

Builders say buyers should ask questions

by BARBARA BROWER
of The Outlook staff

No one says being a builder is easy.

A builder is often entrusted with a dream and with hard-earned, hard-saved money.

It's not easy to build someone's dream house, especially when more than one person's vision is involved. But the real trick is to make the dream come true within financial limitations.

"Ideally, any builder will build in any price range, and will build a home customized to your needs. A lot of people don't realize that. They think you have to buy what is there," says Von Summers, services director of Home Builders Association of Metro Portland.

The first thing to do, he says, is to find a trustworthy builder who has worked in the area you want to live in and whose houses fit your price range.

"If you want to live in Gresham's city limits, find someone who has built in the city limits and is familiar with the permit process and the building codes and things like that," Summers says.

Consider the price range you are willing to pay and then consider the price range of homes constructed by a builder, he advises.

"If you're looking strictly at \$75,000 homes and get a builder who builds in the \$250,000 range, there could be problems. They use different sub-contractors, for one thing."

"Shop around," says Ted Rossman of Lone Oak Construction in Gresham.

"It gives you an idea of what is reasonable. It's a buyer's market right now. Shopping around might also trigger some ideas about what you'd like in your house," he says.

Ask the builder for references and check those references out, he says. Talk to sub-contractors and suppliers to find out if a builder pays bills in a timely fashion. Go out and look at homes built by the builder, talk to the buyers. Find out if the builder does the work expected.

"About 90 percent of our buyers would recommend us. Most good builders can say the same thing," says Charlotte Montgomery of



Charlotte and Bob Montgomery say buyers should look at a variety of homes.

Montgomery Contracting Inc. in Gresham.

She suggests looking at more than one house and at more than the model homes.

"Models tend to have extras so they show nicely. They might have more expensive carpeting and light fixtures. If the buyer is expecting to have those extras and doesn't realize they cost extra there could be a misunderstanding," says Montgomery, who has been in the building industry for 19 years.

"Ask questions about exactly what is included in the price and what isn't," she says.

While you're asking questions, be sure to ask how the builder is on "call backs," says Ken Osbon of Stardust Homes in East Multnomah County.

"Many people don't realize there is no such thing as a perfect house. The foundation may settle and cause sheetrock to crack, or they may find a bubble in the formica. Every house has a call back. Ask the references how the builder is on call backs," he suggests.

"And expect what you buy. Too many times people buy a \$60,000 home and expect it to

be a \$120,000 house. A builder builds to code. If the buyer wants things like more electrical plug-ins they have to be ready to ask for it, and then to pay for it," says Osbon, who has been in the industry for nearly 40 years.

It's a good idea, too, to check with the Builders Board in Salem to be sure they are registered and bonded. The Builders Board, at 378-4621, is a state agency that will force a solution to complaints, and all builders must register.

Most builders agree it is important to establish a good relationship with the buyer, and just as important to keep communications open during the course of construction.

"There has to be trust. The purchaser is buying something they cannot see. They don't really know what they are going to get until it's finished," says Sandy Emrick, president of Concept Construction Inc. in East Multnomah County.

"They should look at a builder's experience and time in the trade and the reputation of the builder. They should look for recommendations. I have to work with the buyer closely. I

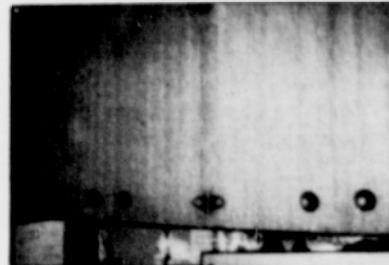
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