



Choosing Between a Condo, Townhouse and House

Housing choices abound, especially in urban areas, leaving many homebuyers wondering what type of residence to buy. One of the messages life delivers consistently is that "change happens" our priorities, lifestyles, circumstances in or out of our control, and budgets. Whether you are a first time homebuyer or retiring and want a simpler lifestyle, consider your level of desired involvement in home maintenance when deciding which style of home works best. Each type of dwelling (condominium, townhouse and detached home) has its pros and cons.

What is a Condominium?

Condominiums provide the most hands-off approach to homeownership. Many of these types of residences are physically indistinguishable from apartments. Condos are often the most affordable option when buying a home because they come with no land; the exterior of the units, plus land and any improvements, is considered common area and owned collectively by all condo owners in the community.

The main advantages of living in a condo are that you don't have to worry about maintaining a yard or the exterior structure. In addition, if you live alone, you may feel an increased sense of security from knowing others are nearby. And if you travel a lot, your house isn't sitting isolated and empty while you are away. Condos also tend to be less expensive than houses. A condo works well for people interested in owning real estate at a reasonable price, want close proximity to where they work or play, and desire the most maintenance free environment offered.



A word about HOAs relative to a Condominium: Owners pay monthly HOA fees covering the cost of unit exterior maintenance, taxes on common property, the insurance required to cover pricey items such as roofs, elevators, and parking structures, amenities and services, and shared utilities. Fees and what they cover vary from community to community.

What Is a Townhouse?

A townhome is a hybrid between a condo and a house. These are often two or three stories, meaning that you don't have downstairs or upstairs neighbors. Townhouse owners usually own the land on which the house is situated, sometimes including any front and backyard area that goes with the residence, no matter how small. They also own the home's exterior. A townhouse is right for people who want some involvement when it comes to maintaining their homes, but do not want the responsibility of owning and maintaining a large lot.

The main advantages of living in a townhome are they often have attached garages on the ground level, more outdoor and interior space, fewer neighbors and as a result, greater convenience, and more privacy and quiet than in a condo.

A word about HOAs relative to townhomes:

Owners generally pay monthly dues covering insurance and maintenance of the community's common areas, amenities and perhaps a utility or two. As a result the HOA is usually lower than within a condominium association. In most cases, owners remain financially responsible for exterior maintenance and repair of their townhouses. Some HOAs enforce community aesthetics rules, such as the colors of exterior paint permitted and the types of fencing owners can install.



What is a Single Family Residence?

Situated on their own lots, detached homes often provide owners with the most freedom when it comes to improving the structures or the land that comes with them. The square footage of detached homes ranges from small to mansion-size, but the defining feature of this style of home is the freestanding structure; there are no neighbors with which to share walls.

While a house can be the most expensive option in terms of both total purchase price and ongoing maintenance, it also gives you the most independence and privacy. Houses typically have the best investment value and because a house is all yours, if you outgrow it, you will have the option of adding on or finishing a basement. Detached houses appeal to people who want large yards for their children to play in, and outdoor space, such as a detached garage or workshop, to pursue their hobbies. They are usually larger than condos, so you'll probably have more indoor space, too.



A word about HOAs relative to a single family home: Like condos, some detached homes, especially those located in urban and suburban areas, have HOAs. However fees are usually minimal and cover no more than amenities and shared maintenance in the neighborhood.