



What to Look for When Selecting a Great Condo

Buying a great condo means gaining two great things. One is buying a well built and maintained suite that suits your needs. The second is becoming the co-owner of a residential commercial property. Many condo buyers are primarily concerned with the suite and location, as these are important for day-to-day life. However, it is the exterior of the building that carries the biggest risks for unexpected major expenses.

Hiring Rival Inspection Services will help protect you from unexpected personal costs in your suite and also help you select a good building to co-own. While home inspectors will look at hundreds of details in a condo inspection, here are some things you can look for in a good condo before you put in an offer:

Exterior

The exterior of the condo is what protects the building and occupants from sun, wind, and rain. A well designed and maintained condo will last a long time while a poor design or poor maintenance may present many unexpected repairs such as the 'leaky condo' issues that have plagued so many buildings in Ontario. As condos are a form of commercial building and there are many co-owners involved, costs for repairs tend to be higher compared to single family house repairs where owners have more control in who is hired, the scope of work, and the quality of materials that are used.

- **Leaky Condo** - This is a big issue to address early in reviewing a condo as leaky condos have cost owners hundreds of millions of dollars in Ontario and buildings are still being identified as 'leaky condos' today.
- **Property** - The condo should be sitting on the highest point on the property to allow water to flow away from the building. If the property slopes, make sure the slope is addressed to channel water around the building, not into it. Also watch for exterior items on the property like large trees which could impact the building in the future.
- **Roof** - Complex roof designs increases the likelihood of water getting into the building. A good roof will have overhangs protecting the walls from rain water, be in good repair, and have leak-free gutters at all the lower edges. Flat roofs are common on condos and when done correctly is an excellent roof.
- **Siding** - Condo siding options depend on the building height and design from the architect and builders. Look for a building that has been rain-screened for your best protection against unexpected costs.
- **Foundation** - Condo foundations are typically combined with underground parking. Underground parking areas and foundation are susceptible to water ingress which can cause deterioration of the structure. Parking garage ceilings, floors, and walls should be dry with no signs of water leakage.
- **General Maintenance** - Look for signs of rot or aged paint on wood trim, holes or missing materials in siding and roofs. Vegetation should be trimmed back from the building. A lot can be said about the maintenance of the building from the care on the outside.

Condo Suites

Interiors of condo suites generally have fewer deficiencies than single family houses. Watch for signs of amateurish work, this often suggests further evaluation and remediation may be needed.

- **Doors and Windows** - Doors and windows should operate smoothly and seal when closed. Look for double pane windows for energy efficiency. Vinyl windows are the best current material for operation and energy efficiency.
- **Kitchens** - Kitchen cabinets and drawers should operate well and be in good repair. Counter tops should be a nonporous material (no wood) in good condition. Flooring should be a material suited for wet environments like tile or vinyl sheets. Avoid wood flooring and particularly laminate, as these will swell when wet and show permanent water damage.
- **Bathrooms** - Bathroom fixtures should be clean with no signs of mold. There should be no visible water damage signs around showers, tubs or on the ceilings. Cabinets should open and close smoothly.
- **Plumbing** - Look under sinks for the water supply pipe material. If you see a bluish grey plastic, this is called polybutylene which is a poor piping material. Copper and white or clear plastics are generally better materials. Watch for signs of water damage on ceilings and walls which may indicate past or current leaks.
- **Electrical** - Check samples of light switches for operation and look for signs of amateurish work like surface wiring or 'rat's nests' of wire groupings. If possible get a look at the main breaker/fuse panel. Breakers are preferred as they indicate a newer electrical system which may have more safety features.
- **Heating** - Heat is commonly from electric baseboards or hot water systems.
- **Hot Water** - Condo hot water is often provided by central building boilers or an in-suite hot water storage tank. These systems need frequent replacement but maintenance costs are low.
- **Laundry** - Laundry areas should have dedicated electrical plugs for the washer and dryer. Dryers also need proper exhaust lines routed to the exterior of the building to safely remove humidity and lint from the house. Laundry cabinets and sinks should be well attached and operate correctly.
- **Interior Safety** - Watch for smoke alarms near all bedrooms. Windows on higher floors should not open more than 4" to prevent children from falling out. Staircases need handrails and guardrails to prevent children and adults from falling.

Final Thoughts

When you set out to buy a new condo, your goal should be to get the best suite and the best building. Buying the wrong suite or building can unexpectedly cost you tens of thousands of dollars. Rival Inspection Services is not caught up in the emotional aspect of buying a home and can give you a clear written report and be an excellent source of expertise on your future expenses when buying a condo. Choosing Rival Inspection Services before you choose your condo can save you from additional stress during the buying process. Always have your condo inspected during the purchase to know your home is safe and sound.