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Selling a home with unconsented improvements? Here's what you need to know

The first thing to understand is that many houses sell with unconsented changes. It is more common than you might think.

The key to a successful transaction is to be upfront with all the relevant information right from the start.

Buyers genuinely want to buy a property and they don't necessarily expect it to be perfect. What they do expect is to be made aware of any important issues **before** they make an offer. When buyers find out about a problem early on, they have time to gather information, come up with a solution and move forward.

It is when buyers find out issues right at the end of the process that they understandably get upset. No one wants to discover a problem with their dream home when they've already fallen in love, negotiated the price, mentally moved their furniture in and are just waiting on the final 'seal of approval' from their builder and lawyer.

"But it was like that when I bought it"

There was a time in real estate when caveat emptor (buyer beware) ruled the day. When houses weren't perfect, but nobody seemed to care. When few buyers checked all the paperwork with a fine-tooth comb before going ahead. Those days are long gone.

In the modern real estate world, buyers expect (and deserve) to know everything there is to know about their future investment. The onus is on the owner and their chosen real estate professional to provide as much information as possible upfront and to seek information out if they see a possible problem.

So please don't be surprised if I ask you whether something in your home is consented. It is my job to know.

How bad is it?

Unconsented changes fall on a wide spectrum. All the way from a basic wooden carport frame tacked on to the side of a house (possibly not a big deal), right up to a house that was never signed off when it was built (probably a very big deal).

In between those two extremes, there are a host of possible changes that sometimes get made without local council signoff:

- An extra toilet is added to a bathroom
- A deck gets turned into a conservatory
- Someone excavates under the house to add storage
- An internal wall is removed
- Windows get turned into ranch sliders

The list goes on. Often, consent has been granted but not signed off at the end of the process. There are also situations where owners go into renovation projects thinking they will stay in that home forever, so signoff becomes a low priority. Like I alluded to earlier, if the renovation was completed decades back, it was possibly common at the time for changes to be made without getting consent.

If in doubt...

If you think your home has work that wasn't signed off by your local Council, then it is best to find this out **before** you go on the market. This is not a time to stick your head in the sand.

Just like a buyer doesn't want to find an issue at the last minute, you as an owner probably don't want your impending house sale to fall over at the last minute. It is best not to risk having your future buyer withdraw their offer over something that could have been easily fixed or accounted for from the start.

The first step to a successful sale...

Have a chat with me, that is what I am here for. I can help you work out how to get an understanding of what is consented in your home and what isn't. From there, I can help you arrange a safe and sanitary if the work was completed before 1992 or a certificate of acceptance if completed after that date.

I can also direct you to the correct tradespeople if work is needed or put you in touch with a lawyer who can help you draft up the necessary disclosures.

Sometimes, you will be able to go straight on the market without making any repairs or changes to your home. If it is a small issue, then all that may be needed is a completed disclosure statement and you are good to go.

And if it is more than that? It is better to handle it now than risk losing your number one buyer right at the end.