



Guide to Take-over Domestic Unit for Prospective Homebuyer



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1.0 Preface

Whenever one decides to purchase a domestic unit, regardless it is for long-term investment purpose or for the formation of a new family, it will inevitably be an important decision for most people in Hong Kong. However, homebuyers are usually disappointed by the vast amount of defects while they take-over the unit. A professional building consultant may be appointed to assist take-over inspection but majority would consider it a fuss over trifling matter. It could also be burdensome for those who were already exhausted by the huge expenses for purchasing a new unit plus its associated fit-out costs.

To facilitate prospective homebuyers to examine their units and to identify obvious building defects effectively, the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors (Building Surveying Division) published this Guide as a reference of the recommended procedures of inspection. This Guide is tailor-made for newly constructed unit but could also be useful as reference for taking-over second-hand or used domestic unit.



2.0 Preparation Works

Majority of the domestic buildings in Hong Kong are multi-owned or strata-titled. Hence, apart from attending the problem and attribute of the unit itself, homebuyers shall also familiarize with the obligations and liabilities resulted from multi-ownership of common parts by reference to deed of mutual covenant (hereinafter refers as DMC). Customarily, solicitor responsible for handling conveyancing used to explain to prospective homebuyer salient point of DMC while interpreting the agreement for sale and purchase. Homebuyer may take this opportunity to enquire for any crucial conditions of DMC. If prospective homebuyer intends to grasp details about DMC prior to committing purchase, he/she may conduct search of such in the Lands Registry. Making copy of DMC is also possible by paying the requisite fee. One should tolerate there is a time gap between committing first sale and making registration of DMC subsequently. Virtually, such time gap could be a problematic vacuum for newly developed domestic units.

The following information are usually found in DMC.

- Prescribed uses of building as stipulated in land grant or lease;
- Definition of various kinds of common parts and restriction on uses;
- Undivided shares of each individual unit;
- Various expenses that constitute the management budget and its allocation according to management shares;
- Amount of management fee deposit and all necessary building funds;
- Other crucial obligations and liabilities of owners, e.g. prohibition of keeping pets, etc.



As far as practicable, homebuyer shall try to obtain a copy of the original sales brochure from developer or property agent for the purpose of understanding the master layout plan of the development, elevation design of building, floor layout of the domestic units, ingress and egress points together with carparking arrangement, location of club house and its facilities provision/utilization, service facilities and finishes provided, information about estate management office, and approximate unit rate of charging management fee.

The master layout plan may provide information such as location of each residential tower, shopping centre, carpark building, estate road and club house as well as the orientation and possible directional view of respective unit. Elevation design may provide information such as the architectural features of external wall, e.g. window layout, balcony, air-conditioning platform and drying rack so that prospective homebuyer may trace out any subsequent modification by ex-owner. Layout of individual floor could ease understanding internal layout of unit so that any subsequent alteration can be recognised almost instantly. It also provides information of fixtures including sanitary fittings, kitchen equipment, lighting installations, plug-in sockets (such as those provided for electrical appliances, television, telephone, computer, etc.), main switch board, water supply mains, gas main and security system. The aforesaid information are considered essential for subsequent field inspection.

If sales brochure is unavailable, which is common for second-hand units, prospective homebuyer may retrieve original building plan from the Buildings Department. Handling fees will be charged for making copies. Although building plan is able to provide information as master layout and design construction, which will be useful for identification of unauthorized building works, regrettably it will not provide information such as service facilities within the unit.



Prior to taking-over a new unit, prospective homebuyer shall liaise with estate management office and developer's solicitor in order to obtain further information and to make all necessary prior arrangement:

- Title transfer of ownership for water, electricity and gas supply services;
- Payment of management fee, management fee deposit and building funds;
- Fit-out rules, application procedures and payment of debris removal fees;
- Membership application procedures of club house, user requirements and payment of fees;
- Operation procedures of estate road, carpark, loading and unloading area;
- For second-hand unit, one shall also obtain information as outstanding litigation or dispute in hand concerning management fee or other payment in arrears, unauthorized building works or alterations, water leakage causing damages to adjoining unit(s), and other information such as a major building renovation/refurbishment requiring owners' additional contribution of funds.

3.0 Guide to Field Inspection

To facilitate effective and efficient field inspection, and to avoid possible omission or duplication of works, it is recommended that homebuyer shall review the floor layout of the domestic unit prior to commencement of inspection. A proper inspection sequence shall be planned, for example starting the inspection from main entrance proceeding to living/dining room and associated corridor and balcony; then inspecting master bedroom, second bedroom and third bedroom; subsequently master bathroom and guest toilet; and lastly kitchen, maid's room and storeroom. Inspection checklist shall be established and to comprise the following elements as far as practicable.



