

# Guide to Prospective Homebuyers Care On Purchase, Take Over & Fit-out





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## 1.0 Preface

Whenever one decides to purchase a domestic unit, whether for investment or self use purpose, it will inevitably be a pivotal decision for most people in Hong Kong. It is envisaged that purchasing a defect-free unit should not be the only matter that a homebuyer mostly concerns. Homebuyers should also be aware of other important issues like land lease conditions, Deed of Mutual Covenant, house rules of the building and fit-out restrictions.

To enhance homebuyer's knowledge on this subject, the Building Surveying Division of The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors published the *Flat Inspection Guide* in 2008 (First Edition). This Edition updates the First Edition with the latest changes and enriches the contents by adding more useful information such as pre-purchase and fit-out guidance. This Guide recommends a systematic approach in reviewing relevant documents, identifying obvious defects and handling fit-out works at the time of purchasing or taking over a purchased flat. This Guide is principally prepared for newly completed domestic units but could also be referred to for second-hand domestic units.



## 2.0 Buildings Ordinance

### 2.1 Approved Building Plans

Purchase of second-hand domestic unit seems less favorable when compared with the first-hand domestic unit, in terms of the premium offer and after-sales services rendered by the property developer. Nevertheless, the homebuyers of second-hand domestic units have the advantage to inspect the property at a close range in order to better understand the property conditions. Since it is not uncommon to have unauthorized building works in second-hand domestic units, homebuyers are advised to pay extra attention to it.

Prior to making a purchase decision, prospective homebuyers shall request relevant documents from the real estate agent for review, e.g. Assignment Plan, Approved Building Plan (Buildings Department), Land Search Record (Land Registry). The subject documents are used for verifying the demarcation of the property and any statutory orders issued by the Buildings Department and Fire Services Department, e.g. repair order, inspection order, removal order and fire safety improvement directions.

Currently, Buildings Department has provided two types of Approved Building Plan viewing services. Interested parties may access to the BRAVO system of the Buildings Department website to procure the services. Most of the building plans for buildings in the 60's and onwards could be retrieved from the system. Alternatively, the building plans could be viewed in person at the Building Information Centre of the Buildings Department. The prospective homebuyers might have a better understanding of the property with reference to the approved building plan.

### 2.2 Unauthorized Building Works

It is not uncommon that an existing second-hand domestic unit had undergone several fitting out works, alterations or additions in the course of its previous occupation. The previous owners might not have appointed any suitable building professional (such as professional building surveyor) to advise and supervise the works or engaged a registered building contractor to carry out the works. Such works might be conducted not up to the required design and construction standards; and contravened relevant Building Regulations. Under such circumstance, the works might have been carried out without following the Building



Authority's statutory approval and consent procedure resulting in the presence of unauthorized building works (UBWs).

Despite the subject works are not carried out by the prospective homebuyer, being the new property owner, he/she would still be liable to certain legal liabilities. The new owner may be bound by the Buildings Ordinance to remove and rectify any contraventions or UBWs once a statutory order is served by the Buildings Department. In addition, the new owner would also be subject to great risk and liabilities if there is any accident caused by the presence of such UBWs. It is worth to note that many common insurance policies would not cover the damages or claims involving UBWs.

To this end, the prospective homebuyers is advised to ensure there is no presence of UBWs or contraventions in the flat before making their buying decision.

### **2.3 Minor Works Control System**

Buildings Department had implemented the Minor Works Control System (MWCS) on 31st December 2010. It aims to facilitate members of the public to carry out minor works in private buildings through simplified control procedures. The Government expected the MWCS will encourage members of the public to follow the new procedures and carry out works lawfully.

Under the new control system, certain types of works could be expedited but it is not always the case. Works in the past which are not under control e.g. replacement of underground drainage, replacement of aluminium window and external wall repair, are required to follow the MWCS procedures. Prescribed Registered Contractors shall be employed to carry out the works. In general, the MWCS has streamlined parts of the current building control system and, in parallel, regulated the less explicit works which might not be controlled in the past.

