



Buying a new home is one of the most exciting steps you can take in your life. It's also one of the biggest financial investments you will ever make, so choosing wisely is important.

There's so much to consider, from location right down to your kitchen counters, and of course, there are many condominiums on the market offering phenomenal choices. A great way to narrow down your search is to make a list – or in the case of savvy computer users, a spreadsheet – that includes the items you really have to have, and those that would be nice, but are negotiable. Then, compare apples and apples to get the most for your condominium dollar!

Start with the big picture. Where do you want to live? Under your "location" column, note how far buildings are from your work, your family and the places you go regularly, such as sports venues, club meeting halls, places of worship, etc. Keep in mind that the distance from point A to point B on a map is only part of the picture. It's a good idea to actually do the drive to these spots and find out how much time it takes with road twists and turns, traffic and the like. If the condo is close to public transportation, you will save a lot of money on gas mileage and wear and tear on your vehicle – and maybe you don't need to own a car at all.

Keep an open mind, too. Buying in an established area is great, but it

can also be wise to consider purchasing in an up-and-coming area where real estate values are likely to rise as the neighbourhood becomes more established – it's a great way to gain equity.

You'll also want to consider the exterior of the condominiums you look at. Are they part of a master-planned community that encompasses parks, landscaping, courtyards and retail venues? Or are you looking for something on the lake? Does the exterior architecture appeal to you? Figure out a rating system and jot notes on your list accordingly. If you have a taste for the modern, you will probably be happiest coming home to a sleek condo with clean lines.

Don't forget about the amenities. Today's common areas are uncommonly beautiful, and you should think of them as an extension of your living space. Your list could include a pool, fitness room, party room, games room, guest suite, theatre room, rooftop garden, virtual golf and any other amenity you come across. Having these spaces in the building enables you to entertain a crowd, barbecue or play pool with friends, hold a Grey Cup party for the gang and host overnight visitors, regardless of how compact your suite may be. Remember that even if you think you may not use a specific amenity, these can all add to the resale value of your suite if and when you move in the future.

Next on your list should be features and finishes, and here's where you need to watch comparing

apples and oranges. Your brochure package should have a Schedule A of appointments. Study it carefully. For example, most condos offer hardwood in the main living area, granite kitchen countertops and stainless steel appliances with the purchase price. Those that don't may carry a lower price tag, but if these items are on your must-have list, then you'll have to pay to upgrade.

Nowadays you'll find incentives galore. Again, look at the big picture. Receiving free upgrades with your purchase price may be just the thing that tips the scale toward one condo over another.

Remember, every piece of real estate you buy is an investment, whether you live in it or not. When you shop, compare fairly, and the best way to do that is to make a list, and check it twice. You're sure to end up with something nice!



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