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3.1 Timber Door, Door Frame and Ironmongeries

- 3.1.1 Examine door leaf, door frame and architrave to reveal any sign of loosen joint, displacement, distortion, bulging, opened mitre, insect or fungal attack;
- 3.1.2 Examine proper functionality of door lock by using keys provided and check whether the tongue is properly fitted with lock socket. Screws shall also be examined to ensure the lock is tightly fixed to door component;
- 3.1.3 Examine door hinge to reveal any loosen screws. Particular attention shall be drawn to any abnormal movement and irritating noise during closing action of door leaf;
- 3.1.4 Examine gap width between door edge and door frame whilst the door is in closed position. Scratched edge or uneven gap width indicates sign of tilted door or frame;
- 3.1.5 Examine paint or other decorative finish to ensure it is smooth and check for absence of colour contrast;
- 3.1.6 For main entrance door, examine door closer to reveal any abnormal movement and irritating noise during self-closing action. Self-closing operation shall not result door slam. Door leaf shall be properly closed, locked and tightly-fitted with door frame. Examine door edge to reveal any loosened fire resisting expansion strip, and any missing/loosen door viewer and door chain;
- 3.1.7 For kitchen door, door closer and fire resisting expansion strip shall be examined as aforesaid. In addition, examine glass panel to enable it is properly fixed by glazing beads without any sign of loosen or cracked glass pane; and
- 3.1.8 For second-hand unit, one shall pay attention to any unauthorized alteration of main entrance and kitchen door. In general, hammer tapping shall be carried out to reveal whether they have been changed to hollow door from fire resisting door.



3.2 Parquet Flooring and Timber Skirting

- 3.2.1 Examine parquet flooring and timber skirting to reveal any sign of localized bulging, distortion or deformation. Where there is doubt by means of visual inspection, hammer tapping shall be carried out to reveal any sign of hollow fixing or detached timber elements;
- 3.2.2 Examine the joints between blocks to ensure no uneven joints or obvious gaps;
- 3.2.3 Examine the junction between vertical and horizontal elements to reveal any shortened timber block or obvious gaps;
- 3.2.4 Examine paint or wax polish finish to ensure it is smooth and absence of colour contrast;
- 3.2.5 Examine joints and mitres of skirting board to reveal any unevenness and obvious gaps. Attention shall be drawn to the filler of nail heads and paint finish which shall be smooth and absence of colour contrast;
- 3.2.6 Examine surface finish to reveal any abnormal darkened or whitened stain and obvious water marks. Such evidences possibly indicate presence of earlier water seepage incident; and
- 3.2.7 General examination to reveal any sign of insect or fungal attack.



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3.3 Wall and Ceiling Concrete, Rendering and Painting Finishes

- 3.3.1 Examine concrete and rendering surfaces to reveal any sign of localized bulging, cracking or spalling. Look for any sign of exposed or corroded reinforcement such as to cause rust stain on decorative surface. Whenever there is doubt by means of visual inspection, hammer tapping shall be carried out to reveal any sign of debonding or hollow substrate. This procedure is crucial for aged building;
- 3.3.2 Examine paint and other decorative finish to reveal any sign of blistering, flaking, crazing, yellowing, mould growing, water staining or moistening, whitening or chalking; and
- 3.3.3 Ensure decorative finish is smooth and absence of colour contrast.



3.4 Window, Window Hood and Balcony

- 3.4.1 Examine edge of window opening, window hood and balcony to reveal any sign of water stain or residual water mark. For example, chemical remains, oxide residue or paint flake was found on window or door frame, mastic sealant or cement grout was disintegrated or detached from substrate, adjoining wall finish such as paint or render was debonded or peeled off, etc.;
- 3.4.2 Examine glass panel to reveal any sign of loosen glazing bead, hardened or deteriorated mastic sealant such as to cause loosen glass pane;
- 3.4.3 Examine ironmongeries such as hinge, fastener and safety grille to reveal any sign of deformation, loosen or oxidized/corroded screws/rivets. Test swing action of opening sash to ensure smoothness and without irritating noise;
- 3.4.4 Examining mild steel window and balustrade to reveal any sign of corrosion, structural deformation and flaking off of paint;



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- 3.4.5** While inspecting aged building, attention shall be drawn to any unauthorized building works outside window or balcony. Typical unauthorized building works include metal cage, full-height glazed panel balcony enclosure, canopy, flower bed, split-type air-conditioning unit supporting rack, drying rack and advertising sign, etc. One may retrieve sales brochure or building plan from the Buildings Department to examine the elevation design for checking of any additional structure. Homebuyer may simply look for any non-standard installations by comparing with adjoining units; and
- 3.4.6** Window and balcony door component of aged buildings shall also be examined to reveal any unauthorized modification. Such works may indicate part of original structural component had been removed or waterproofing sealant has been damaged. One may retrieve sales brochure or building plan from the Buildings Department to examine the elevation design for checking of any modified component. Homebuyer may simply look for any non-standard installations by comparing with adjoining units.



