

## MANSION

## SPREAD SHEET



## 20 SECONDS FOR LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS** seem to matter most when it comes to dating, job interviews...and real-estate listings.

Researchers tracking the eye movements of subjects who looked at online home listings found that more than 95% of users viewed the first photo—the one that shows the exterior of the home—for a total of 20 seconds. After that, their eyes tended to flit all over the screen, according to Michael Seiler, founder and director of the Institute for Behavioral and Experimental Real Estate at Old Dominion University at Norfolk, Va.

"Without an eye-catching photo, the battle is lost before it begins," Prof. Seiler says. "You have to grab people's attention within two seconds. Do it the way a billboard does."

Following the home-exterior photo, Prof. Seiler found that 76% of participants viewed the property description—things like the size and number of bedrooms/bathrooms—second. Real-estate agents' remarks, which can be a turnoff if they contain all-capital text, hyped-up adjectives and brand names, were the most overlooked—41.5% of home buyers didn't view them at all.

Understanding how people view a listing online can help agents refine

their approach. "For a lot of people, the first point of contact with a house is through the Internet," Prof. Seiler says.

Overall, when viewing an online real-estate listing, home buyers spend about 60% of their time on photos, 20% on the property description and 20% on the real-estate agents' remarks section, Prof. Seiler says. The research tracked eye movements of 45 people who each viewed 10 listings with six photos in August 2011, looking at the time spent viewing each online feature and the number of times their eyes stopped at a certain element. His study, "Toward an Understanding of Real Estate Home Buyer Internet Search Behavior: An Application of Ocular Tracking Technology," has been accepted by the Journal of Real Estate Research.

The study participants' eye movements followed a "Z" pattern, beginning in the upper left corner to the upper right and continuing down the page in small "Z" patterns. After reaching the bottom right corner, they continued scanning up the right column of the screen. But as online browsers click through properties, their interest wanes. "People have respondent fatigue. After a while, you get lost in a sea of homes," he says.

Paula Wells, a team coordinator for Interco Real Estate in California's Silicon Valley, says she makes sure that the photos, property details and remarks can be seen on the page without scrolling. "Most homeowners are going to be looking for the photo first. That's going to pique their interest or not," says Ms. Wells. Nine times out of 10, she displays an exterior photo first and orders the rest of the photos as if you're walking through the home. Remarks are kept short, 400 characters at most.

Lisa Lippman, senior vice president and director of Brown Harris Stevens, limits her remarks to two to three paragraphs. "People get bored when you just rattle off brand names of the appliances and types of wood and stone," she says. Instead, Ms. Lippman recommends writing about the views, lifestyle and neighborhood. "You want to whet somebody's appetite so they want to see it," she says.

