

EXPERT ADVICE

NEW dreamhomes

the builder-homeowner connection



by Hugh Heron

When it comes to new homes, purchasers are much more than just customers; the builder and buyer establish a relationship that lasts for years. The builder is responsible for constructing homes to standards that meet or exceed Ontario Building Code, to deliver them in timely fashion, and to uphold the provisions of the seven-year new home warranty set out by Taron Warranty Corporation to protect owners' rights. Once they take possession, purchasers are expected to keep their homes in good working order through proper maintenance. It's a two-way street.

Today's buyers expect excellent quality and service, and demand more choice than ever before. I've often compared the evolution of homebuilding to the fast-food industry. When the first fast-food chains opened in the 1950s, they served hamburgers, French fries and drinks. Today, these restaurants offer everything from breakfasts to desserts. Likewise, when I worked at Consolidated Building Corporation in the 1970s, we offered six pre-selected packages with a brick colour, roof colour, cabinetry, paint and trim. Today, many builders have design centres with thousands of choices in flooring, cabinets, paint colours, etc. – and we use sophisticated methods to accommodate that level of personalization and still deliver a topnotch product.

Of course, the builder's role doesn't end when owners take possession. After-sales service is an important part of the builder-homeowner relationship. But homeowners must also be accountable for the condition of their homes once they move in. In addition to being the largest investment most people make in their lifetime, a new home is a living, breathing entity that shifts and changes with time, and responds to the family that lives in it.

Sometimes, owners expect after-sales service to look after items that are not really service issues, but lifestyle consequences. For example, condensation may result from extensive cooking without providing air flow during the process. Some people shut off their Heat Recovery

Ventilation systems and the air stagnates rather than being exchanged for fresh air from the outside. These actions on the part of the homeowner create unnecessary problems. Simple things like changing the furnace filter regularly can have a huge effect on a home's condition.

Most builders provide a homeowner manual that explains how your new home "works," including information from manufacturers about specific products and how to care for them. Purchasers also receive a Homeowner Information Package from Taron that includes a section on maintaining the home. The warranty doesn't cover damage resulting from improper maintenance, so it is important to read this document to understand your expected role in keeping your home in good condition. You will also find Home Maintenance Checklists on the Taron website (www.taron.com).

There's help as well from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). On that website (www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca), you can access a Home Maintenance Calendar with a seasonal maintenance checklist. CMHC also sells a detailed Homeowner's Manual that can be purchased online.

The point is, the buyer and the builder are in this together, like partners on a homebuying mission. Each has responsibilities, and they both have to understand their part in the journey.



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