

## Shine With A Twilight Open House

by Wendy Cole

*Twilight open houses are a great vehicle for gaining new clients.*

The setting sun cast a welcoming glow on the five-bedroom French country estate, gentle light shimmering through its decorator windows. Trickling fountains in the backyard pool, surrounded by Travertine marble, sounded like a babbling brook.

It was a perfect happy hour setting. But the gracious host was Coldwell Banker sales associate Gail Niermeyer, and the soiree was a twilight open house, which ran from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. on a recent Thursday evening in Naperville, Ill.

The twilight open house phenomenon is gathering steam.

Smart practitioners recognize that, at a time when inventories are high, offering access on weeknights can bring greater exposure to listings. "In a slow market, you have to find new techniques to get people inside of homes," said Niermeyer, who had opened five homes among her 30 listings on this same evening.

Twilights have also risen in response to the hectic weekend routines of American families. For many people, carving out two hours on a Sunday afternoon to peruse homes is increasingly challenging.

Twilight events don't necessarily draw larger crowds than traditional weekend open houses, but they create a new option for certain buyers, such as young professionals or empty-nesters, who may prefer this time slot.

Acknowledging that the greatest value of any open house is to gather contacts, Niermeyer considers twilight events a great vehicle for gaining new clients. The 20-year veteran says she's met about 20 percent of her clients through open houses she has hosted.

### Key Advantages of the Weeknight Concept

- **Sellers like them.** Many find it less disruptive, preferring to make themselves scarce for a few hours during the week than during a precious Sunday afternoon.
- **They're convenient.** Weekends can be hectic, but it's easy for many buyers to stop by after work.
- **They help your listings stand out.** The home will rise above the sea of open houses advertised on weekends. Twilight open houses are especially suited for homes with terrific sunset views.

Niermeyer says refreshments aren't critical to the success of a twilight open house, though she concedes that snacks can be a draw. One important tip: If you do offer wine, stick with sauvignon blanc or some other white variety that's easy to clean up if spilled.

### Cautions to Keep in Mind

- **Developing twilight-specific marketing.** It takes special effort to create materials for your open house and acquiring lit signage.
- **Competitors may piggyback.** Don't be surprised if other listing agents want to cash in on your idea and put out yard signs for their own spontaneous evening open house to capitalize on the increased local foot traffic.
- **Serving alcohol could pose liability issues.** There may be liabilities for the seller or salesperson, and the practice also is discouraged by some local associations.



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