

Is your apartment hurting your love life?
Photo: Jules Frazier Photography, Getty Images

I laugh whenever I remember the Friends episode starring Rebecca Romijn. She was a gorgeous, laid back love interest for Ross — until she brought Ross home to her filthy apartment. As beautiful as she was, Ross just couldn't get past her bad habits. And although most of us aren't *that* messy, it got me thinking: If you're inviting your date to your house for the first time, what are the dos and don'ts for creating the right atmosphere (beyond flowers and candles)? Is it possible that he's just not that into you because of your apartment?

Absolutely. *The New York Times* wrote about what men often do wrong when decorating for a big date, so I went searching for some answers for us ladies. Sisters Laura Carlin and Alison Forbes from *The Art of Everyday Living* had lots to say.

1. Put away those pictures of you and your ex-boyfriends, or even you and your best guy friends.

"Too many pictures of friends and family hints that you may have no additional space in your life for a relationship," says Alison. Also, try to keep pictures of your friends and family (particularly your parents, for obvious reasons) out of your bed room. Another common mistake is using your bedroom as a home office — it implies you don't think having a romantic space is a priority. This doesn't exactly set an intimate mood.

2. Hide any signs that you are overly organized or anal retentive.

Sally may have alphabetized her movies on index cards in "When Harry Met Sally," but Harry found out about this much, much later. Excessive amounts of pillows, figurines — anything that goes to an extreme usually means you might not be so balanced yourself. There is a pretty obvious line between liking something and being obsessed with it. "When you are too fixated on everything being perfect, it might make



your partner feel like you have an ideal they can never live up to," says Laura. If nothing about your apartment is relaxing, it seems unlikely that you know how to relax yourself.

3. Clean out the clutter.

"Clearing out space in your apartment *makes* space for another person," says Alison, "whether you meet that person now or the in future, and it is a very telling sign that you are ready to make someone else a major part of your life." Take a look around your place and think about how it reflects who you are. Broken, unfinished objects may say that you don't expect the best or strive to complete what you start.

4. Decorate for two — and be cheery.

Alison and Laura find that many women have a bed with one nightstand, a dining room table set for one and art on the walls depicting sad or serious women. Replace those lonely vibes with happy and hopeful ones.

Open your shades and let light pour in, paint your rooms in warm colors (such as chocolate browns, skin tones and creamy olives). "A bowl of fresh fruit like peaches or some nuts gives the apartment life and texture," says Laura. Soft blankets and pillows are homey and make your environment comfortable. All of these touches will show your date that you're a warm and happy person. In other words, someone they want to spend time around.

5. Be clean, organized and get rid of piles.

This is obvious, but let's be more specific — No piles of dirty dishes in the sink, papers strewn about or a bathroom with wet towels, feminine hygiene products or makeup everywhere. And for those of you who chronically put your messes into piles, stop fooling yourself: an organized mess is still a mess. If your home truly reflects who you are, then an apartment filled with junk will make you seem like a mess yourself.

6. Get rid of any evidence that you might read self help books about dating and attracting men.

This is a biggie! He'll feel like he was somehow lured into your life, subliminally or otherwise, by one of your sneaky dating tips. Instead, pile some of your favorite books around the house that reflect some of your favorite things.

7. Decorate with items that appeal to the senses.

Candles aren't the only thing to set a mood. Avoid fluorescent lighting — it's cold, piercing and Laura and Alison said it is known to release stress hormones. Go with warmer, gentler lighting that accents the creamy tones on your walls. Most importantly, make sure your place smells good. Kitty litter, the fish you cooked the night before, or a musty, mildewy odor are all deal breakers. Light some incense, get a lavender scented candle or bake some freshly made cookies (that smell could seduce any guy!).