

Vague Real Estate Terms

Through the years humorous articles have been written poking fun at comments in real estate ads. We all know that "close to public transportation" should be interpreted as "built over the subway". But the following are vague real estate terms that can get real estate salespeople into trouble. The age of consumerism has become the age of litigation, and the following terms should be avoided or used judiciously.

New Roof

The term "roof" is misleading in that it implies the roof covering plus the roof sheathing, rafters or trusses. The word "new" is rather nebulous as well. "Shingles replaced in 1990" is a more accurate description.

Updated Wiring

Does updated wiring mean the size of the service has been increased or additional circuits have been added? Does it mean that the older knob tube wiring has been torn out (which is usually not necessary)? Sometimes it means that the old outlets have been replaced with modern-looking ones, however the wiring has not been changed at all.

A better approach may be to comment on the adequacy of the incoming service and more importantly the adequacy of the distribution network. Both of these however, are very difficult to assess without a solid understanding of electricity. We all know that you cannot determine the size of an electrical service by reading the sticker on the main box in the basement. It may be best to leave this one alone.

Thermal Windows

There is really no such thing. The R value (resistance to heat transfer) of a typical wall in a modern house is approximately R12 to R20. The R value of a single glazed window is R1. What about a double glazed window? R2! The window manufacturers call this a 100% improvement! The real benefit of double glazing is that it increases the surface temperature of the inside pane of glass so that condensation does not form on the windows in the winter time.

If the second pane of glass is a separate storm window, there will be a separate frame for the storm. This creates a second barrier to air infiltration and in some cases, it is a better arrangement than a double glazed window in a single frame.

Upgraded Plumbing

Are we talking about new bathroom fixtures or new copper pipes? If we are talking about new pipes, are we talking about all new pipes within the house or just the accessible ones in the unfinished portion of the basement? When we say "all copper plumbing" do we mean the waste piping as well? From the mid 1950's to the late 1960's, waste plumbing was also copper.

In the vast majority of houses where old galvanized supply plumbing has been replaced with modern copper, the line coming in from the street has not been replaced. Back in the days when galvanized plumbing was installed, the line coming in from the street was not galvanized steel. Instead it was lead. Recent newspaper articles and television programs have people all in a knot about the lead in houses. This is not to suggest that this is a problem, however, terms such as upgraded plumbing may make purchasers believe that the supply line coming in from the street has been changed as well.

Totally Renovated

One person's idea of a total renovation is quite different than another's. If a house has eight year old shingles on the roof at the time of the renovation, there would be no need to replace the shingles unless the renovation includes changes to the roof line. The term "totally renovated" leads some purchasers to believe that every part of the house that shows wear has been replaced. Therefore, they expect new shingles and are disappointed to find that the roof is "older" even though it does not require replacement.

There are many more expressions that cause confusion. With the degree of professionalism on the rise in the real estate community, there is no place for ambiguity.

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