

Old vs. New Construction



Coldwell Banker Bain

Old vs New: Which is Right for You?

Whether you buy an existing house or choose new construction, it pays to understand your options.

With most things, houses included, you like what you like. Some people love pulling the wrapper off a brand new home, knowing that it's never been lived in. Others prefer the history and character of a house that's withstood the test of time, families and Mother Nature. Whether you buy an existing house or opt for new construction depends as much on personal preference as on tangible factors such as price, availability, lot size, convenience, etc. Here are some of the pros and cons to consider.

Advantages of resale homes:

- **They're available.** You don't have to wait for the house to be built and there are many styles to choose from (Victorian, Tudor, Colonial, Craftsman, Mid-century modern, etc.).
- **They're negotiable.** Not a given, but unless there's a bidding war you're likely to have some flexibility on purchase price.
- **They're known commodities.** Part of selling a house involves disclosing its history and known issues, so you'll be aware of structural or other problems before you buy.
- **They're solidly built.** Many older homes were built of timber from old-growth forests, and often by craftsmen who paid meticulous attention to detail.
- **They've got character.** Architectural details such as hand-carved molding and trim, arches, stained-glass windows, pocket doors, decorative tile, stone fireplaces, etc., lend charm to older homes.
- **They've got mature landscaping.** Trees and bushes planted when older homes were new now add great curb appeal and provide ample shade (and sometimes fruit!).
- **They're in established neighborhoods.** Residential neighborhoods are more likely to stay that way; zoning changes are unlikely.

Disadvantages of resale homes:

- **They're maintenance hogs.** With older houses, things happen. Systems and structures wear out at different times so there's always something to fix.
- **They're costly to update.** Older homes often have outdated plumbing, wiring and heating and cooling systems that are expensive to fix or replace or are incompatible with today's technology.

- **They're costly to renovate.** You can get that cook's kitchen or spa master bath in an older house, but remodeling isn't cheap.
- **They're energy inefficient.** Many older houses leak energy like a sieve, with single-pane windows and poorly insulated walls, doors and chimneys that allow warm air in winter or cool air in summer to escape.
- **They're stingy with storage.** Once upon a time, people had less stuff to stow so storage wasn't a big deal. Literally. Many older homes are plagued with small closets, limited storage space and one-car garages (if there's a garage at all).
- **They're more expensive.** Because many resale homes are located near schools, transit, shopping, cultural amenities – conveniences urban dwellers prize – they tend to be more expensive than similar-size or even larger houses in new subdivisions.
- **They're smaller.** Except for mansions or in-city estates, many resale homes are smaller in square footage and lot size than their newly built cousins.

Advantages of new construction:

- **Customizable.** New-home buyers often get to weigh in on design decisions – picking flooring, kitchen surfaces or exterior paint color – to create a living space perfectly tailored to their tastes.
- **Energy-smart.** New construction is built to code that mandates higher energy-efficiency standards. Walls, ceilings and floors are insulated. Dual- or triple-pane windows keep homes warmer in winter and cooler in summer. Appliances use less energy, making new homes cheaper to operate.
- **Less maintenance.** Today's new homes use materials engineered to reduce maintenance. For example, composite products that replace wood in exterior trim cut down on rot and repainting.
- **Fewer repairs.** New houses are just that, new. With no existing wear and tear, appliances, surfaces and systems are expected to hold up for some time.
- **Modern.** With new construction, many modern conveniences are standard, such as built-in dishwashers, refrigerators, microwaves, wine coolers; they feature master suite baths, workout and media rooms and networked wiring.
- **Builder's warranty.** Most new homes include a full warranty for a minimum of a year; extended warranties cover most components in the house.
- **Homeowners associations.** The long-term effect of HOA rules and regulations helps keep property values high.

Disadvantages of new construction:

- **Non-negotiable.** With new construction, there's usually little to no wiggle room on price; you'll pay full price.
- **Cookie-cutter design.** Some people say tract houses all look alike, but they're really more like variations on a theme. Still, limited floor plans create a homogeneity within new developments that's a turn-off to some buyers, appealing to others.
- **No character.** The old-world charm and architectural details of an older home is absent in new construction. If you need design embellishments, you'll have to add them.
- **House settling.** All houses settle, including new ones. Expect cracks in foundations, walls and door frames to appear over time.
- **Homeowners associations.** Rules and regulations may limit what you can do with your property. If you have to pay HOA dues, that will add to the cost of ownership.
- **Little to no landscaping.** New homes won't have the lush, green lawns (front and back) of resale homes. And it can take years for trees and bushes to grow.
- **Longer commutes.** Because most new construction is located in suburban areas, be prepared for a longer rush-hour commute if you work in the city center.

