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THE HGTV PROBLEM

Realtors bemoan the property fantasies of home buyers.

So you want to buy and renovate an old home. How hard can it be? You meet with a realtor, head to some open houses, and *voilà*. As for the renovation, you can simply roll up your sleeves and do it yourself, right?

Those effortless scenarios play out on endless episodes of popular HGTV shows like *House Hunters* and *Love It or List It*. In reality, though, realtors say buying and updating a home is far more complicated than the typical TV portrayal.

Charles King, a realtor who works in Boston and on the South Shore, calls this the HGTV problem. The channel reflects a cultural obsession with aesthetics, he says, and can mislead aspiring buyers,

leading them to develop unrealistic expectations about their budget and dwell on superficial details (that pretty paint color) while ignoring crucial elements (the crumbling foundation).

The seemingly low cost of many homes featured on HGTV — which are often located in small towns and rural areas across the country — is also deceiving for viewers in Greater Boston, King says.

“People are buying waterfront mansion homes for \$300,000 [on HGTV],” he says, laughing. “You can’t even get a parking space in some of Boston for \$300,000.”

The leisurely buying process depicted on the show is particularly absurd, says Marjorie Vogt, owner of Vogt Realty Group in Dedham and West Roxbury.

“People don’t look at three houses and buy one and get it,” she says. “I wish it was that easy.”

Once the house is purchased, renovations aren’t as simple as “knocking down a wall,” a common request that King hears from HGTV-crazed clients. Because the shows give the impression that most work is of the do-it-yourself variety, buyers often don’t realize they’ll have to budget for carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and other professionals, says Red Hilton, who runs the online-only Greater Boston realty AskForRed.com.

“These shows can really deceive people into thinking that you could just buy the house and do whatever you want without asking for permission,” says Erica Moise of Centre Realty Group in Newton, who notes that the shows rarely cover the process of obtaining permits for home renovations — which can be tricky.

Shows on HGTV might be rooted in reality, but ultimately they’re still reality television. Realtors say it’s their job to separate fact from fiction, especially when it comes to budgets and clients’ expectations.

“HGTV is like the . . . WebMD of real estate,” Hilton says. “There’s information there, but you have to know how to use it.”

—Brenna Donovan