For works categorised as minor works under the MWCS, members of the public shall follow the prescribed procedures and requirements. Currently, there are 126 types of minor works in nature categorised into 3 Classes. Class 1 minor works are relatively more complicated e.g. construction of internal staircase. Class 2 minor works are of a comparatively lower complexity and risk to safety. Class 3 minor works mainly cover general household minor works e.g. installation of metal supporting frame for domestic type air conditioning unit.



In accordance with the regulation, Class 1 minor works shall be designed and supervised by the Prescribed Building Professionals; and be constructed by the Prescribed Registered Contractors. For Class 2 and 3 minor works, the Prescribed Registered Contractors are fully responsible for the works involved.

## **2.4 Mandatory Building and Window Inspection**

In mid-2012, the Buildings Department had launched the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme (MBIS) and Mandatory Window Inspection Scheme (MWIS). For buildings of 30 years old or above, the common parts of the building shall be inspected by the Registered Inspectors at 10 years interval. For buildings of 10 years old or above, all windows at common area and domestic units shall be inspected by the Qualified Persons at 5 years interval. Whether the subject building requiring mandatory inspection may be one of the considerations to the prospective purchaser.



### 3.0 Land and Property Management Issues

The design, layout, use of materials and construction workmanship of domestic units are critical to a homebuyer's purchase decision. Nevertheless, homebuyer should also scrutinize specified land issues related documents such as Outline Zoning Plans, Land Lease Conditions and Deed of Mutual Covenant; which may have significant impact on the neighbourhood environment and the owner's rights and liabilities vesting on the property.

#### 3.1 Outline Zoning Plans

Outline Zoning Plans (OZPs) are statutory plans specifying the permitted land-uses and major road systems of all developed areas in Hong Kong. Each piece of land lot is designated for certain broad land-use zoning, such as residential; commercial; industrial; open space; government, institution or community uses; green belt; conservation areas; comprehensive development areas; village type development; open storage or other specified purposes. If there are any development density restrictions such as building height, plot ratio and site coverage on the land lots, the same will also be specified on the plans. The OZPs are available for sale at the Lands Department's Survey and Mapping Office (Map Publications Centres) and for public inspection at the Technical Services Division of the Planning Department. Similar information is also available for public inspection at the web site of the Town Planning Board.

The adjoining land uses should be checked carefully since the property value and neighbourhood might be affected, either positively or negatively, by the use, disposition and height of nearby developments.

#### 3.2 Land Lease Conditions

Land lease conditions are the contractual provisions governing the land granted to developers or land owners. Land leases stipulate the obligations and duties of the owners, and the planning, building, engineering and development requirements that need to be satisfied. Important information such as land use, building density (restrictions on gross floor area, site coverage and height), building disposition, vehicular access, landscaping provisions, set back or provisions for public access and facilities for public use (e.g. public open space, public transport terminus, community centre), terms of land grant, and maintenance responsibilities of certain portion of land (e.g. slopes, pavements, roads, open ground and similar





spaces specified under the leases by the government) to be taken up by the developer or owner of the land, if any, could be found. Usually, all obligations and responsibilities of the developer or land owner under the lease shall subsequently be transferred to the purchasers of individual units by way of title assignment. Therefore it is important for homebuyers to be aware of all relevant conditions and the corresponding liabilities and obligations prior to purchase. All land lease documents are registered in the Land Registry and they could be accessed by the public either in person or online after paying the prescribed fee.

### 3.3 Deed of Mutual Covenant

Majority of domestic buildings in Hong Kong are multi-owned. The Deed of Mutual Covenant (DMC) is a legal document binding the building owners of a building or a development, registered in the Land Registry. It clearly sets out the rights, interests and obligations of the owners, occupiers, tenants and property management agents in respect of the use, management and maintenance of private properties, common parts and facilities of buildings.

Homebuyers shall familiarize themselves with their obligations and liabilities under the DMC. If a prospective homebuyer intends to obtain the DMC prior to purchasing the property, he/she may pay the prescribed fee and obtain a copy from the Land Registry. Nevertheless, for new development the DMC will only be available in the Land Registry after completing the first sale between the developer and the buyer, i.e. upon execution of the first assignment document of the building. Therefore, it will usually not be available before the completion of a new building or development. Prospective purchasers of uncompleted flats may not be able to retrieve the DMC from the Land Registry and thus they may need to ask the developer or its representative solicitors for the details of the DMC conditions or better still for a copy of the draft DMC document.

