

THE APPRAISAL

After a Smell Moves In, Buyers Won't Follow



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Rosalind Rodburg in her apartment at 10 West End Avenue, with her broker, Michael Graves. She says she is having difficulty selling the \$1.8 million apartment because of the odor of truffles from a store on the ground floor.

By CHRISTINE HAUGHNEY
Published: October 11, 2010

Imagine the stench of a refrigerator crammed with rotting carrots and lettuce. Throw in the earthy smell of dirt, half a dozen pairs of teenage boys' worn-out sneakers and some stinky, stinky cheese.

- RECOMMEND
- TWITTER
- LINKEDIN
- SIGN IN TO E-MAIL
- PRINT
- REPRINTS
- SHARE

Related

[City Room: When Apartment Hunters Heed Their Noses](#)
(October 11, 2010)

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Vittorio Giordano, an official at the store, unloading some truffles.

[Enlarge This Image](#)

Now you're starting to imagine what it smells like in the lobby of one Far West Side luxury condominium building, thanks to the shop that moved in last summer.

No, the residents of 10 West End Avenue aren't living next to a waste treatment facility. Here the offender is far more upscale. Urbani Truffles, an Italian company whose recent chief was once called the King of Truffles, bought a two-story retail condominium in the base of the building and in August started stacking boxes of truffles to the top of its high ceilings.

The stench it produces bears no resemblance to the delicate scent of

Log in to see what your friends are sharing on nytimes.com. [Privacy Policy](#) | [What's This?](#)

[Log In With](#)

What's Popular Now

[The Benefits of Bilingualism](#)



[Why I Am Leaving Goldman Sachs](#)

MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED VIEWED

1. [Opinionator: The Brain on Love](#)
2. [Frank Bruni: Rethinking His Religion](#)
3. [Thomas L. Friedman: A Festival of Lies](#)
4. [Breakdown: Mangled Horses, Maimed Jockeys](#)
5. [Just the Facts. Yes, All of Them.](#)



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times
Mr. Giordano describing a new ventilation system.

truffles dusted over risotto, or the aroma of truffle oil wafting from scrambled eggs. In fact, this smell has so forcefully overtaken the condominium's lobby that even as the truffle company tries to fix the problem, owners in the building say they are having trouble renting and selling their apartments.

"It's just overwhelming to me," said Rosalind Rodburg, who added that the lobby smell was so off-putting that it had prevented her from selling her \$1.8 million apartment 21 stories above.

"There's no reason for my apartment

not to be selling."

Real estate brokers have ready answers for other urban handicaps like bad views (lower the shades), amorous neighbors (drown them out with opera) and dark rooms (floor lamps and track lighting). But an odor that brokers can't disguise with scented candles or freshly baked cookies can be a death knell.

"It's so personal," said Ivana Tagliomonte, a Halstead broker.

One of her clients sold his 12th-floor penthouse in Gramercy Park after a bakery moved in and he couldn't tolerate the odor of onion bagels. (Another family, she noted, bought a TriBeCa loft over a spice shop because they found the smell of curry comforting.)

Phillip Acha of Platinum Properties said a dozen people turned down two rentals in a downtown building because of the odor from a chain restaurant nearby. The landlord had to slash rents by 20 percent to get rid of the units.

When your home "smells like Chipotle, it's never a good thing," Mr. Acha said.

At 10 West End Avenue, Ms. Rodburg's broker, Michael Graves, an agent with Core, has cut the price by \$75,000 and shown the apartment to about 70 people over the past four months. He squarely blames the truffle smell for driving away buyers.

"About 85 percent of the time, people mention it when they come in," Mr. Graves said.

While some brokers insist they and their clients don't notice the truffle odor, apartments for sale there spend, on average, 33.7 weeks on the market, compared with the third-quarter average of 18 weeks, according to [StreetEasy.com](#).

While the building has two units in contract, when Robin Schneiderman, a Citi-Habitats broker, brought a couple to look at a 28th-floor \$6,500-a-month rental, they immediately rejected it because of the stench.

