



What to look for in a new home (and what to ignore)

Here are some tips to help you look beyond your personal wish list and identify potential issues that could cause problems and cost you money down the line.



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Location

- Consider proximity to work, schools, shopping, parks, etc.
- Assess the quality of the local schools. Even if you don't have or plan to have children, good schools support re-sale value.

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Neighborhood

- Evaluate traffic, noise, and the overall charm of the neighborhood.
- Visit the neighborhood several times at different times of day to get a sense of traffic, noise levels, etc.
- Research the safety of the neighborhood. There are online sites that can provide crime rate data

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Land

- Check public land records for setback requirements. If you think you may want to build an addition, pool, deck, etc., in the future, you will likely need zoning approval and permits.
- Look for pooling water which could indicate drainage issues.
- Check out the lot grade. Not only is it important to ensure proper drainage, it could affect any future plans to build a deck or an addition.
- If the yard is unkempt or overgrown, don't let that distract you. Cleaning up and changing plants can be done by you or a landscaper.

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Condo or HOA

- Condominiums, houses or townhomes within a planned development or gated community require you to join the homeowners association (HOA) of that community. Find out the monthly or annual fees, as well as the covenants, conditions, and restrictions (CC&Rs).
- If you're looking at a property within a homeowners association, check out the facilities and services covered in your HOA fees.

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Layout

- Make sure the layout meets your needs. If you want an open floor plan and are considering removing walls, you'll need to know if they are load-bearing.
- Look at the size and placement of windows to ensure you'll get the amount of sunlight you want, at the time of day you want it.
- Make sure you can easily open windows, and that they shut completely. Same with doors – and feel around for drafts.
- Pay attention to overhead fixtures and the location of electrical outlets to ensure you'll have enough light throughout the house.

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Roof & Attic

- Ask about the roof – what it's made of and when it was last replaced. A good roof should last 15-20 years.
- Don't ignore the attic. Determine how easy it is to access, whether it's insulated, and if it offers any storage space.

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Basement

- Check for water marks, cracks in the floor and walls, and other signs of leaks in the basement.
- Watch for signs of termites, ants, or other pests, which can cause structural damage.
- Follow your nose. Unpleasant odors could point to mold, sewage issues, or gas leaks.
- Look for big cracks in the foundation or on walls that could indicate structural problems.

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Utilities

- Test the plumbing. Get underneath sinks to examine pipes for signs of leaks. Run the water to make sure it's clear, check the water pressure, and see how long it takes to get hot.
- Check the electrical panel, as well as the switches and outlets throughout the house. Flip the switches to make sure there's no flickering that could indicate faulty wiring.
- Ask about the age of heating and cooling systems.

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Interior Design

- Don't be seduced by artful staging, though it can provide you with decorating ideas for when you move into the home with your own things.
- Look past any clutter or furnishings that aren't to your taste. Use your imagination to clear the room and fill it with your possessions.
- Focus on the room itself and try to see beyond walls that aren't decorated to your taste – that can be easily improved when you move in.
- If the overall layout works well, you can bring a tired room to life with new fixtures, hardware, and appliances.
- Think about how much stuff you have and if there's ample closet space.

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Connectivity

- Check phone signal strength in different rooms of the house to make sure there aren't any "dead spots."
- Find out what broadband options and speeds are available.

Get a Home Inspection

Following these tips will help you select a potential new home with confidence, but they don't take the place of a home inspection. Be sure to have the home inspected by a professional – it will cost a couple hundred dollars now, but it could save you money and headaches in the long run.

Curious about the mortgage process?

The process of getting a mortgage can seem daunting to say the least. But in our guide to understanding mortgages, **The Road Home**, we've explained it step-by-step so that the road to getting your new home is as smooth as possible.

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