The common DMC clauses cover the following:

- Prescribed uses of building as stipulated in land grant or lease;
- Definition of common parts and restricted uses;
- Undivided shares of each domestic unit;
- Contents of management budget and its allocation;
- Amount of management fee deposit and sinking fund; and
- Other obligations and liabilities, e.g. prohibition of keeping pets, repairing of external wall and public open space.



### 3.4 Property Management Aspects

Homebuyers may liaise with the estate management office and the solicitors representing the developer in order to obtain further information and to make prior arrangement for:

- Transfer of utilities accounts e.g. water, electricity and gas supply services;
- Payment of management fee, management fee deposit and sinking fund;
- Effect of public liability and fire insurance as appropriate;
- Fit-out rules, application procedures and payment of debris removal fees;
- Membership application procedures of club house;
- House rules for estate road, carpark, loading and unloading areas.

For second-hand units, one shall also check for the existence of any litigation, legal proceeding or dispute in relation to the subject units such as:

- management fee or other payment in arrears;
- unauthorized building works or alterations;
- water leakage causing damages to adjoining units;
- any outstanding building orders issued by the Building Authority for removal of unauthorized building works (UBWs), repair of the property or the building as a whole, investigation or repair of slope belonging to the owner/owners of the building, etc.;
- other contractual disputes between the Incorporated Owners of the building or the common building owners with a third party such as a building contractor, facilities services providers, etc.



## 4.0 Field Inspection

Subsequent to the documentary check and verification, the prospective buyer should undertake a field inspection before the purchase of a completed unit in order to ensure it follows or corresponds to the sales description and to ascertain the actual conditions of the property. Upon taking over the purchased unit, the prospective buyer should conduct a detailed check of the unit immediately to identify presence of any defects, damages or problematic issues.

To facilitate effective and efficient field inspection, and to avoid possible omission or duplication of works, it is recommended that homebuyers shall study the layout of the domestic unit prior to the inspection. They should bring along some handy tools for checking of various building components, plan the sequence of inspection and record the defects noted for the developer's follow up action.

### 4.1 Design, Layout and Provisions

For newly completed domestic unit, homebuyer shall refer to the original sales brochure to familiarize with the design, layout and provisions of the development, for instance:

- Location of major facilities - residential towers, shopping arcade, club house, carpark and vehicular access etc;
- Facade design - external wall finishes, architectural features, curtain wall provision, window layout, balcony, utility platform, air-conditioners platforms or hoods, drying rack etc;
- Building layout - dimension and layout of the unit, lift lobbies, staircases and utilities rooms etc;
- Finishes, fixture and appliances - sanitary fitments and fittings, kitchen equipment, lighting installations, electrical appliances, main switch board, water supply mains, drainage system, gas mains, security system and plug-in sockets (electrical, antenna, telephone and data etc.). Remember to collect the warranty cards provided by the manufacturers.

If sales brochure is not available, which is common for second-hand units, homebuyers may retrieve the Approved Building Plans, Alteration and Addition Plans and Minor Works Records from the Buildings Department for examination. Administrative fees will be charged for viewing and making copies. Although building plans can provide information such as the general layout, usage and basic



construction dimension, which is useful for identification of any UBWs, regrettably it may not provide other information such as facilities and appliances provided within the unit. Particular attention should be given to any UBWs in second-hand units. In case of any doubt, advice from relevant building professionals such as qualified building surveyor should be sought.

