

Choosing a Quality Builder

By Mike Heslin, President of HBRA

Whether you are buying a condominium, a townhouse, a single-family home in a subdivision or a custom built house, you want to know that you are buying a good quality home from a reputable builder.

You should choose your builder as carefully as you choose your new home, but before you begin your search, ask yourself some questions: What type of home do you want? In what price range? Where? After you answer these and other important questions about the new home you are seeking, address the question of who should build it.

A good place to start your search for a builder is with your local homebuilders association. Most builders associations can provide a list of their builder members. To find out how to contact your local builders association, visit the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) web site at www.nahb.com and click on the heading “state and local associations.” You may also find other useful information to aid in your home search in the “Especially for Consumers” section.

When buying a new home, you are not buying just a structure. Along with the structure comes a package of services and the quality of those services will have an important effect on your enjoyment of your home. For instance, most homes come with a one-year warranty on workmanship and materials. Since virtually every home is going to need at least minor adjustments and repairs of warranty items during the first year, you should look for a builder who will provide quality service after the sale.

The best way to learn about the quality of service a builder offers is to ask previous customers. If you are buying a detached home in a subdivision, a townhome or a multifamily condominium, find out what the builder has recently built in the area near where you are buying. Then visit some of the previous projects and ask the residents about their experiences with their homes and their builder. The best time to visit is usually on a Saturday morning when people are out doing yard work or chores.

Don't be shy about approaching people. Knock on some doors if you have to. In most cases, a builder's previous customers will be open with you. Try to talk to at least three or four homeowners in each neighborhood. You should not rely solely on the views of only one person. Ask questions like: Are you happy with your home? If you had any problems, were they fixed promptly and properly? Would you buy another home from this builder? Take notes so you can make comparisons later.

Remember that cost is not a direct measure of quality. High quality combines good design and fine products and materials with superior workmanship and proper installation. Just because one home is less expensive than another does not mean it is a better value. Likewise, a more expensive home may not mean better craftsmanship. Look at the quality of the construction features. Inspect the quality of the cabinetry, carpeting, trim work and paint. Ask the builder a lot of questions. Get specifics, take notes and never hesitate to ask questions.

Other useful tools available for new homebuyers is www.HomeBuilder.com web site and the real estate section in your local paper. HomeBuilder.com, the official new homes website of NAHB, lists more than 17,000 builders nationwide and more than 120,000 homes for sale. It also includes information on how to find a custom builder, the planned community of your dreams or information about builders who are active in your area, the types of homes they build and the prices you can expect to pay.

A home is one of the largest and most important purchases you can make. If you do your homework, ask questions, and come prepared, you will develop knowledge and a sense of confidence that will help you to make the right decision. If you have any questions about selecting a builder, contact the homebuilders association in your area for assistance. (268-7008)