—Sanette Tanaka

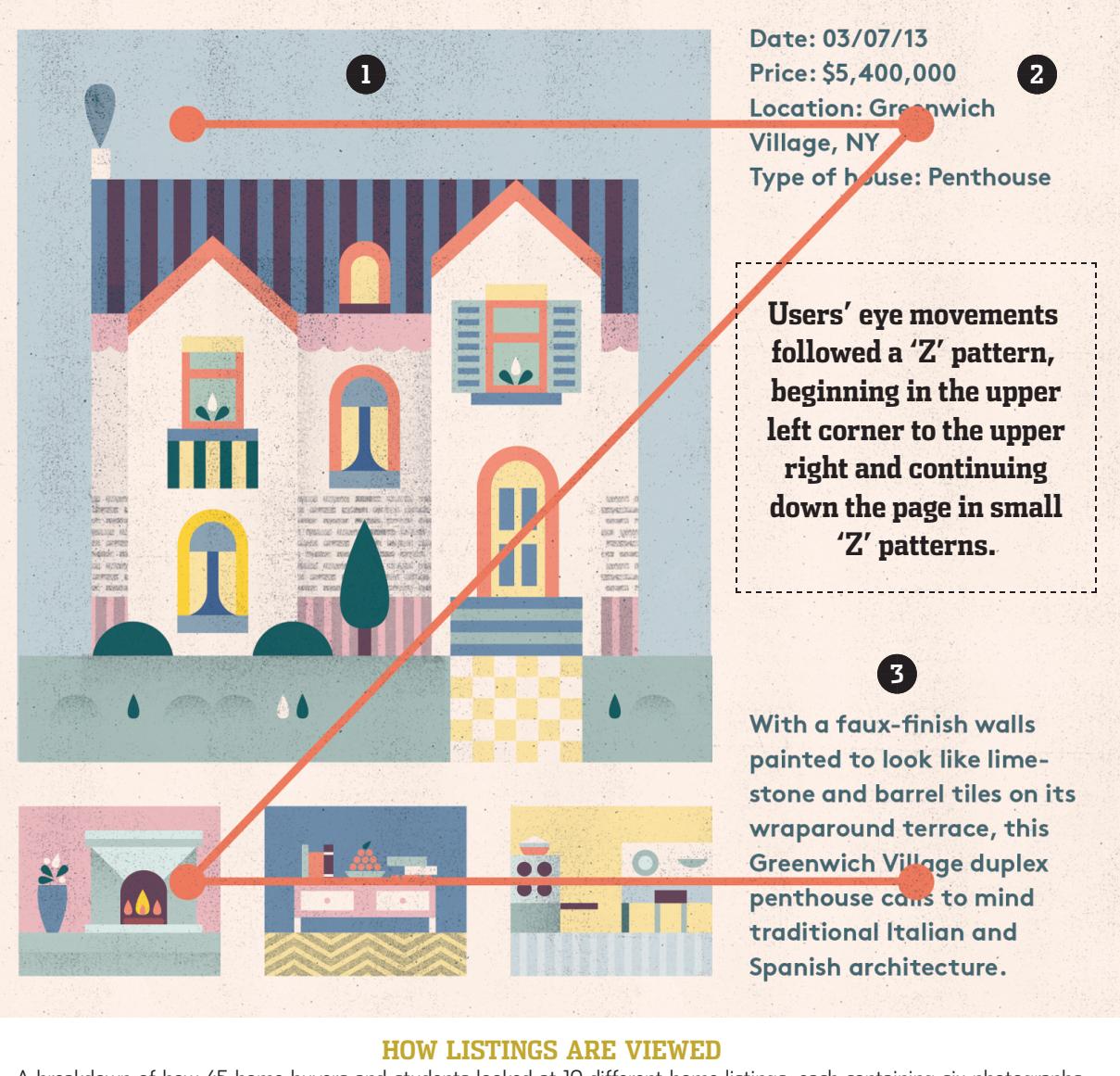
## Enjoying the View

How a user spends time looking at real-estate listings online and the number of times he stops to fixate on a certain element:

Item on screen	Total viewing time, in seconds	Number of fixations
Photos, overall	56.49	156.59
Exterior home photo	20.05	60.74
Kitchen	7.92	24.4
Living room	8.06	24.39
Master bedroom	7.82	24.05
Master bathroom	7.9	24.53
Backyard/view	8.23	24.77

Source: "Toward an Understanding of Real Estate Home Buyer Internet Search Behavior: An Application of Ocular Tracking Technology," Prof. Michael Seiler, Old Dominion University at Norfolk, Va.

Illustration by Lotta Nieminen



Date: 03/07/13  
Price: \$5,400,000  
Location: Greenwich Village, NY  
Type of house: Penthouse

Users' eye movements followed a 'Z' pattern, beginning in the upper left corner to the upper right and continuing down the page in small 'Z' patterns.

With a faux-finish walls painted to look like limestone and barrel tiles on its wraparound terrace, this Greenwich Village duplex penthouse calls to mind traditional Italian and Spanish architecture.

## HOW LISTINGS ARE VIEWED

A breakdown of how 45 home buyers and students looked at 10 different home listings, each containing six photographs. Researchers at Old Dominion University used eye-tracking technology to quantify the results.

1

When viewing real-estate listings online, 95% of users looked at the first home photo—usually the exterior—longest, about 20 seconds.

2

Next, 76% of users viewed the property description, which gives the location, price and property value.

3

The remarks added by the real-estate agent were the most overlooked—41.5% of users didn't view them at all.

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