



Panorama Woods by Portrait Homes offers easy access to schools, shopping and parks.

10 Minutes with Robert Grimm

FINDING YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD FIT

» by **SUSAN M BOYCE**

Some call it their “castle,” others their “residence,” yet others simply their “pad.”

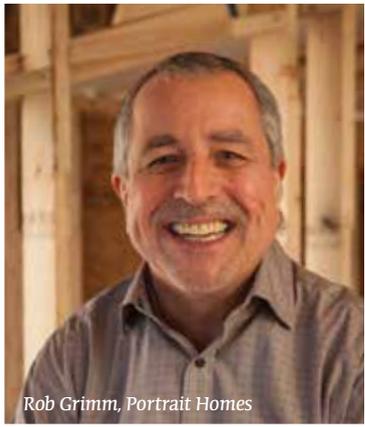
But whatever moniker you use, most people would agree that a home is far more than just four walls and a roof. It’s a reflection of who you are and what matters most in your life. So choosing the right neighbourhood is just as important as choosing the right style of dwelling.

This issue, New Home Guide chats with Robert Grimm, principal of Portrait Homes, about some of the considerations to take into account when you’re deciding where, geographically, you want to come home to.

Q: The Lower Mainland offers an astonishing diversity — from agricultural communities to ultra cosmopolitan, downtown centres. Even within a single municipality, neighbourhoods often have a totally different character and ambiance than the one right next to it. How does a homebuyer choose the one that’s right for them?

A: In a word, it comes down to lifestyle. So the first step is to establish what’s important to you in the way you live your life day-to-day. For example, having a garden, a workshop, and a ground-oriented home are all extremely important to me but not to my brother, Harry. Living in a downtown Vancouver condo with a balcony would suit him perfectly. I’d never be happy there.

I also prefer a neighbourhood that’s very family-oriented and active. In the South Surrey neighbourhood where I live you always see families out riding their bikes or walking together, and on a sunny afternoon there’s almost always a game of pick up hockey happening somewhere on the street. Personally, I like that for my kids, but for someone who doesn’t have children, it might be a detriment.



Rob Grimm, Portrait Homes



Hampstead at Silver Ridge by Portrait Homes is a family-friendly community where neighbours know each other and are often seen enjoying outdoor activities together

Q: You're talking about fun, casual activities. What about things like cultural events and formal recreational opportunities? How do they fit into the equation?

A: Again, you have to be realistic about what's important to you. Families with young children will want to know there are good schools close by. If you're a serious swimmer, proximity to a year-round pool makes sense. A person who loves to ride horses, won't find many stables in downtown Vancouver or the North Shore, but for someone who has seasons tickets to the opera and a couple of live theatre venues those locations are ideal.

One interesting hybrid is the large, communal amenities you see some developers like Polygon putting into their masterplanned communities. While it may mean higher strata fees, it's a lifestyle that works for people who don't have to travel for things like a gym or place to host large gatherings.

Q: What about the "feel" of a neighbourhood?

A: The best thing you can do is go exploring and spend some time hanging out. Sit down and have coffee or stay for dinner. Go shopping at the local grocery store. And be sure to check out neighbourhoods you're interested in at different times of the day and on weekdays as well as weekends — just because an area is quiet on a Sunday doesn't mean it will be on Monday morning when all the local businesses and industries open.

I also believe in talking to realtors who specialize in an area you're considering and to the neighbours who live there now. Most people are quite willing to help. We once knocked on a person's door and ended up having a two-hour conversation with her over tea — we learned a lot that day.

Q: Have you got any cautions?

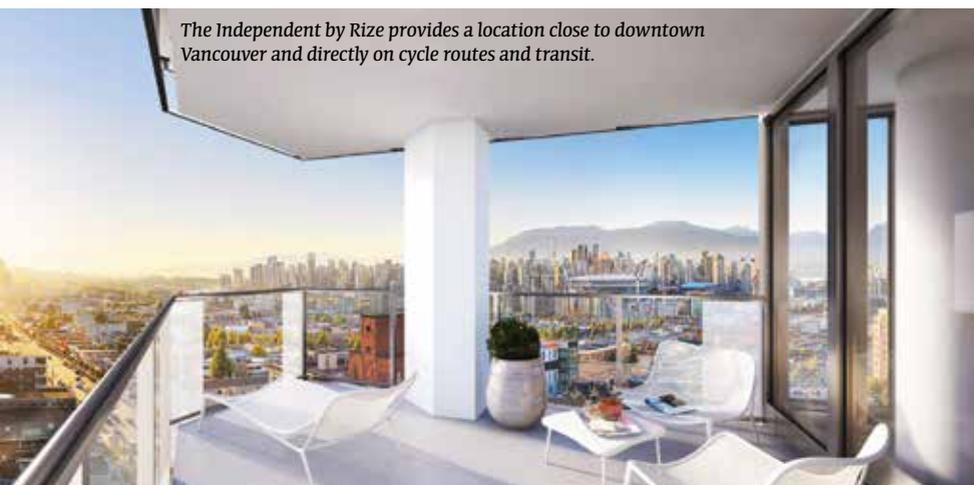
A: If an area is scheduled for redevelopment, it can be a great potential for gain on your investment. But you need to be aware evolution usually takes time, and sometimes that means the neighbourhood gets a bit rundown before it evolves. Think about it this way. If an investor is holding several lots that he wants to sell to a developer for a multi-family project, there's not a lot of sense repainting or reroofing because those houses are just going to be torn down.

Q: What's your advice to first time buyers?

A: Be clear on what you're willing and not willing to sacrifice to get the lifestyle you want. If having access to a natural setting, outdoor activities, and a larger home is important, some people are happy to accept a longer commute time and the possibility of needing two cars. On the other hand, if you really prefer to be within cycling or walking distance of where you work, it might mean giving up some space — which isn't an issue for many urbanites.

Ultimately, though, I think the sooner you get into the market the better even if you initially have to make compromises, like taking in a roommate, or starting out with a condo when you really want a townhouse.

For more information about Portrait Homes, visit portraithomes.ca.



The Independent by Rize provides a location close to downtown Vancouver and directly on cycle routes and transit.