

EXPERT OPINION

Peace of Mind

BOWA's pre-sale consultations save potential homebuyers a world of worry



If you've ever wanted to buy a house that may have a few flaws and questioned the wisdom of such a move, then you know how Tom Baltimore and his wife Hillary felt when they looked at a Potomac home that sat in a desirable neighborhood on a terrific lot, but that came with more than a few challenges.

"I absolutely loved the lot, with its tree line and the privacy of a cul-de-sac," says Baltimore, cofounder and president of Bethesda-based RLJ Development. "But the house was in bad shape and we knew it would be a daunting challenge to get it to meet our vision."

The Baltimores were ready to take on a renovation project, but weren't sure just how much work this particular house would require. They turned to BOWA Builders, Inc., a locally based design/build firm, for a pre-purchase consultation.

"A good pre-purchase consultation is all about determining if the house is, or can be made, the right house for that particular purchaser," says Steve Kirstein, a BOWA principal and

the team leader on the Baltimore job. "The most important thing we can do is to help avoid a disaster, like buying a house that can never be made into what the buyers envision. Sometimes it's a question of the budget they have versus the work that would need to be done, and sometimes it's a question of being unable to meet all the permitting requirements. We can figure out if the project is feasible and a good match for that particular buyer."

Though such consultations can save buyers a good deal of money by helping them avoid a "disaster purchase," BOWA doesn't charge prospective clients for the service. "We tend to work with serious buyers referred to us by people we know," Kirstein says. Even if a buyer walks away from a particular property on BOWA's advice, they usually end up hiring the firm at some point down the road.

Another advantage of bringing in a pre-consult team before closing on a house is the time it shaves off a renovation schedule. In the Baltimores'



Tom and Hillary Baltimore's renovated Potomac home (left). Once moldy and dilapidated, the pool house is now a stunning feature of the property (above).

case, that added up to several months, at least. "We took the time at the beginning to get to know the Baltimores and what they wanted in their new home, and then took the time to really get to know the house they were considering," Kirstein says. "We were able to give them clear guidance, and when they decided to go ahead with the purchase, we were

ready to get working."

The challenges BOWA faced were complex. The garage area had four inches of standing water in it, and the pool house was riddled with mold and falling apart. BOWA saved it and today it's one of the crowning features of the property.

In the end, the home was totally remade according to the Baltimores' wishes, and then some. "BOWA also offered some important design ideas that ended up making the finished product that much better," Baltimore says.

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