3.5 Toilet, Bathroom and Kitchen

- 3.5.1 Examine drainage system connecting to W.C., bath tub, washbasin, kitchen sink, washing machine and floor drains in order to reveal any sign of blockage and leakage of water trap. Look for any sign of foul smell which possibly indicates water trap may have been dried out, improperly altered or removed;
- 3.5.2 Examine water supply system connecting to W.C. cistern, washbasin, kitchen sink, shower, bath tub and washing machine. Look for any sign of choking, yellowish, precipitation or abnormal smell;
- 3.5.3 Test water retaining function of every water tap and valve (including the main valve) and to reveal any sign of dripping or seepage at moving parts during operation. Ball valve of W.C. cistern shall also be tested to guard against overflowing;
- 3.5.4 Examine suspended ceiling to ensure it is leveled horizontally by simply comparing with adjoining tile or marble joints. Look for any sign of localized sagging particularly at location near to light fitting, and other defects as uneven panel joint, spot of corrosion and contrasting paint finish;
- 3.5.5 Examine wall, floor and counter-top marble/granite or tiled finish to reveal any sign of localized debonding. Whenever there is doubt by means of visual inspection, hammer tapping shall be carried out to reveal any sign of hollow substrate. Look for other defects as poor pointing, uneven and undulating joints, and surface finish stained with water marks or chalked/oxidized powder;



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- 3.5.6** Examine every sanitary fitment and kitchen equipment including bath tub, W.C. suite (pan, cistern and seat cover), washbasin, sink, washing machine and other ironmongeries (e.g. towel rod, shelf, basin plug, etc.) as listed in sales brochure such as to reveal any sign of improper fixing, loosen screws, craze or chipped ceramic, and discolouring of chrome-plated coating;
- 3.5.7** Examine mirror, mirror box and timber cabinet to reveal any sign of improper fixing, cracks, chipped edge or discolouring of mercury backing. All timber installation may be examined according to the procedures as stipulated in 3.1 above; and
- 3.5.8** Examine condition of all mastic sealant at edges of bath tub, washbasin, W.C. pan, sink, counter-top, marble or tiled joints, mirror, etc. to reveal any sign of disintegration, peeled off, detached with substrate or stained.



3.6 Electrical, Gaseous and Other Building Services Installations

- 3.6.1 Initially, location of the main earth leakage circuit breaker (ELCB) shall be confirmed with the floor plan of sales brochure. Press the test switch on the ELCB to examine proper power disconnection. Review label tab to ensure correct indication of respective electricity supply;
- 3.6.2 Examine every power socket to ensure proper functioning and to reveal such defect as mechanical damage. One may connect temporary electrical appliances to socket to ensure power is connected. Location of each socket may be confirmed with the marked position as indicated in the floor plan of sales brochure;
- 3.6.3 Examine every light fitting by switching on-off each individual lamp switch. Temporary lamp bulb may be used as testing. Location and number of light fitting and light switch may be referred to the floor plan of sales brochure;
- 3.6.4 Examine every socket provided for telephone, communal antenna and computer broadband service to reveal any defects such as mechanical damage. Location and number of socket may be referred to the floor plan of sales brochure. Generally, one could only test proper connection of these sockets with respective service provider after moving-in and equipment being installed;



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- 3.6.5** Examine main gaseous supply valve, water heater and cooker by testing its on-off operation, ignition and gas supply. Reference may be made to the floor plan of sales brochure for the number and exact location of these fittings. Check for any defect such as corrosion or mechanical damage of metal enclosure, and disjointed or damaged flexible tubing. The warranty provided by manufacturer shall also be checked;
- 3.6.6** Examine every electrical appliance provided by developer to ensure proper functioning. Such appliances may include room cooler, split-type air-conditioning unit, electrical heater, cooker, refrigerator, washing machine, micro-wave oven, exhaust fan and range hood. Reference may be made to the floor plan of sales brochure for the exact number provided and their location of installation. Check for any defect as corrosion or mechanical damage of metal enclosure, and disjointed or damaged cables. The warranty provided by manufacturer shall also be checked; and
- 3.6.7** Examine other building services installations provided by developer such as door phone or video phone and burglary alarm connected to security control room. Signal testing with the control room shall be carried out. Reference may be made to the floor plan of sales brochure for the exact number provided and their location of installation.



4.0 Conclusion

The above inspection guide provides prospective homebuyer a simplified but systematic set of procedures to facilitate efficient inspection of a residential unit. As majority of the procedures are performed by means of visual examination and simple on-off operation of equipment, prospective homebuyer shall not treat this inspection guide as a full and complete defect identification process. The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors shall not be held responsible to any prospective homebuyer who had relied on this inspection guide to carry out inspection. Prospective homebuyer, who possesses doubt, is strongly recommended to approach professional building consultant, such as professional building surveyor, for assistance and advice.

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