

Old House? New House?

Weighing Your Options

Maybe it has something to do with a childhood home we fondly remember. Many of us long for old homes built with solid construction, quality craftsmanship and beautiful details. We wax poetic and wistfully recall the hand carvings, plaster walls and eyebrow dormers of homes we've known. On the other hand, how do the old homes we admire compare with newly minted models—and what should we consider before deciding which to buy?

Location. Typically, old homes sit on generous plots of land in or near town. The neighborhoods are established and usually more central to schools and shopping. Mature trees and plantings provide shade and beautify the property and neighborhood streets. New homes are generally found in new developments outside of town and homeowners who buy into an early can expect to contend with dust and construction sights and sounds as the remaining phases are being built. Landscaping may be skimpy or nonexistent, but a buyer has the opportunity to design the décor from scratch.

Layout. New homes tend to have a more spacious functional layout with higher ceilings, bigger windows, family kitchens, walk-in closets, and family rooms. Some even have media rooms and come pre-wired for cable and computers. On the other hand, older homes were designed for a more formal

lifestyle, which is reflected in the formal dining and living areas and many cozy rooms, including small bedrooms, closets and bathrooms.

Energy efficiency. Those eight-over-eight single pane wood windows add character to an old home, but even with storm windows, they're not nearly as energy efficient as modern dual-glazed or thermal windows. While most old homes lacked insulation in outside walls and attics, homes built today insulate against high heating and cooling costs. Although the bigger windows, higher ceilings and larger rooms, common in new homes, can also cause high utility bills.

Maintenance. With older homes, upkeep could be more expensive because of older appliances, plumbing and electrical systems—not to mention the roof—may need to be replaced. A turn of the century home may have outdated knob-and-tube wiring, and even a recently built home may have an inadequate fuse box-style panel that falls short of the energy demands of 21st century families. But new homes generally come with warranties that will cover the cost for most major problems.

Price. Older homes are usually less expensive per square foot. In addition the tax structure is more predictable because the neighborhood is already established with amenities that newer neighborhoods are still in the process of gaining, such as schools, police and fire services, and infrastructures (roads, sidewalks, etc.). However, with restoration costs a possibility for older homes, your dollars may very well be spent on the back-end rather than upfront.



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If the charm and beauty of an old home wins your heart, hire an inspector to evaluate the home for lead paint, insect and water damage, lead and/or galvanized pipes, outdated wiring, foundation problems and energy efficiency, including windows as well as heating/cooling systems and insulation. After you get the all-clear, you have one last consideration: Does the home fit your lifestyle or would the conveniences of a newer model suit you better? Only you and your family have the answer.

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