

**The “Bones” to Pick
Or
How to Choose a “Good” House**

Why are some houses better investments than others? Location and surrounding issues aside, these better houses often have what realtors call “good bones”. Here are some “bones” to pick when shopping for a house:

- **Integrity – We live in a neighborhood where most houses were designed by professional architects or skilled builders. Houses were designed from the bottom up to have a unique style and layout that would please a particular, often sophisticated, client. At the outset, our local housing inventory was of a higher caliber than housing in other neighborhoods.**

Generally, superior houses that have had fewer owners have more integrity because they have had been subjected to fewer owner urges to affect significant alterations. *Good bones tip: choose the untouched, unspoiled classic period houses. If they are sympathetically updated, great; if un-restored, they are well worth the costs of restoration.*

- **Consistency – Look for houses that have details that are the same throughout. Windows and doors should be the same type throughout—and of the original design. Shun houses with later-period aluminum or louver (jalousie) windows. Worse yet, are the houses that have had the original window dimensions cut down to accommodate newer, smaller, standard-sized windows. Some post-War houses had aluminum windows and sliding doors from new. Mixing wooden components with the original aluminum ones often looks odd. *Good bones tip: think of the elements of a house as a language of materials and components—and style as its grammar.***
- **Fashion – Some houses seem to collect eras of fashion. It’s like walking through the 1920s front door into the 1960s living room into the 1990s kitchen to the 1980s master bath. These are the houses “flippers” tear the guts out of. What’s left when they are done is often a homogeneous interior of 2000s fashion. Few flippers take the time and trouble to restore a fine older house to its original integrity because to do so costs more than imposing a “now” fashion upon it. What they do can actually diminish the value of a home, as “now” quickly becomes passé, e.g., granite kitchens. *Good bones tip: fashion is ephemeral; good style lasts forever. Avoid fashion-challenged houses if possible.***

- **Layout – A weak floor plan is expensive, or even impossible, to fix. Generally, three-bedroom, or more, houses are the best investments. Ideally, at least three bedrooms should be together on one level, as families prefer to have kids close by. Notice details of floor plans as you walk through a house. How far is the garage from the kitchen? Which rooms have the best views? Can you see upstairs bathroom doors from the entry hall (very awkward)? How far is the kitchen from the garden areas (so that supervision of children and entertaining are facilitated)?**

Good bones tip: we live in California in large part because of our superb climate. California's gift to modern living was to move the public rooms to the rear of the house so that the garden could be enjoyed as a public area as well. Choose houses that embrace this indoor/outdoor concept.

- **Era of Construction - About 1935, California updated its building code to reflect lessons learned in the 1933 Long Beach quake. For example, because many homes in the '33 quake fell off their foundations, post-1935 houses were required to be bolted to their foundations. Each quake since then has brought ever-more comprehensive revisions and additions to the code. Older homes can be retrofitted, but at added cost. *Good bones tips: the newer the home, the more robust the construction is likely to be. In an older home, ask what, if any, seismic retrofitting has been done. Consult an expert inspector to evaluate any retrofitting.***
- **Exposure – Sunny houses are more valuable. *Good bones tip: look for houses with southern exposures for the main rooms. They will have good light all day, all year.***
- **Magic – Every home should have a bit of magic. The architect Palladio said that a great room should have at least one dimension over-scale. Our pioneer architects knew this well, which is why so many Los Feliz living rooms have high ceilings. A sensational view is magic all the time—another reason our hillside neighborhood came to be. *Good bones tip: Choose magic in your home!***

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