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When buying a home, the more information the better

*By Stephanie Earls
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ALBANY, N.Y. — Old homes have lots of things to say, especially to new buyers.

Things like: Isn't remodeling much easier when you watch it on TV? The term master bedroom is applied far too loosely, don't you think?

However, a new (old) home can be rather tight-lipped when it comes to sharing info on the practical things: When the roof was installed, and who did it. When the heating system was last inspected, and by whom. Whether the washing machine is still under warranty. Whether Susan B. Anthony once partied there.

When I moved into my new (old) house, I didn't expect much in the way of background info. The previous owner had lived overseas for years, and the house had been more or less vacant. Within a few weeks, after talking to neighbors, I'd figured out the basics — trash pickup time, parking regulations, which neighbor was responsible for the obesity epidemic among the block's squirrels.

The upshot? The more information you get about your new home before you move in, the better equipped you'll be. To a degree, the mystery element is simply part of moving into a new home. New buyers figure they'll have to tackle issues as they come and learn by trial and error.

That said, we asked a few real estate agents what kinds of information they've seen homeowners leave behind, as well as suggestions for good (and helpful) parting "gifts":

"Appliance manuals on any mechanical things in the house, if they have them," said Timothy Mulchy, broker/owner of Select Homes in Albany. "Of course, most homeowners, if they ever had (the manual), they don't know where it is, or they threw it away."

Sellers should also provide info on utilities companies, including cable and phone.

In Mulchy's experience, though, buyers are usually more concerned with lifestyle questions than logistics about the home. "It's the simpler things that are more important to them," he said, such as what time the trash collector or mail or school bus or newspaper comes. "Or are there special programs at the library or the (YMCA). Or where's a good place to get good pizza, good takeout?"

It isn't that the new buyers don't care about the home's mechanical issues, he added. It's just that in the giddy flush of new ownership, they're not thinking about potential problems. For buyers moving into a subdivision, a "deed restriction" book, listing the basic rules of the community, should come with the home. "I find that (sellers) forget to do that, and the (buyers) will go ahead and put a shed out and they're not supposed to," said Francis Tironi, owner of Tironi One Realty LLC. "That's really a big thing."

Other items sellers should let buyers know about:

- Contact information for the companies/workers who service the appliances.
- A location of the mechanicals in the house, including water and power on/off valves.
- The location of a well or septic system, and who services or drilled them.
- The age of the roof.
- When items such as the electrical, kitchen or windows were upgraded.

- A collection of heating bills.
- The name of the plumber and electrician.

"All these are especially important if somebody's buying from out of town," Tironi said. "It would be a nice thing to make up a list like that, even including things like a good mechanic, emergency numbers and the closest hospital. I sold this town house to a gentleman and the first or second day he almost cut his finger off, he called me up and didn't know where to go."

The new subdivision homes that Tironi builds all come with a handbook that tells owners about the house, and includes a list of relevant phone numbers.

"This is all pretty much done for you," he said.

Helen Simpson, who runs Helen Simpson Real Estate, suggests sellers leave their buyers with a "sunny disposition and their phone number." But talking specifics . . . "I would say, leave a list of all the people they could contact," Simpson said. "If there was a problem with an appliance previously, who worked on it? That way, someone wouldn't have to re-diagnose the problem." Simpson also suggests leaving behind a list of people the sellers thought were trustworthy to do repairs. "There are a lot of people who claim to have the skills and knowledge, and some don't," she said.

Some good things to pass along:

- Copies of the before and after photos of any renovations you did.
- Who mows the lawn.
- The names and numbers of neighbors.
- Info about any of the home's quirks: If it's on a hill, does rain flood the house or crawlspace? Do you have to jiggle the toilet lever so the water doesn't run?
- Also, especially with older homes, if the sellers know they should tell the buyers who owned the home in the past, and whether the family (or the home) has any local historical significance.

"Every house has a story: Who stayed there? Maybe generals?" Simpson said. "(Are there) old love letters?"

"People move on and they might die, but the houses live on for hundreds of years."

Texas' population continues to grow, migration study shows

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Texas was the top state in the country for the number of inbound moves in 2007, according to the **Atlas Van Lines** migration study.

That means Texas welcomed the highest number of new residents out of all the states in the country. (Atlas did not release actual move figures.)

The Atlas Van Lines migration study shows that Florida has lost some of its luster as a state for new residents. In fact, for the second year in a row, Atlas Van Lines moved more residents out of Florida than into the state.

For the first time since 2001, California had more inbound moves than outbound moves, according to Atlas Van Lines.

"Atlas' migration study reflects the movement of the nation and identifies thriving hot spots in America," says Greg Hoover, senior vice president and chief marketing officer for **Atlas World Group**.

"Overall, the number of household-goods moves was down for the industry, as the post-Katrina exodus from Louisiana into the surrounding states leveled off and the housing market continued to stagnate. Real estate costs undoubtedly influenced migration patterns this year as well," Hoover adds.

Atlas Van Lines is a subsidiary of Atlas World Group in Evansville, Ind. The company had revenues of \$986 million in 2006.