



By Richard Grunder

Older homes, as we know, have a lot of charm and the purchase of one of these pieces of residential history can be very exciting. However, be careful that you don't get in over your head.

To buy an older home you need the three ms: money, muscle and motivation. The money will be needed not only for the initial purchase price, but also for the many upgrades that you might want to do. For openers, if the home is a true older home which has never been upgraded over the years, most people would want to upgrade the kitchen and the bathrooms, not to mention the replacement of the roofing and siding materials

if these have not been done in recent years.

The second m is for muscle. Most younger homebuyers who are looking at older homes are on tight budgets. In order to effect many of the desired changes, they will not be able to afford outside contractors to do the work. They will have to add their own muscle or sweat equity, as some people call it, in an effort to do some of the renovations themselves.

Which brings us to the third m, which is for motivation. Will your motivation to spend weekend after weekend falter after the initial excitement passes? If it does, then your renovation projects will grind to a halt. So, going back to the three ms, if you run short on any one of the three, your house adventure could become an old house aggravation.

Also in regard to the purchase of older homes, there are some particular red flags that a buyer should be on the lookout for. The biggest ticket items should be the ones of the most concern for buyers. Specifically, you should make sure that the roof and roof framing is in good order and will not need replacing in the immediate future. This would be particularly true if you're dealing with an older home with a slate or older wooden roof.

The next area of concern would be the plumbing throughout the house. If it hasn't been upgraded over the years, you could be dealing with old and dilapidated plumbing which will be delivering poor water pressure throughout your house and will require major expense after moving in.

Of course, the heating and/or cooling systems should be fully evaluated, since they also represent a big dollar expense, as well as the electrical system. Is the electrical system adequate enough to handle the requirements of today's modern conveniences and appliances or is the house powered by a 60-amp fuse panel or less?

Then too, there are also health and environmental issues to consider. Does the house contain asbestos-related materials, such as asbestos roof shingles, asbestos shingles used for siding or asbestos insulation like that used on heating piping ducts? Also, don't forget about the presence of lead based paint or older lead piping which would contribute to the presence of lead in the water supply. All of these environmental issues and their related expenses need to be considered if you anticipate any type of remodeling as they need to be dealt with safely and/or disposed of properly.

In view of these considerations, it would be prudent to establish a budget for the upgrades that you would be planning on performing after moving in. You should then add the cost of these upgrades to the purchase price and determine if the combined cost is still within the market value of your proposed home.

The important thing to remember from all of this is that if you are considering purchasing an older home, there is more expense to consider than just the initial purchase price. Buying an older home can be fun and exciting, but be sure to keep the total final costs in mind when determining exactly how much home you can afford. It's highly recommended that you have the home professionally inspected so that you know exactly what you're dealing with in regard to your expected repairs, upgrades and renovations.

Richard Grunder is a Certified Building Inspector, and the owner of HouseMaster Home Inspection Service, Santa Barbara. You can reach him at 805-898-2698, or at Richard.Grunder@HouseMaster.com. His website is located at www.SantaBarbara.HouseMaster.com.

Home Improvement Q&A

By Alan J. Heavens
The Philadelphia Inquirer



Q: It's time to replace our kitchen floor. We're considering installing one-piece vinyl or ceramic tile. Our countertops are butcher block, if that matters. Can you give us some pros or cons for each, or, better yet, your clear-cut favorite?

A: The composition of the countertops and the cabinets, the color of the room, the look of the appliances, and the amount of natural and artificial light "splashing" on the flooring at any time all have a role to play in your choice.

Ten years ago, I would have recommended tile or vinyl (I have installed both) because

they were designed to stand up to the kind of wear and tear a kitchen or bathroom gets. These days, options include engineered wood, hardwood, cork, bamboo, and laminate, among others. I'd look into all of them before deciding.

Q: I have an older house with bathroom wainscoting covered by lead paint partly covered by tile. (The old basin cracked, and we replaced it, installing a smaller backsplash.) I'd like to remove the rest of the tile, smooth the combination of paint and adhesive, and paint it. I guess I'll use Safest Stripper for the smoothing.

My concern is the lead dust when I pull off the tiles, and my idea is to wet around and behind each tile as much as possible before pulling one off, wear a mask, and keep the window open and the door closed. I've discussed this with a plumber and also with a contractor who was in the house for other reasons. Both say I worry too much and that the amount of lead is insignificant.

...I would value your opinion, as well as any suggestions you might have.

A: I always err on the side of caution. Take every precaution you're planning. There is probably not very much lead dust, as the plumber and contractor say, but there is enough to track it around the house on the soles of your shoes.

Q: I have a double house with side-by-side bathrooms, which I am remodeling. I want to put something in the walls between the two bathrooms to minimize the sound between them. I'm considering an extra layer of drywall on one wall. Do you have a suggestion for me?

A: I'd look first into the Quietzone products manufactured by Owens Corning. An additional half-sheet of drywall may or may not accomplish what you want it to. Plaster walls are much thicker than drywall, and they seem to do little to cut down on noise. You may be asking the added sheet of drywall to do something it cannot.

Q: I have noticed my roof is stained black, making it look horrible and perhaps damaging it. Is there something I could do to remove this marking?

A: The black stuff is an algae called Gloeocapsa magma, and it thrives on asphalt shingles on the shady roofs of houses, where it has constant moisture. When roofing manufacturers began making fiberglass shingles as older materials disappeared from the market, they added ground-up limestone to make the shingles heavier. The algae appears to thrive on limestone.

You can clean the algae off with oxygen bleach; chlorine bleach will damage the shingles. Roofers are now nailing copper or zinc strips at the highest points of roofs so that rain washes copper and zinc down on the algae, killing it.

© 2007, The Philadelphia Inquirer.
Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.