## 4.2 Inspection Gadgets

To assist the inspection, homebuyers may bring along the following handy tools for checking:

- Camera - recording condition of premises/defects;
- Torch - lighting up areas inside cabinets, false ceiling and pipe ducts;
- Inspection mirror - inspecting unreachable areas such as external window caulking, underside of sink cabinet and false ceiling;
- Measuring tape - verifying dimension of premises based on Code of Measuring Practice published by The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors;
- Multi-purpose gadgets - cutter/screw driver for opening up concealed areas or covers;
- Leveler - checking leveling/verticality of floor/wall/fixtures;
- Tennis ball or a marble (small glass ball) - checking floor leveling;
- Card (e.g. name card or plastic card) - checking tightness of windows when closed
- Mallet or tapping rod - checking any debonded screeding, plaster or tiling;
- Post-it label - marking defects;
- Toilet paper - checking water seepage at pipework and water fixtures connections;
- Light bulb and hand-held electrical appliance (such as mobile phone charger) - checking the electricity supply to lighting fittings and plug-in sockets

## 4.3 Main Inspection Items

### 4.3.1 Timber Door, Door Frame and Ironmongeries

#### A. Door Leaf, Door Frame and Architrave

Examine for:

- signs of loosen joint, displacement, distortion, bulging, opened mitre, insect or fungal attack;



*Loosen joint at door frame*



- excessive or uneven gap between door leaf and door frame, clashed on floor or door frame;
- scratches on door leaf and door frame finishes, in particular on timber veneer surface;
- loosen painted or decorative surface, uneven or faded colour;
- signs of water damage at bottom part especially for kitchen and toilet doors;
- loosen /cracked glass viewing panel for kitchen door if any;
- loosen expansion strips on fire resisting doors, usually for main entrance and kitchen doors.



*Missing expansion strip on fire resisting door*

## B. Ironmongeries

Examine for:

- door locks/ handles - malfunctioning, discolouring, loosely fixed component;



*Any malfunctioning, discolouring, loosely fixed component at door locks/ handles*



*Loosen screws at door hinge*

- hinges - missing, undersized or loosen screws, rusting, discolouring, abnormal sound during door closing;

- door closer - slam or abnormal sound during self-closing action, or malfunctioning and rusting;



*Any abnormal movement of door closer*



*Missing door viewer*

- door viewers/door chain/door stop - missing, loosen, cracked or stained.

For second-hand units, one shall pay attention to any unauthorized alteration of main entrance and kitchen doors. They are usually fire resisting doors and should not be replaced with hollow core doors or with the door closer removed. Any security gates installed shall not obstruct or reduce the width of exit route of the floor.



## 4.3.2 Flooring and Skirting

### A. Timber

Examine for:

- signs of bulging, hollowing, distortion or deformation;
- incorrect leveling, uneven joints or excessive gaps along timber strips;
- sign of insect or fungal attack, in particular, termite attack in second-hand units;
- shortened timber strips or obvious gaps at interface of skirting and flooring;
- scratches, rough surface or uneven colour on paint or wax polish finishes;
- unevenness and obvious gaps on joints and mitres of skirting;
- unevenness and colour deviation of the filler to cover the nail head at skirting;
- abnormal darkened or whitened stain which indicates the presence of previous water seepage on floor;
- sign of detachment of skirting or obvious gaps at interface of skirting and wall surface.



*Any incorrect leveling on timber flooring*



*Any scratches, rough surface or uneven colour on timber surface*

### B. Stone and Tile

Examine for:

- signs of cracking, hollowing, unleveling, chipping;
- scratches, rough surface on polished stone and tile;
- unevenness and obvious gaps on stone and tile grouting/ pointing;
- excessive grouting/ pointing between stones and tiles
- obvious gaps at interface of skirting and flooring;
- abnormal stains which indicate the presence of previous water seepage on floor.



### 4.3.3 Wall and Ceiling Finishes

#### A. Plastering

Examine for:

- incorrect leveling or verticality for edges of beams/columns/walls;
- signs of waving, bulging, cracking, water stain or mould growth.

#### B. Painting

Examine for:

- signs of blistering, flaking, crazing, peeling, yellowing, mould growth, water staining or moistening, whitening, chalking and colour deviation.



*Any blistering or mould growth on painting*

#### C. Wall Covering

Examine for:

- signs of waving, bubbling, peeling, yellowing, scratches, mould growth, water staining or moistening, and colour deviation;
- obvious gaps between wall covering sheets;
- excessive wall covering glue.

#### D. Timber Facings

Examine for:

- signs of distortion or deformation;
- sign of insect or fungal attack;
- scratches and cracks;
- unevenness and obvious gaps at joints;
- abnormal stains which indicate the presence of previous water seepage.

