Look Before Buying

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If you’re an Acadiana citizen, you may have to resort to purchasing a lot and building your own custom home. Don’t kid yourself — this is not the easy way. It’s a lot easier to choose from homes already built. But, if individualism is a strong personal trait and you’ve set your heart on a custom-designed house in an unusual location or one with no houses to select from, the buy-and-build method may be your only alternative.

Decide first if you want a house in town, suburbs, or a vacation hideaway. Picking a location is half the job. You may locate the land by checking the classified ads or consulting with a real estate broker. However, the most desirable properties may not be on the market at all, but available if pursued. To locate these, you have to cruise the territory that interests you and keep your eyes primed for likely-looking vacant sites. When you find one worth investigating, go to the assessor’s office and find out who owns it, the assessed value, amount of property taxes and if they are paid or not. Equipped with these facts you might contact the owner or arrange with a real estate broker to approach the owner and handle negotiations.

Before you start, be careful. Lot seekers often assume that because a piece of property is vacant, it can be picked up for a song. This is seldom the case. Land is precious even when idle, and property owners usually have inflated opinions of what their property is worth. In fact, some lots in developed areas have been kept off the market in hopes of speculative profit. The owner will often hold out for an immoveable price — so, be prepared for patient and time-consuming negotiations.

Yet, even in intensely developed areas, there are numerous small parcels of well-located land which have been bypassed in the course of general development. These are “stepchild-areas” looking for parents. They will often make good buys.

If a lot looks like a steal, try to find out from neighbors why it has not sold. Perhaps, the reason is innocent enough but it could be serious.

A party interested in custom design may find an orphaned lot which will not accommodate a stock plan house but which might easily be adapted through ingenious planning and design. Some of the best homesites have been a result of immense patience.