6. [Paul Krugman: Lobbyists, Guns and Money](#)
7. [Gray Matter: The Case for Sleep Medicine](#)
8. [India in One, Two or Three Weeks](#)
9. [Campaign Stops: The Outsourced Party](#)
10. [Maureen Dowd: How Oedipus Wrecks](#)

[Go to Complete List »](#)

“The lobby smells horrific,” Mr. Schneiderman said. “It plays with your mind a little bit.” He added that the odor made prospective renters start questioning if the building was well-run.

Residents insist that it is. Paul Herman, president of Brown Harris Stevens Residential Management, which took over the building’s management on Sept. 1, said in a statement that since the smell started in July, the building’s handyman and resident manager sealed “every square inch of the lobby” and have spoken weekly with Urbani executives about eliminating the smell. The building also installed fans on Aug. 20 to help disperse the odor.

Urbani recently installed new ductwork to address the odor and hopes that the equipment will be “fully operational” this week.

Vittorio Giordano, Urbani’s vice president, led a reporter through the store, which will be the company’s United States headquarters, to point out the machines he is installing to swallow up the scent like Pac-Man and how the cleaned air will be redirected north onto 60th Street. He added that Urbani was spending \$50,000 on ventilation systems to fix the problem.

Still, he warned that it might take time and that residents and prospective buyers and renters would just have to understand that they’re trying. “This is not a problem we can solve in two days,” he said.

In Real Life, No Price Cut

In April, The Appraisal paid a visit to the bachelor pad that plays a starring role in the sequel “Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps.” At the time, the apartment’s real-life investment banker was planning to put it on the market, taking advantage of the exposure.

In the movie, recently released, the owner of the apartment, played by Shia LaBeouf, has to take a 25 percent haircut on the \$6 million apartment he bought, selling it during the downturn for \$4.5 million.

But the seller of the actual penthouse at 31 West 21st Street, an investment banker named Richard Weissman, doesn’t plan to accept any such cut, according to Arthur Gallego, a spokesman for Aligned Real Estate, which officially put the apartment on the market in the summer. Mr. Weissman still hasn’t lowered its \$15 million asking price. This is the third time he has tried to sell the property, according to StreetEasy.com; he bought it for \$1.4 million in 2003.

Mr. Gallego said the apartment in the movie was much smaller than the real apartment.

“In the film’s fictional setting, Shia LaBeouf’s apartment is actually staged as a one-bedroom, with a large chunk of the real 6,250-square-foot, four-bedroom duplex loft’s space walled-off.”

The penthouse has two offers from buyers who had seen it in the movie, he said, that are “well above the make-believe movie price of a \$6 million one-bedroom.”

A version of this article appeared in print on October 12, 2010, on page A26 of the New York edition.

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS



Get 50% Off The New York Times & Free All Digital Access.

Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics

- Housing and Real Estate
- Real Estate Brokers
- Smells and Odors

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM

BOOKS »



Why Won't They Listen?

ARTS »



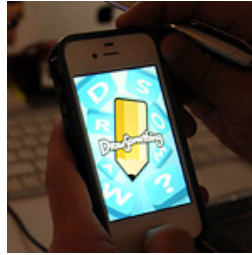
Visions of India Dancing and Dancing and Dancing

OPINION »



Op-Ed: When a Parking Lot Is So Much More

BUSINESS »



A Popular App Changes a Struggling Start-Up

OPINION »

Editorial: Dementia Behind Bars

The prison system is struggling to cope with a rising tide of older, sicker inmates. States must pursue other avenues.

N.Y. / REGION



No Longer Bl... South Bronx

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Autos](#) | [B](#)
 Copyright 2010 The New York Times Company | [Privacy](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Advertis](#)



Beginning in April, visitors to NYTimes.com will have access to **10 free articles** per month instead of **20**.

[Learn more about this change.](#)