



## WHAT DO PEOPLE REALLY MEAN WHEN THEY SAY A PLACE HAS "GOOD BONES"?



Details like crown molding, hardwood floors, and an original staircase can all add up to "good bones."

*Sometimes, it seems like there are as many real estate jargon terms out there as there are actual apartments. In our new feature, [Bricktionary](#), we're taking on the task of decoding them, one buzzword at a time.*

If you've ever visited an open house (or cruised a listing) for an older property, chances are you've heard the term "good bones." On its face, it sounds reassuring and positive, yes, but what does it actually mean? As with many real estate terms, the definition, as it turns out, is fungible and dependent on

whom you ask. "It's one of those terms that everyone is going to use it slightly differently," says Citi Habitats broker Caroline Bass.

At its broadest, "good bones" generally means an older home or apartment has covetable, time-tested features that most everyone agrees are positives. "You wouldn't use it for new construction," Bass notes. "You're going to say it with older prewar buildings, or even certain postwar [e.g. mid-century] buildings have good bones."

While Bass uses good bones to refer to a home that has certain, unchangeable incontrovertible pluses—high ceilings, good light, an original sunken living room, etc.—appraiser and Miller Samuel data guru Jonathan Miller drills it down to more specific period detail. "[Good bones] refers to a property that retains a lot of the character of the original period but needs updating," he explains. "Hardwood floors, stairways, crown moldings, fireplaces, doors and window frames that can be updated or restored keeping the original design elements intact when considered collectively could be applied to a property as having 'good bones.'"

The key detail here, says Miller, is that there are original construction details that can be "replicated or enhanced," and that while the aging property will need some updating, you won't be starting from scratch. All of which, of course, can spell higher property values. "Intact original detail is highly desirable and extremely valuable to people, and many will go to great lengths to restore homes that have it," says Doug Bowen, a Douglas Elliman broker who frequently works with and renovates historic homes.

In addition to that period detail, there's *also* a more nitty gritty structural component to a home's "bones," particularly if you're buying a standalone home, rather than an apartment. (As Miller puts it, "the bones equal the skeleton.") It means a place that's strong, sturdy, and gifted with they-don't-make-them-like-they-used-to construction. (After all, no one wants to scoop up a historic old charmer, only to find out it's a structurally unsound, *MoneyPit*-esque nightmare in need of a gut reno.) "In my mind, good bones first and foremost means the structural integrity of the house," says Bowen, and the more decorative elements are secondary.

"Good bones" here mean a solid foundation, a basement—say you have a townhouse—without issues like leaking or asbestos, the state of the staircases and load-bearing walls, and the roof. (Hence, the importance of touring an older home or apartment with a contractor *before* you buy if you're planning on doing some spruce-ups.) Bowen notes that "good bones" can also constitute structural elements in apartment buildings, like prewars with their notoriously (and blissfully) soundproof walls, or a condo conversion in a solid, built-to-last former warehouse.

In short, the bones depend on the building, and when in doubt, don't be afraid to grill for specifics. "People use it to mean different things at different times," Bass adds. "If you're not sure, maybe ask, 'What specifically makes this a good bones type of building?' Or 'What exactly are you referencing?'" If you're thinking of splashing out the kind of cash it takes to buy a New York apartment or townhouse—especially a historic one—never be afraid to be the squeaky wheel.

[http://www.brickunderground.com/blog/2015/09/good\\_bones\\_what\\_does\\_it\\_mean](http://www.brickunderground.com/blog/2015/09/good_bones_what_does_it_mean)