#### E. Suspended Ceiling

Examine for:

Metal suspended ceiling

- signs of scratches, corrosion, distortion or deformation, uneven panel joint of suspended ceiling panel;
- sign of corrosion or distortion of supporting frames/ grids.



*Any distortion or deformation of metal suspended ceiling*



Timber/Gypsum suspended ceiling

- signs of cracks, scratches or deformation of suspended ceiling;
- abnormal stains which indicate the presence of previous water seepage.

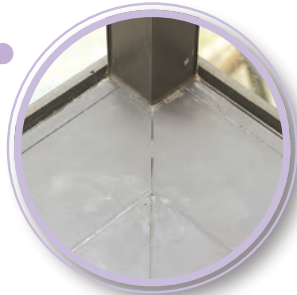
### 4.3.4 Window, Window Hood and Sliding Door

Examine for:

- signs of water stain or residual water marks on the edges of window opening and window hood;
- cracked or chipped stone covering strip on window cill or window hood;
- incorrect fall of window type air-conditioner platform and window cill;
- signs of chemical or cement remains, oxide residue, discolouration on window or door frames and sealant;



*Any chipping on window hood marble slab*



*Any signs of chemical or cement remains, oxide residue, discolouration on window frames*



- signs of deformation and scratches on window frames/sashes and ironmongeries; and inadequate drain holes on window frame,
- scratched glass surface, loosen glazing bead and missing or deteriorated sealant;

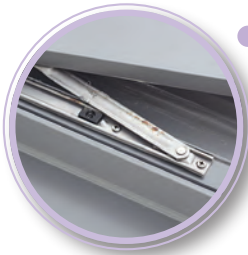


*Scratched glass surface*





- signs of missing, deformation, loosen or oxidized/corroded screws/rivets on ironmongeries such as hinges, fasteners and safety grilles;



*Any signs of loosen or oxidized/corroded screws/ rivets on window hinge*



*Any signs of missing, deformation, loosen ironmongeries such as window fastener*



*Any signs of oxidized/ corroded door handle and lock*

- abnormal movement and sound when operating the openable sashes or sliding doors;
- tightness of openable sashes when closed.

### 4.3.5 Balcony and Utility Platform

Examine for:

- signs of corrosion, missing or corroded fixing screws, deformation and flaking off of painting on metal balustrade;
- signs of scratch on glass surface and chipped glass edge, loosen glazing bead, hardened or deteriorated sealant on glass balustrade;
- signs of missing grout or flaked painting on the adjoining wall or ceiling;
- signs of debonding, missing grout, uneven and undulating joints on wall and floor tiles or timber flooring deck;
- incorrect fall or water ponding on floor;
- blockage of floor drain or corrosion of grating of drain.

For second-hand units, attention shall be drawn to any UBWs outside window or balcony such as metal cage, canopy, flower box, split-type air-conditioning unit supporting rack, drying rack and advertising sign.



*Any blockage of floor drain or corrosion of grating*



### 4.3.6 Toilet, Bathroom and Kitchen

#### A. Plumbing

Examine for:

- signs of choking, yellowish, precipitation, slow water flow or abnormal smell of potable water connected to washbasin, kitchen sink, shower, bath tub and washing machine;
- signs of dripping or seepage when operating water taps and valves, including those for flushing water;
- water dripping due to persistent overflowing of water closet cistern.

#### B. Drainage

Examine for:

- sign of blockage and leakage of water traps and piping connected to watercloset, bath tub, washbasin, kitchen sink, washing machine and floor drain;
- overhead pipework condition such as corrosion and water leakage which are normally installed inside the false ceiling of building over 15 years old (Drainage pipes are not permitted to pass through the private premises below in recently completed residential development);
- existence of foul smell or positive pressure from drain points indicates water trap may have been dried out, improperly altered or removed;
- external pipeworks and supporting brackets for misalignment, disconnection, loosening, water leakage and corrosion.



*Any sign of blockage and leakage of water traps and piping connected to kitchen sink, washing machine and floor drain*

For second-hand units, attention shall be drawn to any unauthorized alteration of drainage system especially the removal of water trap for sanitary fittings which may affect hygiene and health of occupants.



