the case for Martin Orefice, the CEO of Rent To Own Labs. Martin was working for a property management company, preparing to show an apartment to a prospective tenant. The property itself and neighborhood were older, especially the property next to the rental property he was showing to clients.



When Martin went to greet his client, he found a team demolishing the house he was supposed to show his clients. Apparently, the plan was to tear down and rebuild the older house next to theirs, but the demolition company got the wrong address. In the end, his employer ended up getting a beautiful new duplex out of the deal.

## How to Avoid:

Unfortunately, there is not much that a real estate agent can do to prevent a mistake like this. However, if this does happen with clients,

you can do another search for listings and find your clients a new property. Search through your local **MLS**, **Realtor.com**, or Zillow for the latest listings.

**Zillow** is one of the top real estate listing websites in the U.S., with about 36 million visitors per month. Not only can you search for listings, but you can also post them by creating a free **Zillow profile** or becoming a Zillow Premier Agent. As a Premier Agent, you'll be featured exclusively on listings and can generate buyer leads directly from their website.

# 11. Strangers in the Property

You never know what you're going to stumble upon when you enter an empty property, although the hope is that it is completely empty. Jennifer Chiongbian, a real estate broker, appraiser, and copywriter, ran into a real estate horror story of her own on a closing day final inspection.

As she and her colleague got off the elevator to do their final walk-through, they smelled a waft of bacon in the hallway, and commented to themselves about how great it smelled but thought nothing of it. Once they swung open the apartment door, they found out where the bacon smell was coming from. There was a large man in his underwear cooking bacon in the apartment.

He continued eating and going along with his business as if the two agents weren't even there. To top it off, the man did not speak much English, but her colleague communicated with him in Russian to tell him he needed to get out of the apartment.

## How to Avoid:

Making sure the properties you represent are safe and secure is one of the most important roles of being a seller's agent. Invest in **real estate lock boxes** to guarantee that keys are kept in a safe location and can only be accessed by people who know the code. Also, as Jennifer did in this situation, taking another agent with you to showings is an excellent way to protect your safety.

# 12. Strange Client Requests

Since real estate professionals work with clients on a daily basis, from time to time, you will hear odd requests from clients. Licensed Realtor Tim Schroeder experienced a request he found laughable at first before he realized the clients were dead serious.

Tim's clients sold their home and purchased a new one, and were adamant about taking their toilet seat to their new home. He thought they were **making a joke** at first, but they really wanted to keep them because they said they were used to them. The homeowners took the toilet seats to their new home and got them installed.

## How to Avoid:

There is no way to completely avoid strange requests from clients, but you can make sure that you are prepared for them. If you are representing the seller, ask your clients if they are intending to sell the home furnished or unfurnished. If they are selling it furnished, ask what items are not included in the sale. A seller may be leaving all the furniture, but may be taking a specific picture with them, which needs to be excluded from the sale.

# 13. Open the Refrigerator With Caution

Our last bad realtor story from author Roseann Galvan is a bit gross and spooky. She was showing an empty and very clean apartment to her clients. They were especially excited about the kitchen as they were both enthusiastic cooks. There was a beautiful new stainless steel refrigerator, and Roseann instructed her clients to open it and take a look.



When they opened it, they found it was full of human hair. Although they all paused in disgust for a few moments, Roseann regained her composure and continued with the showing.

## **How to Avoid:**

Avoid this situation by getting to the home a few minutes before your clients so you can inspect the property, open cabinets, check the

refrigerator and closets, and turn the lights on. That way, if there is an issue, you'll see it before your clients do.

However, there is not always the opportunity to get to every home before your clients and you are often seeing the property for the first time along with them. When you are making appointments, ask the listing agent about the home's condition, so you can be aware of anything that you and your clients will walk into.

Although it's recommended letting your clients explore the home for a bit themselves, volunteer yourself to be the one to open cabinets and refrigerators first, so you get the initial glimpse. If something is awry behind the door, you can warn them or tell them the condition before they look for themselves.

## Bottom Line

Whether you're **new to the real estate business** or have been in it for decades, there will always be surprises and horror stories that keep you on your toes. The key to these surprises is having a game plan to avoid them from happening as well as having a solution if they do happen.