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YOUR SECOND HOME | RELOCATING TO ANOTHER SITE

Moving, Roof, Walls and All



By BILLIE COHEN
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ROUGHLY 10,000 private homes are moved in the United States annually, according to the International Association of Structural Movers, the trade association for those who haul everything from houses to lighthouses. Now that doesn't mean that 10,000 people pack up their things and members of the movers' group help them carry the boxes (though that would be nice). It means that the entire house is put on a truck or barge, then hauled to another site.

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might want to allow somebody to move it."

In what it calls its "house rescue business," Nickel Brothers buys buildings that are scheduled for demolition, like a four-bedroom, cedar-shingled house in Bellevue, Wash., now posted on its Web site, and sells them for a price that includes the cost of a local relocation. (The Bellevue house is going for \$235,000.) Mr. McCord noted that about 60 percent of Nickel Brothers' customers in this part of their business are second-home buyers.

The homes on the Nickel Brothers Web site have already been evaluated for a move, but how do you tell if the one you're considering buying on your own can handle a relocation?

"Have a licensed engineer determine whether the house is sound enough to move," said Kelly Beamon, senior editor at This Old House magazine. "Whether it can be moved at all

Nancy Doniger

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can't really be eyeballed. So go with an engineer. He can tell you whether the walls are in good condition — start there, because this will be an unbiased third party. And when you go to a structural mover who makes his money off moving houses, you'll get another opinion."

Generally speaking, if a house is well-built and handled by experienced movers (the movers' group has a list of members on its Web site, www.iasm.org), it can be relocated. As if to prove this point, movers in Manhattan last week moved [Alexander Hamilton's](#) 206-year-old country home, the Grange, to a nearby park.

"Most houses move very well," Mr. McCord said. "Especially older brick houses if properly supported. A wood-frame house just by its nature is flexible, so it does very well in a move. All those pieces have a tiny bit of give and play that allows them to do well in terms of small bumps."

Which leads to a discussion of one of the biggest bumps you'll encounter. Moving a house isn't necessarily cheap, which is why Ms. Beamon recommended careful consideration about how much the seller is asking upfront. Many will lower the price (sometimes to as low as a dollar, or even free) if you will pick up the moving fees. Mr. McCord said base costs can range anywhere from \$25,000 to \$100,000, depending on the size of the house and the distance and intricacy of the route. On top of that, you have what's known as "wire costs," the additional charge to have power, phone and cable lines relocated or moved out of the way while your home-on-a-truck is rolling down a street.

Accommodating these utility crews and the accompanying police escorts that might be required — and whether they work during the night or day, or if they put in overtime — can quickly deplete your bank account. Mr. McCord estimated that the cost can range from a few thousand dollars to as much as \$60,000. That number quickly goes up if it turns out your house is too tall for the neighborhood's wires or even the trees. It might have to be divided and then reassembled, both of which add to the bill.

Clearly, the entire process of a move — determining if a house is sound, mapping out an efficient truck or barge route and covering the costs — is no easy task. But the dream of owning an architecturally appealing older home, and even fixing it up yourself, is hard to ignore.

"Make sure that it's worthwhile for you," Ms. Beamon said. "If this stuff is in your blood, the money won't stop you."

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