## C. Finishes

### (i) Suspended ceiling

Examine for:

- incorrect leveling, uneven panel joint, corrosion and colour deviation or sagging particularly at location near to light fitting;
- any signs of water leakage or concrete spalling inside suspended ceiling void as far as possible.

### (ii) Stone and tile finishes

Examine for:

- signs of crack, hollow, bedding, chipped edge, debonding, missing grout, uneven and undulating joints, and stained with water marks or chalked efflorescence (crystalized white powder) on wall, floor and counter-top marble/granite or tiled finish;
- signs of disintegration, peeling off, detachment or staining of sealant at edges of bath tub, watercloset and sink, etc.;
- incorrect fall or water ponding on floor.



*Any incorrect fall or water ponding on floor*

## D. Fixtures, Fitments and Equipment

### (i) Wooden cabinets and wardrobe

Examine for:

- signs of deformation, misalignment of doors and shelves and any scratches and pop-up/bubbling of veneered or plastic laminated surfaces;
- signs of sagging and loosen fixing of hanging cabinets;
- missing or loosen hardware such as handles, hinges, magnetic catches and supports



*Any missing or loosen hardware such as handles, hinges, magnetic catches and supports*



## (ii) Counter top

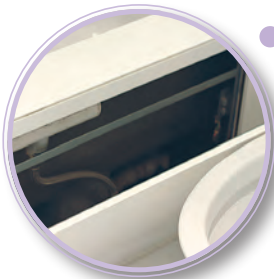
Examine for:

- signs of deformation, cracks, stains, scratches on solid surfacing or stainless steel counter top in kitchen;
- missing sealant between counter top and sink

## (iii) Sanitary fitments

Examine for:

- correctness of the brand and model as specified in the sales brochure for bath tub, shower tray, watercloset suite (pan, cistern and seat cover), washbasin, sink, tap and ironmongeries, etc.;
- signs of improper fixing, loosen screws, crazed or chipped ceramic, and discolouring of chrome-plated coating for the fixtures and equipment;
- signs of improper fixing, cracks, chipped edge or discolouring of mercury backing on mirror, mirror box and timber cabinet;
- signs of improper fixing of door hinges or tracks, scratches on glazing and poorly formed sealant for shower cubicle;
- effectiveness of overflow pipe and joint sealants by simple flooding test to sink and wash basin;
- condition of maintenance chamber under bathtub.



*Examine the condition of maintenance chamber under bathtub*



*Simple flooding test for sink and wash basin to verify the effectiveness of overflow pipe and joint sealant*



#### (iv) Electrical appliances and equipment

Examine for:

- any malfunctioning of electrical appliances such as refrigerator, stove, exhaust fan, range hood, water heater, etc;
- the electricity supply to lighting fittings and plug-in sockets.



*Examine the electricity supply to lighting fittings and plug-in sockets*

#### 4.3.7 Flat Roof

Examine for:

- signs of corrosion, missing or corroded fixing screws, deformation and flaking off of painting on metal balustrade;
- signs of scratch on glass surface and chipped glass edge, loosen glazing bead, hardened or deteriorated sealant on glass balustrade;
- signs of debonded tiles, peeling off of paint, concrete spalling of parapet wall;
- signs of debonding, missing grout, uneven and undulating joints on wall and floor tiles;
- incorrect fall or water ponding on floor and ;
- blockage of floor drain or corrosion of grating of drain.

For second-hand units, it is not uncommon that there is metal/ solid fence wall separating or delineating boundary of flat roof of each individual unit. Homebuyers are advised to ascertain the conditions, height and positions of the fencing wall. In addition, attention shall be drawn to any UBWs on flat roof such as canopy, burglar bars, flower box, split-type air-conditioning unit supporting rack and advertising sign. Homebuyers are advised to retrieve the Approved Building Plans, Alteration and Addition Plans and Minor Works Records from the Buildings Department for verification.

