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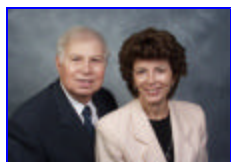
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In 2003 low interest rates and demand for homes drove the market to milestones in sales, prices and refinancing. The median price of single-family homes in the San Fernando Valley hit \$413,000 in December. Economists are predicting a strong 2004 in home sales and mortgage rates are expected to stay in the historically low range of 6% to 7%.



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Three Potential Home Hazards

A home inspector's job is to survey a home for potential problems, from structural compromises to potential health risks. This investigation lets the buyer know the condition of the home, as well as environmental factors that may be a cause for concern.



Here is a look at three environmental factors that may raise a red flag ! should they be discovered during the home inspection.

Radon – This gaseous radioactive element can be released from the rock and earth beneath a home, from well water, or from a home's building materials. Health professionals recommend having a home tested for Radon because it is a known carcinogen linked specifically to lung cancer. A Radon test will reveal whether the home has acceptable levels of the gas or if steps should be taken to reduce the concentrations.

Asbestos – At one time this material was used in homes because of its insulation properties. However, it has since been definitively linked to several lung diseases. You should know that asbestos is not always an immediate hazard. If the asbestos is deemed to be in good condition it may be left alone and monitored. However, if the material is frayed or damaged the particles may be airborne and the asbestos may need to be professionally removed.

Mold – While it is common to find mold spores inside a home, problems can arise when there is active mold growth in the home. This growth increases the

Key Questions to Ask Your Listing Agent

Before you sign a contract with a listing agent to market and sell your home, you should interview at least three different real estate professionals. Here are some questions you should ask.

1. Are you a licensed real estate professional in good standing? Verify with your state real estate commission that each individual is licensed.

2. What is your education ! and experience? Find out how much education each agent has and don't be afraid to ask for an explanation of credentials you are not familiar with. In addition, find out how long they have been selling real estate.

3. What is your experience in my neighborhood or town? Ask each person to give you his or her perspective on general market



conditions and then ask them about the specific factors affecting your community. All! so ask if he or she has had experience selling homes

in your neighborhood.

4. What will you do to sell my home? Ask each interviewee to explain in detail all the steps that will be taken to sell your home. The agent should also be prepared to present a Competitive Market Analysis or CMA. This review of local homes sold can help you and the agent determine an attractive asking price.

5. Who will I be working with? Many agents work with an assistant or team. Ask the interviewee if he or she works with others and how the process will be handled should you sign a contract. Communication will be crucial once the marketing begins.

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number of airborne spores and in turn raises the amount inhaled by occupants. Increased exposure to mold has been known to cause allergies and other health complications. In addition, mold can damage property and ultimately compromise the structure of the home.

In each of these cases, rely on the expert opinion of your home inspector and/or environmental specialist. He or she will be able to advise you about the severity of the problem and what steps! should be taken next.



Is there a popular restaurant in your area that you would like to try, but can't really afford? Consider visiting the establishment for lunch, as many restaurants charge less for mid-day meals. With this approach you will be able to enjoy the food ! and atmosphere while remaining within your budget.

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