
Be realistic when house shopping



DWELLING ON DWELLINGS:

By **Brad Boisvert**

Let's face it, we all want. French philosopher Gaston Bachelard once said, "Man is a creation of desire, not a creation of need."

Take houses, for example. A bear may choose a cave simply because it provides his basic needs of shelter. Yet a man - or woman - will choose a house because it embodies the most wants for the money.

But before you go out looking at real estate, do a little reality check first. Take a hard look at your lifestyle and your family and make an honest assessment of your needs. What are your absolute necessities in a home?

Then, once you look at houses, you can more comfortably weigh the amenities and your wants.

So what are examples of needs?

Number of bedrooms, for starters. Unless they want to sleep stacked three high, a family of five shouldn't bother looking at two-bedroom houses. On the other hand, three bedrooms, although not ideal, may suffice if two siblings are willing to share.

Bathrooms are another key feature. Families with teen-age children may consider two or more bathrooms an absolute necessity.

Other necessities may include:

A good roof.

- A good furnace.
- Adequate square footage.
- A large enough yard for children to play in or gardeners to dig in.
- Garage and storage space.
- Proximity to work or school.
- Accommodation for differently abled individuals (first floor bedrooms for the elderly, for example).
- Kitchen size.

Once you sit down and discuss your needs with your real estate agent, he or she can use Multiple Listings Service to narrow down your house hunting.

Obviously, if you need a barn for a horse, there's no sense in looking at townhouses, right? But a good real estate agent may also see some not-so-obvious alternatives.

You may, for example, be able to convert a finished basement into an extra bedroom. Or space above a garage may make a perfect home office.

If you have a good agent, you will spend your time looking at houses that you know already fit your needs. In this light, you have the luxury of evaluating houses based on their perks rather than their downfalls. And that makes the process more fun and fulfilling.

Examples of perks include pools, paint color, wood flooring, spectacular views or landscaping, insulated windows, bay windows, skylights, new cabinetry ... and the list goes on.

To keep your house hunting from becoming a blur, make sure your agent gives you a print-out of every house you visit. And take notes - and not just mental notes; write this stuff down. Jot down what you thought of the houses' appearances. What would you change about the exteriors or the interiors?

Make notes on every room. How did you like the view from the living room?

Was there space for both a formal dining room and eat-in-kitchen? Does the dishwasher come with the house?

Here are a few things you should make notes on:

- Listing price (an obvious concern).
- Space.
- Yard.
- Exterior color and condition.
- Number and condition of bedrooms.
- Number and condition of bathrooms.
- Size and condition of kitchen.
- Size and condition of the living room.
- Size and condition of the dining room.
- Size and condition of family room and other rooms.
- Size and condition of the garage and basement.
- Condition of furnace.
- Color and condition of floors and carpets.
- Size and condition of windows.
- What appliances come with the house.
- Proximity to schools.
- Schools' state rankings.
- Commute distance.

- Access and distance to town, grocery stores, neighbors, etc.

- Other amenities (pool, skylights, fireplace, etc.)

At the end of the day, you'll have a good idea about where each house stands in terms of meeting your wants as well as needs.

And when looking at real estate, that's a real good feeling.