Condo vs House Living

There are many decisions to be made before taking the property plunge, but for many the first thing to consider is whether to purchase a freestanding house or a condo.

By Jan Tompkins, Broker/Owner of Azure Realty

A freestanding house or a condo? Each has advantages and disadvantages that can greatly affect an owner's living experience. While lifestyle and cost can help determine which one is more suitable, there are also basic differences between the two property types. Homeowners purchase the house and the land underneath, whereas condo ownership includes only the living space inside of the unit and a portion of the common area of the condo building.

CONDO

According to recent statistics, more buyers are choosing to purchase condos over houses in recent years due to a resurgence in urban living. There are, however, other advantages and disadvantages to consider.

PROS

- Condos are usually located in tourist or urban areas and within walking distance to shops, restaurants and other places of interest;
- They often have resort-like amenities, such as 24-hour security, pools and fitness centres that may be cost-prohibitive in a house;
- With people living busier lives condos are an attractive choice due to their convenience and low-maintenance lifestyle;
- Owners can often take advantage of rental pools whilst not in residence to offset expenses;
- Since association fees (strata fees) cover the exterior and many of the expensive components of the structure, maintenance costs are limited to the interior of dwelling;
- Condo living can create a strong sense of community as a result of the close proximity between neighbours.

CONS

- A major drawback to condo life can be strata fees, which are collected outside of the monthly mortgage payment and used toward building maintenance and amenities. These fees can be expensive and increase unexpectedly when extra money for maintenance is needed;
- Another potential con is that all owners share in the decision making process with regard to the condo building;
- Many seek the sense of community and safety found in condos, while others do not like the strata restrictions associated with such living situations.

HOUSE

A popular choice for many, there are benefits and shortcomings to consider before purchasing a freestanding house.

PROS

- A major advantage to buying a house is having complete control to make changes to the property (both inside and out) without the consent of others;
- Another advantage is that homes often allow for extra indoor and outdoor space, which is more conducive to accommodating families, children and pets;
- Houses generally have more privacy due to the fact that neighbours do not live in as close proximity as they would in condos.

CONS

- Homeowners are completely responsible for all maintenance inside and outside of the property, including care and upkeep of the yard, pool and sometimes docks. Therefore, buyers should take into consideration the cost associated with acquiring the equipment necessary for regular maintenance;
- Improvements, even though they will likely increase the home's resale value, require an initial investment of time and money;
- Another con is that utility bills are often higher since houses generally have more space than condos;
- Although it is possible to rent out one's home whilst away, the onus is on the owner to facilitate all aspects as there is no rental pool to take advantage of;
- Most homes lack the 'turn key' advantage that comes with condo living.

While each scenario involves trade-offs of one sort or another, only you can decide which dwelling best suits your lifestyle needs.

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