#### 4.3.8 Electrical, Gaseous and Other Appliances

##### A. Electrical

Examine for:

- exact number and location of electrical installations such as main switch board, power sockets, lighting switch/points, antenna/ telephone/data sockets;



- defects such as damaged/loosing cover plates, malfunctioning of indicator lamp, disconnection, crack, misalignment or loosened sockets and switches, damaged wiring;

Test on:

- main switch board including the earth leakage circuit breaker (ELCB) and check the label tabs to ensure the correct indication of electrical circuits;
- power sockets with temporary electrical appliances connected;
- lighting switches with temporary lamp bulb connected;
- antenna/telephone/data could only be checked after move-in and with services subscribed.

## **B. Gaseous**

Examine for:

- exact number and location of gaseous appliances and installations;
- defects such as corrosion or mechanical damage of metal enclosure, and disjointed or damaged flexible tubing;
- expiry date of the flexible hose.

Test on:

- main gaseous supply valve, water heater and stove.

## **C. Other Appliances**

Examine for:

- exact number and location of household appliances and installations;
- defects such as corrosion or mechanical damage of metal enclosure, and disjointed or damaged cables;

Test on:

- household appliances such as air-conditioning units, stove, refrigerator, washing machine, microwave oven, exhaust fan, range hood, door phone or video phone and burglary alarm.



## 5.0 Care on Fit-out Works

Homebuyers would usually proceed with fit-out works after taking over the unit. Many of them believe that engaging a professional design consultant and contractor to take up the works would resolve all trouble for them. However, homebuyers are reminded of the importance of certain preparation, materials selection and quality control issues for the successful and satisfactory completion of the works. Engaging a professional consultant and preparation of a proper fit-out contract are equally crucial. Homebuyers may refer to the HKIS publication namely Conditions of Engagement of Building Surveyors and the Standard Form of Contract for Decoration, Repair and Maintenance Works for necessary guidance and reference.

### 5.1 Preparation

- Observe fit-out rules and procedures imposed by the Management Company in particular on fit-out deposit, working permit, working hours and housekeeping requirements.
- Proper insurance cover (e.g. Contractor's All Risks and Employees' Compensation) for fit-out works is essential. It covers possible claims against legal liabilities on property damage and third parties injuries arising from the fit-out works.
- Reference to Approved Building Plan is crucial if alteration to domestic units is anticipated. The location of structural elements, loading capacity of floor slab, fire resisting construction and lighting & ventilation requirements, etc. should be properly attended to.
- Engagement of qualified building professionals such as Professional Building Surveyor to advise on the implication of the alteration works is recommended. Engagement of Authorized Person or Registered Structural Engineer may sometimes be necessary depending on the nature and extent of the alteration works involved.
- Certain types of fit-out works are classified as Minor Works, for instance, erection of drying rack and air conditioning rack on external wall. Homebuyers shall engage Registered Minor Works Contractor of designated class to perform the specified works. For details, please visit Buildings Department website: [www.bd.gov.hk](http://www.bd.gov.hk)



- Electrical works should be carried out by Registered Electrical Contractors and WR1 form should be prepared upon works completion.
- Alteration to fresh water and flushing water pipeworks should be carried out by Licensed Plumber registered with Water Supplies Department.
- Gaseous appliance and pipework installation should be carried out by Registered Gas Contractor.
- For second-hand units, it is advised to check the conditions of electrical wiring, plumbing & drainage pipeworks, window frame and sashes. Repair and/or replacement of the entire system or parts may be warranted for premises built for more than 15 years. In addition, spalled concrete and water seepage are common defects found in toilet/kitchen and window surrounds. Proper defects diagnosis is needed before proceeding with the remedial works or alteration works.

## 5.2 Materials and Waste

- Adopt environmental friendly materials and fittings as far as possible, for instance:
  - water based and no/low Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) paint
  - water taps and shower heads with Water Efficiency Labeling Scheme (WELS) label
  - dual flush watercloset
  - rapidly renewable materials e.g. bamboo
  - carpet or timber decking composed of recycled materials
  - energy saving lamps, LED lamps and electrical appliances with energy labels under the Mandatory Energy Efficiency Labelling Scheme (MEELS)
- Construction waste should be properly disposed to designated dumping areas assigned by the Management Company or be collected by licensed construction waste disposal contractor under the Construction Waste Disposal Charging Scheme.





