

Excerpts from *The Brand-New House Book*

On options

“A fireplace is another good bet, but don’t go overboard. One will add value, but more than one generally will not, and a fireplace is worth more in some locations than others. For most buyers, the family room is the desired spot. A fireplace in the living room is less sought-after, and having one in a master suite is definitely frivolous unless the house is at the very high end.” P. 77

On lots

“You don’t want a lake in your backyard with every downpour. In a production-built subdivision, all the lots may look the same, but some will be ‘collectors’ of the runoff from five or six adjacent lots... engage a landscape architect to walk the subdivision with you and evaluate the drainage and grading of different lots.” P. 175

On plan configurations

“While you may know that a one-story house costs more per square foot than a two-story house with the same floor area (because the one-story has a larger foundation and roof area), you may not appreciate more subtle distinctions that affect cost. For example, moving the master suite down to the first floor will raise the cost, unless you eliminate other first-floor functions such as a formal living and dining room, because your builder will end up having to add a master suit wing on the back. This will increase the cost for the foundation, exterior walls, and roof.” P. 37

On contracts

“Most sales contracts have words to the effect that the house that you are purchasing will be ‘substantially similar to the builder’s model,’ but ‘construction of the house may have changes from the precise dimensions of the interior and the exterior’...if a particular dimension is very important, for example your garage must be at least twenty-three feet long to accommodate your Chevy Suburban...insist on adding this in a contract addendum.” P. 209

On hiring expertise

“For production-built houses, you should engage an attorney to review your sales contract, a landscape architect to help you choose a lot, an arborist to evaluate mature trees...and a private home inspector to monitor construction. The costs for all this advice would be about what a builder would charge for the whirlpool tub that most people insist on but rarely use once the novelty has worn off. Engaging a fifth expert, a buyer’s agent, will be costless, as the agent’s commission will be paid by the builder. In the case of a custom-built house, the attorney’s fees to review your contract with the builder will be higher, but that much more important because you will be putting more money into the project.” P. 18