



## HACKED OFF...

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*What makes journalists really angry? In this regular spot, journalists have a chance to vent their spleen over the issues they care about. And we invite readers to respond. This week, Rebecca Winward wants to know why on earth people buy new-build homes, arguing that it's a very dubious honour to be the first to live in a property.*

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I suppose I shouldn't be surprised that in a consumer society such as ours, 'newness' is so highly prized. It's understandable in some circumstances - who'd want someone else's smelly cast-off trainers, or a PC that's so outdated that you can't run the software you require? And while 'vintage' fashions can be chic, there are still some lengths that nobody will go to - the market for second-hand smalls is unsurprisingly, er, small.

But why on earth does the belief that brand-new is best apply to housing? I think it's simply crazy. Older homes are most definitely the wiser choice, and it's not just because of the unique character that a period home offers - there are practical reasons too. For starters, the oft-quoted premium on buying a new house is 10-15 per cent, which, when you consider the price of even a modest abode these days, is far from insignificant.

So what does that extra outlay buy you? A pristine home with your pick of interior fixtures? Well, it's more likely to be your choice from a small menu of fittings designed to appeal to the uninspired majority. And yes, buying new does ensure that all the appliances in the home are unused, but it's not always a good thing. I've heard stories of leaking radiators, dodgy wiring, and waste pipes not being connected - leading to all sorts of nasty surprises when systems are first used.

This leads me on to the prickly subject of snagging. What a terrible misnomer! The Oxford English Dictionary states the definition of 'snag' being 'an unexpected or hidden obstacle or drawback' - but a quick browse around some of the online forums will uncover many disgruntled buyers who found faults that were far from hidden. Plugs hanging off walls, cracked walls, half-turfed gardens... The list goes on.

And it's not just these imperfections that betray the fact that developers are trying to wring the greatest profit out of the smallest outlay. Cramped together to ensure the maximum number of 'units' on the site, these properties have tiny gardens (if they have one at all), while driveways and garages (ditto) seem to have shrunk so much that even a Fiesta is a snug fit. Equally annoyingly, the footprint of the house is so small that rooms

are tiny boxes, and built-in storage non-existent - where you're supposed to put your vacuum cleaner or ironing board is a mystery to me.

Then there's the question of durability. All over Britain you'll find historic buildings dating back hundreds of years - but how many new homes will survive for posterity? It seems quality is no longer a consideration. Internal walls have the sound-proofing capacity of cardboard, interior fittings are designed down to a price, while the ubiquitous plastic window is said to have a lifespan of just 15-25 years, depending on who you listen to (in stark contrast to the centuries that the traditional wooden sash can cope with).

On the subject of not-too-fantastic plastic, I am incredulous that a material made from petroleum, produced using methods that create huge quantities of greenhouse gases, is used so much in new-build homes. Surely this is an age when we're all supposed to be eco-savvy? It's not just uPVC that is environmentally unsound, either - there simply is no logic in building homes out of fresh materials that are shipped in from around the world (emitting plenty of greenhouse gases in the process), when there are reclaimed local materials that can be re-used, and perfectly sound buildings laying empty - for example, the vacant apartments above our high street shops.

Buy a new home? I wouldn't waste my money - or the world's resources.