## 5.3 Works and Quality

- Pay attention to locations of structural elements - columns, beams, load bearing walls and floor slabs, etc. Any alteration or demolition of structural elements should be subject to the advice from relevant building professional and may require submission to and approval from the Building Authority before commencement of works.
- Main entrance and kitchen are usually provided with fire resisting doors in accordance with statutory requirements. Replacement of these doors should comply with the relevant requirements.
- Formation of open kitchen requires fulfillment of statutory requirements such as the provision of appropriate fire service installations e.g. sprinklers and smoke detectors. Approval and consent from the Building Authority is normally required prior to the commencement of works.
- It is not uncommon to demolish the partition wall between flat units. Before making any decision, it is advised to consult a building professional to advise on the feasibility both from technical side and the restrictions under the DMC. For certain situations, the building professional may need to assist the homebuyers to consult a legal professional.
- For pipe ducts with access panels situated in domestic units, the interior decoration shall not obstruct the opening of such access panels for maintenance purpose.
- Detailing of works is very important and it may affect the safety and convenience of the occupiers/neighbours:
  - Hanging cabinets - correct types and quantities of wall/ceiling anchors should be used for fixing of hanging cabinets.



- Waterproofing - bathroom and kitchen wall and floor should be applied with waterproofing materials. It is recommended to apply waterproofing materials at minimum height of 2m and 1.2m for bathroom and kitchen walls respectively. Flooring should be laid in proper fall to avoid water ponding. Floor drains should be provided inside bathrooms and kitchen as far as practicable to minimize damage arising from any burst pipes.
- Shower tray - alteration of bath tub to shower tray is very common. Care should be taken to accommodate a water trap in the drainage system in order to maintain proper water seal between bathroom and waste water drainage stack.
- Grouting and sealing around bath tub - poorly grouted wall tiles and sealing around bath tub are common causes of water seepage complaints from occupiers underneath. Water seeping through the joints of wall tiles and junctions will be accumulated under the bath tub. Access panel for inspecting the bottom of bath tub should be provided.



## 6.0 Frequently Asked Questions

- **How long is the defects liability period for newly developed building?**

Developers normally provide 12 months defects liability period for the components, finishes, fittings and equipment, in regard to faults in materials and workmanship, with wear and tear and vandalism excluded.

- **How long will the developer repair the defects?**

Each developer has its own schedule and resources to carry out defects rectification works. Generally 2 to 4 weeks are considered reasonable.

- **Am I entitled to ask for replacement of malfunctioned fittings or equipment?**

Replacement is the last resort until the fittings or equipment is beyond repair.

- **What should I do if the domestic unit is not finished or equipped in accordance with the sales agreement?**

You should lodge a complaint to the developer and engage a professional building consultant such as a qualified building surveyor to assist you.

- **I'm not sure whether UBWs existed in the 2nd hand premises. What should I do?**

In case you are not able to ascertain the existence of UBWs based on the Approved Building Plans retrieved from the Buildings Department, you are advised to engage a professional building consultant such as qualified building surveyor to verify the situation.

- **I noticed mould growth at toilet ceiling. Is it sign of water seepage from floor above?**

Poor ventilation in humid areas will induce mould growth and it may not relate to water seepage. Further investigation is recommended.

- **What should I do if water seepage and/or spalled concrete recur after repair works complete?**

You should approach the contractor whom you employed to carry out the repair works to investigate. Alternatively, it is advisable to appoint a professional building consultant such as qualified building surveyor to review the situation and recommend appropriate repair solutions.



## 7.0 Conclusion

This Guide provides prospective homebuyers a better understanding on the critical process in home purchase and fit-out. It highlights several concerned areas during the pre-purchase and taking-over stages. Following these steps, homebuyers interest would be better safeguarded.

### Disclaimers

Readers shall not treat this Guide as a full and complete professional practice guide. Prospective homebuyers are advised to appoint professional building consultants, such as qualified building surveyors, in conducting documents review, comprehensive defects inspection and fit-out management as required. The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors shall not be held responsible to any persons who rely on this Guide to perform any form of review, inspection, report and decision.

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