

A Homeowner Orientation

Your new home is nearly complete. You are preparing for the closing and getting ready to move. (Where did all this stuff come from?) At this point your builder will contact you to schedule an appointment for your homeowner orientation.

A HOMEOWNER ORIENTATION is a meeting at your new home that provides with a thorough demonstration of your new home and an opportunity to confirm the builder installed all of your selections as your ordered them.

SCHEDULING

Builder systems vary but the following guidelines are typical of most orientation programs.

Although you may be aware of an approximate time weeks in advance, expect several days notice for the specific orientation appointment.

Most builders schedule the orientation for several days before the closing appointment. This practice provides times to complete items noted before you move in.

Allow a minimum of 2 hours for the orientation. Most take 90 minutes, others up to 4 hours.

Avoid scheduling your orientation over a lunch hour or on a day when other appointments compete for your attention.

Avoid late afternoon appointments. Dramatic streams of sunlight or harsh shadows, caused by a setting sun make it difficult to see surfaces clearly.

Generally builders offer appointments Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m.

PREPARATION

To take full advantage of your orientation, consider these hints.

If you visit your home a day or two prior to orientation, you may notice dozen of details that need attention. Last-minute rush is common. The fine-tuning that polishes a home for delivery cannot be done until final installations are complete.

If you haven't already done so, read the builder's limited warranty, warranty standards, and literature you have received about home maintenance.

Review the forms the builder uses for the orientation. Builders who provide a homeowner man-

ual usually include copies in it for you to preview.

Bring your contract, selection sheets, and change orders.

If you have questions, write them down, room by room, so you can bring them up when you get to that part of your home.

Orientations are most beneficial if you can focus on your home and the information your builder presents. Arrange for friends and young children to see the home at a time before or after the orientation.

Wear shoes that are convenient to get off and on and comfortable clothing.

Arrive for you orientation rested and alert.

Plan to listen carefully and take a hands-on approach. Push buttons, lock locks, and flip breakers. This action helps you remember the dozens of details your builder covers.

PROCEDURES

A few builders ask the buyers to go to the sales office at the appointment time, but most meet the buyers at their new home. Depending on the size of the company, the superintendent, assistant superintendent, warranty manager, or a customer service person (whose full-time job is conducting orientations) might conduct this meeting. Most builders follow preplanned agendas and a set route through the home to assure that you cover everything. Stay with the builder to avoid missing useful information.

The builder will list any items the two of you agree need further attention even if the work is already pending. The overall quality of your home should equal what you saw in the builder's other homes. At some point, quality ceases to be specific and becomes a matter of personal taste. Every home has a subjective side. In a few areas your personal taste may exceed your builder's standards. You and your builder want to confirm that your new home achieves the overall level of quality shown in your builder's other work or described in the documents of the sale.

The builder notes each item and arranges appropriate work. Items listed during orientation usually fall into several categories-

Incomplete or missing
(Cabinet knob is not installed.)

Incorrect
(Porch light should be polished brass, not antique.)

Dysfunctional
(Bath fan does not come on.)

Below company standard
(Mitered corner is rough, top right of den door, hallway side.)

Damaged
(Scrape on wall is from carpet installation.)

Uncleaned
(Garage floor is muddy.)

Regardless of how meticulously you and your builder documented details in your purchase agreement, items you did not discuss may arise. Last-minute questions might sound like these: The deck isn't sealed? Plastic window-well covers do not come with the house? Only one towel ring in the powder room? The documents of your purchase, the models, and standard practices in the region are the tools for resolving these questions.

Builder limited warranties exclude repairs for damage caused by moving in or living in the home. If your movers scratch the marble entry floor bringing the piano in, notify the moving company. If you splinter some wood trim and break a tail light backing out of your new garage, repairs to the garage and the car are your responsibility.

MATERIALS DELIVERED

Besides the orientation forms, builders deliver some additional items at the orientation. Ordinarily these items include-

Emergency phone numbers for contacting critical trade contractors (electrical, plumbing, heating) outside of normal business hours

Manufacturer warranties and booklets for appliances, furnace, air conditioner, and so on. If any are missing, the builder will note that and obtain copies for you.

Homeowner association updates about the community such as pool hours, the news from the cable television company, or information about community recycling.

A touch-up kit, typically including small cans of touch-up paint, caulk and so on.

Signed copies of the orientation forms completed during this meeting (By signing these forms you acknowledge that cosmetic surfaces and breakable items in your new home are in proper condition. Exceptions should be written on your orientation list.)

FINISHING TOUCHES

Unless your orientation occurs the same day as your closing, expect your builder to make noticeable progress on remaining items prior to your move-in. The benefit of a few days between orientation and closing are clear. Builders who operate on that schedule may set a second appointment the day of closing to confirm which orientation items are complete and update you any remaining items.

If your home needs a part or a particular trade contractor must be called back, extra time may be needed to complete the work. The builder should keep you informed of the expected schedule for the remaining items. The typical time frame is 10 to 30 days.

Gaining access to occupied homes to complete orientation items is a concern to homeowners

and builders alike. Builders today are more likely to ask that an adult be present while any work is performed on your home. Making appointment around your busy schedule may result in service taking longer than anyone wants. Your cooperation is essential. Builder and trade contractor service hours are typically from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. or from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

WHATS NEXT?

While the builder is attending to these last details on the home, you are handling the last details of your move. All the thinking, planning, deciding, paying, and waiting are about to give way to carrying, unpacking, arranging, and yes, more paying. But some paperwork called closing is next.

Once a buyer decides to buy a house requiring professional remodeling, the big question is how to select a remodeler to do the work. With all kinds of people calling themselves remodelers, it's not difficult to find somebody willing to take your money.

As with any professional, the best idea is for a buyer to ask around and solicit advice from friends who have had good experiences with a specific remodeler. That way the customer can have an opportunity to find out what it was like work with that particular remodeler and see his work. If the customer is satisfied, then he can arrange to meet with the remodeler to see if the remodeler's style and ideas make the customer comfortable.

Of course, depending on the customer's budget and timetable, he may decide to buy the house and then prioritize the repairs, fixing only the essential main systems first.

Like any home improvement, many variables will affect the return an owner will receive on his investment. A rule of thumb is that any repair which brings a house up to the level of the other houses in the neighborhood is a worthy one. Eventually, the homeowner will face the principle of diminishing returns where the home's value will not increase in proportion with the cost of improvements.

One thing that is not variable is that shoddy workmanship will not increase a home's value. The time and resources necessary to restore a fixer-upper may not be acceptable to everybody. But those who decide to accept the challenge and make the commitment to invest in quality home improvements will be richly rewarded.