



Trading Spaces Vs. Cleaning

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It's springtime, and what better time to review some of life's greater (but lesser-known) truths? For instance, never eat egg salad from a buffet. Always let wet toilet paper hang dry before using it. Never punch a hyena in the crotch. And most importantly, it's time to move.

If you rent, you should move every year until you're 30, at which point you should hire someone to move you. C'mon what's more exciting than a new apartment, huh? Yeah!! Unless you're moving because you lost your job and went broke, in which case, bumper man.

Which reminds me: the first thing you need to do when looking for a new place is get some money, so you can afford better digs. The best way to get money is to go to a bank with its vault open and a sign that says, "Help Yo'self." Otherwise, try a casino. I was at a casino the other night. I had to get out of the house because Mom was mad about my bumper.

Quick recap: I found an old chrome bumper in this empty lot and put it up for sale on eBay. The auction was set to close Sunday morning, when Mom decided it was time for church. I begged off, citing the need to monitor my financial windfall. She wasn't too happy about that, and when she came back to find out I failed to meet my reserve asking price (\$15,000), she threw a pot at me.

Is it my fault the only place with enough room to store the bumper is her bedroom? I think not. She'll calm down once I move out and take the bumper with me. I'll mount it over the fireplace and then joke with people that I brought down a Buick. It'll get big laughs, for sure. (Note to self: get an apartment with a fireplace. Also, friends.)

Anyway, I was at the casino, where I got thrown out for taking off my shirt while playing Caribbean Stud Poker. Apparently, this game is played under different rules at different places. Now I know. The important thing is that I didn't lose any money at the casino, thereby enabling me to use it for a new apartment.

Another way to save money for an apartment is to find a roommate. But that's a terrible idea. Sure, it helps pay the rent and bills, but if you're a woman, you know this can end only in a destroyed friendship, or with (at least) one of you in handcuffs. If you're a guy, there's always the chance you'll have the crazy roommate who does things that make no sense. And I'm not talking just about the guy who leaves the apartment door unlocked, or the TV on when no one is home.

I once had a roommate who left rotting food in the cabinets because he was convinced it smelled bad enough to scare away mice. He was right, but that's not the point. Another time, I had a roommate and two planes crashed into the World Trade Center. Which goes to show, it can never work out with a roommate.

In fact, the only time you should have a roommate is when you're engaged. You should always live with a person before marrying them. That way, if it turns out they communicate with the dead in their sleep, you can get the hell out of there before booking a caterer.

The other thing you need to do when finding a new apartment is to make sure you're not getting ripped off or buying in a bad neighborhood. I recommend staking out the place at night, to see what it's like when the sun goes down. If you're the only person peeing in the alley or parking lot behind the building, that's a good sign. If you get arrested on top of it, that shows the police are really on the ball in that area. Sign the lease as soon as you make bail.

As for the inside of the apartment, be sure to check the usual important things. For instance, the toilet. How well does it flush? Does it have some power behind it? You don't want to take chances here. Also, ask the landlord how it handles paper towels. (It's fun to watch their eyes bug out when you ask them.)

Remember to check the refrigerator, too. If the apartment is still occupied when you view it, try some of the food to

see if the fridge keeps it fresh. Again, no sense in taking chances. If the apartment is not occupied when you tour it and food is still in the fridge, ask the landlord if you'll be allowed to keep it. If so, you've just saved Mom a trip to the grocery store.

Speaking of food, how about the stove? Does it have one? Is it an electric range? If so, run away. Electric ranges are intolerable. Those glowing red burners creep me out, as if it's saying "Hello" or something as it warms up. Give me the "click, click, click - poof!" of a gas burner any day. Plus, if the pilot light goes out, you'll get to light the burner with a match. Talk about an adventure!

Also, be sure to check the light bulbs around the apartment to make sure they work. Don't be fooled, though, into just turning on the light for a moment as you scan each room. What if the bulbs all burn out two days after you move in? Do you think the landlord is going to replace them then? Not hardly. You need to take them home with you for study, to see how long they're going to last.

This might seem an unwieldy task, but it will be well worth it. Here's what you do: Go into the kitchen, turn on the sink, and then walk away. The landlord will go in there to turn off the sink, possibly while cursing you, but that's OK. Meanwhile, you go into the bathroom to remove the light bulbs and turn on the sink and tub in there. That should buy you enough time to get the light bulbs out of the kitchen and living room as the landlord is turning off the water in the bathroom. You can then apologize and make nice with the landlord by explaining that you have a rare condition whereby you cannot sense running water, but that you have a trained ferret to help you out with this. With the current housing boom, most landlords should be desperate enough for tenants to go for that excuse.

You can then take the light bulbs home to see how long they last, potentially saving yourself as much as \$8.24. I would try to either double that at blackjack, or save it for an upgrade on your next apartment.