

# Builder shopping requires thorough investigations

In the market for a new house? If so, you should shop for your builder as thoroughly as you shop for the house itself. Whether you are buying a condominium, a townhouse, a house in a subdivision, or a custom-built house, the quality will be determined by the quality of the builder.

"Most buyers give a lot of thought to the style of house they want," said Robert R. Jones, president of the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan and Robert R. Jones Associates of West Bloomfield.

"Usually, though, they don't think enough about the builder. It's important that they find one who can build the style they want the way they want it."

The real estate section of the local newspaper is a good place to start. Reading it over you can find out which builders are active in your area, what types of houses are being built and what price you might expect to pay.

In addition, the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan has a list of builders who construct houses in various areas. Local real estate agents also are helpful in conducting the search.

Friends and relatives can provide useful recommendations. Ask them about builders they have dealt with or for the names of their friends who have recently had a good experience with a builder.

After making a list of builders, make notes about their reputations and quality of work. Recording all factual information, as well as your own impressions, will make comparisons easier later on.

Perhaps the best way to learn about builders is to visit houses they have built and talk to the owners. Ask the top builders on your list for addresses of their recently built houses. At the very least, drive by to see if the houses are visually appealing and, if possible, get the phone numbers of the homeowners so you can see how they feel about the houses after having lived in them.

Ask people if they are happy with their purchases and if the builder did what was promised and performed in a timely manner. The most telling question of all may be whether they would buy another house from the same builder. Most people will tell you if they are pleased with their houses; if not, they usually will want to tell you about their experiences.

When you buy a house, you are looking for quality and value. The construction features of the house, such as the detail work on cabinets and trim, will tell you a great deal about the prospective builder. Price is important but value is more so... just because a house is more or less expensive than another does not mean it is a better value.

"Value takes more than just price into account," Jones said. "The quality of the construction and the location of the home, along with the price, make up the value of the home. Each home will have a different value for different buyers."

Another important factor in selecting a builder is the warranty provided on the house. Get a copy of the builder's warranty and read it over. If you feel you need help understanding any aspect of it, take it to an attorney. Don't wait until you move in and a problem arises to find out what coverage you have.

"Most builders offer some form of

written warranty," Jones said. "Many of them back their own work while others offer a warranty backed by an insurance company. To get an insured warranty, you must buy from a builder who belongs to an insurance program."

Another thing to find out from a prospective builder is what kind of service you can expect after the sale. Typically, a builder makes two service calls on a new house. One comes between one and three months after move-in, while the other comes at around 11 months, usually right before a one-year warranty would expire. In an emergency, the builder should send someone to your house immediately.

## Ann Arbor Flower & Garden Show nears

The fifth annual Ann Arbor Flower & Garden Show will convey the theme, "Once Upon A Time," showcasing gardens fashioned from history books, fairy tales and our grandparents' memories.

The University of Michigan's Matthaei Botanical Gardens will present the best of the old and new in gardening March 24-27 at the Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds.

The show will feature an acre of professionally designed landscapes and more than 500 horticultural and floral design exhibits. New features include French parterre garden pathways be-

tween buildings and an antique garden furniture and accessories market.

Hours are 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, March 24-26, and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday, March 27. Senior Day is 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday, March 24. For ticket information, call (313) 998-7002.

The Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds is at 5055 Ann Arbor-Saline Road, Ann Arbor. Parking at the show is \$2 per car.

Proceeds from the show will help fund completion of the new Gateway and Herb Knot Gardens at Matthaei Botanical Gardens.



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