

An aerial photograph of a Los Angeles coastline. On the left, the blue ocean meets a sandy beach with white surf. To the right of the beach, a dense residential area with red-tiled roofs and greenery is visible. In the background, the city of Los Angeles extends to the horizon under a clear sky.

5 Things to Consider Before Buying an Older Home in Los Angeles

You may be attracted to vintage LA homes, but are you ready to own one?

(Getty Images)

By Emily Manthei Nov. 7, 2016, 9:21 a.m.

Having experienced significant growth in the early 20th century, Los Angeles has a lot of historic homes, from grand Victorian residences in Boyle Heights and Angelino Heights to Spanish-style adobes and Craftsman bungalows found throughout the metro area.

Real estate agents [Tracy Do](#) and [Mark Mullin](#), both with [Tracy Do Real Estate](#) and [Compass](#), specialize in neighborhoods containing mostly older homes – many dating back to the early 1900s. They note that, although buyers love the character and individual personality of vintage homes, they can be a lot of extra work.

[Mullin](#) encourages buyers to see the bright side if they have fallen in love with a special house. "You may even look at it as an opportunity to mitigate cost. If you go through the inspections and the house needs a lot of work, it may put you in the position to leverage some discounts. Get into those negotiations with your Realtor, and perhaps you can chisel the price down."

According to [Do](#) and [Mullin](#) – [two of the top real estate agents in Los Angeles](#) as identified by OpenHouse Realty, a real estate technology company (and U.S. News partner) – here are the things potential buyers should think about before putting in an offer on an older home.

Consider the state of the home. [One of the first questions potential homebuyers should ask is when the home's roof, plumbing, electrical and foundation were last updated. "Any of those that haven't had upgrades will be due for replacement," Do says. "They are all pretty much at the end of their life."](#)

In some cases, the owner selling the property will be a direct descendant of the original owner or builder. In the case of a 100-year-old home that has stayed in the same family, it's easy to see how some of these repairs may have been skipped. ["If a family lives in the same house for multiple](#)

generations, they just fix things as they break," Do says. "Sometimes, the house has never had a major update at all."

Seventy to 100 years of wear and tear on a house is enough reason to replace these systems, but advances in technology are also a factor. For example, galvanized plumbing was common in older construction, and it worked for a time, but today's owners will see the side effects: water colored brown by rusty pipes. Instead, PVC and copper pipes prove much better options. All these renovations may end up costing buyers a pretty penny.

On the plus side, early Los Angeles homes were often built of redwood, which is impossible to get today. Redwood is a solid, termite-resistant wood that is generally more unbreakable than newer building materials.

Consider the size of the home. Early 20th century houses are often quite small, which may surprise buyers who are used to the open floor plans popular in more modern Los Angeles homes. "Most of these homes have two or three similar-sized bedrooms and small closets that make buyers cringe," Do says. "But if they love the style, they'll make accommodations."

Buyers will find a similar issue with the garages, which were originally built for horses or very narrow cars. Although many older homes in Los Angeles have garages, buyers might struggle to imagine parking their car in them. "Instead, they convert the space to storage or a work studio," Do says.

Even the driveways can be excruciatingly narrow and hard to adjust to. Mullin says, "You could say these houses are already suited to the type of people who drive a FIAT or a Smart car."

Consider the exterior. Another item of concern is often the windows, which were made in a variety of styles, in custom sizes. Certain streets or blocks in Los Angeles are considered "historic overlay zones." If the home is located in one of those areas, all exterior modifications must fit with the home's original style. This can pose a problem if a buyer discovers damage or draftiness: If the home is located in a historic overlay zone, the buyer will be forced to replace the old windows with a reproduction of the same custom windows.

If the home is not located within one of these areas, modern windows are an option, though they could compromise the home's appearance. "Newer vinyl windows can look OK, but reproducing the originals will always look better," Mullin advises.

Consider the flow of the home. In homes that have not been completely stripped or rehabbed, a buyer can often enjoy a very inviting outdoor space, usually with enough room for outdoor furniture. Most of these homes also have a back patio or front porch, too. "Vintage homes often have mature landscaping, fruit-bearing trees and lots of shade," Do says.

What may surprise buyers, however, is the access to this space, which is usually through a small door that once led to a service porch. "The flow from indoors to outdoors is not what buyers are expecting," Mullin admits, noting that indoor-outdoor layouts didn't really gain traction until the mid-20th century.

Consider the details. Whether it's a unique, locally designed tile, built-in cabinetry or one-of-a-kind door handles that cause a buyer to fall for an older house, it pays to remember that these things will only get older and rarer as time goes on.

"Period details are much less common to find nowadays, after a decade of so much rehabbing and flipping. Clients are tickled when they find some of the original character intact," Do says. If buyers care for these details well, they will become more valuable over time and add to the house's value.

While the costs, maintenance and regulations associated with investing in one of Los Angeles' older homes may intimidate buyers at first, Mullin insists that the joy of owning the home is often worth it.

"There are multiple solutions to every problem," he says. "If a buyer has an eye for these details, they shouldn't be afraid to invest in a house they have fallen in love with."

<http://realestate.usnews.com/real-estate/articles/5-things-to-consider-before-buying-an-older-home-in-los-angeles/>