

NEW CONDO GUIDE

Metro Vancouver Edition

INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

Buy from a builder you can trust

By Hugh Heron

Years ago, I used to say that people paid more attention to buying a pair of shoes than a house. That's not the case anymore, because new-home buyers realize their purchase is likely the biggest investment they will make in their lifetime. I'm happy to say that today's shoppers are well educated about what's available in the market, and they are comparing carefully to get the most for their money. The great news is that nowadays, it's easier than ever to do the research required to make a wise decision. Among the top items to explore is the builder's reputation. Buying a new home involves a lot of trust, and you need to feel confident that your home will be built well and serviced efficiently.

In 1967 when I started in the industry in Canada, people shopping for homes relied on word-of-mouth, which is the original form of social networking. Actually, this method is still effective today. Certainly, if you know people who have bought from the builders you are considering, ask about design, quality and service. Drive through completed neighbourhoods and look at how everything came together. Do you find the homes and streetscapes pleasing? Was there attention paid to exterior colours and designs? Has the neighbourhood aged well? You might also knock on doors and ask how the owners felt about their purchase experience. Trust me, whether they are happy or not so happy, they will be glad to let you know.

Of course, you can find out a lot without even leaving your home, now

that the Internet is only a keystroke away. Check on builders' histories and track records by visiting their websites. Tarion Warranty Corp. (tarion.com) is also extremely useful. Check as to whether the builder has been subject to conciliations, which are onsite inspections by qualified Warranty representatives conducted for the purpose of resolving disputes with homeowners.

Whether you research online, in person or both, keep an open mind and place the information in a realistic context. Remember that building homes and communities requires the organization of hundreds of suppliers and trades. We sometimes face labour and/or materials shortages. There might be delays in municipal approvals as well. In addition, realize that even the best builders make occasional mistakes. The important thing is that the builder informs buyers of any problems and does everything possible to fix the situation.

Another thing to be realistic about is word-of-mouth information that comes from social networking websites. Some of the feedback may be on the level; some may be exaggerated or simply not true. Take it all with a grain of salt and gather your information from a variety of sources.

If this is your first new home purchase, take the time to do your homework. It's tempting to get swept away in a sales office where renderings, floorplans and model homes paint a beautiful picture. Remember that builders can promise anything, but it's what they deliver that

counts. This is why reputations are so important.

New home builders understand that an educated buyer is more likely to be a happy one. Sales representatives should be willing to answer all of your questions or point you in the right direction if they don't know. If you have any doubts at all about reading floorplans, what your purchase price includes, what the closing costs will be... ask, ask, ask – and expect a straight answer.

If you are looking to jump onto the new home train, you're already on a positive track. Now, make sure the engineer is qualified to get you to your destination.



Hugh Heron is Principal and Partner in the Heron Group of Companies and President of Heathwood Homes, as well as a former Member of the Board of Directors of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and a Past President of the Toronto Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Home Builders' Association.