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## NO PLACE LIKE HOME: Can a tattered, but terrific, Quincy Point pad compare with a gorgeous new house in Cohasset?

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*The Patriot Ledger*

It was hard to feel anything but insignificant after touring the \$2 million palace they've built at 17 Ox Pasture Lane in Cohasset. I had just spent two hours exploring and taking notes about a spotless, impeccably designed five-bedroom house full of custom woodwork, carefully designed lighting and a Batcave's worth of wonderful gadgets.

Shame washed over me as I looked around my home. The place was a mess. I had a sink full of dishes, a living room table covered in mail, and a tower of recyclables stacked up at the kitchen door.



The self-loathing stayed with me for a moment, but as the day wore on and the memory of the mega-house faded, I got to thinking: All this stuff is lying around my house because we do some living here. Friends come over for dinner and make the dishes dirty, and sometimes we don't open the mail because we'd rather hang around outside on the back steps.

So what's more valuable: A shabby home with stories to tell, or a gorgeous home whose defining characteristic is its perfection?

I simply had to find out. So here we go: a pound-for-pound shootout between a brand-new mansion and my place, a house on Quincy Point built for a shipyard worker a century ago.

### Quick history lesson

**Concept home:** Built by WCVB for a continuing feature they're doing. Open to the public for tours. Up until last month, the admission fee went to the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps.

**My house:** I moved in two years ago with my friend and Patriot Ledger colleague Rick Collins, who offered me a steal on rent. Six generations of his family have lived there.

**Advantage:** Our house. While I have the utmost admiration for WCVB's well-seasoned news team and the Children's Action Corps, our place wins if for no other reason than the Collins family's status as local bowling legends.

### The front door

**Concept home:** The door is beautiful. It is painted a lovely dark green, in perfect harmony with the woodsy setting. It looks strong. It has a fancy handle you click with your thumb.

**My house:** Our front door needs painting badly, and the storm door is tied shut. Lucky for us, we never see the front door: the driveway is behind the house, so we use the back entrance.

Our back door is also green, in total contrast with our neighborhood. We have a regular old doorknob with a fascinating modification: It falls off all the time.

This is our favorite trick to play on new guests: They come up the stairs, doorknob in hand, horrified that they just broke it. We yell, "What'd you DO?" and snatch the doorknob out of their hand and pretend that we can't get it back on.

**Advantage:** My house.

### The bathroom

**Concept home:** There are several, the best being the one off the master suite. The tile floor is bright and decorative, there are two sinks, a toilet with a bow on the lid, a whirlpool bath with remote control and the coolest shower stall I've ever seen.

The showering options are unreal. You have your choice of the standard overhead and the hand-held shower head. There are water jets at your back.

This is a human car wash.

The bathroom is enormous. "You could put all three of our bathrooms in here," a woman said while touring the place.

**My house:** Loud, rattling fan. One toilet, sans bow, one sink. Standard shower and bath. Light fixture above shower is missing. Roommate's fiancée has decorated shower with stick-on ducks wearing rain gear. Roommate has rearranged them into a compromising position. Water pressure is excellent.

Sundries are stored behind the mirror, with overflow finding home atop the toilet. Large collection of reading material, including the 9/11 Commission Report, "Like I Was Sayin'" by Mike Royko, and "The Indispensable Calvin and Hobbes" by Bill Watterson.

**Advantage:** My house.

Roommate's comment: "Calvin and Hobbes beats human car wash seven days a week and twice on Sundays."

### The bedroom

**Concept home:** The master suite is large and airy. There is a king-sized bed with a headboard fashioned to look like an antique couch, the kind with decorative brass buttons holding the upholstery to the frame.

Two big glass doors open up to a deck, about 8 feet by 10 feet, where there is a cute little tea table and two chairs.

**My house:** My dresser is at least 30 years old and has been used by every child in my family. No closet; clothes are hung on a free-standing laundry rack. Two laundry baskets wedged between the bed and the wall contain all the stuff I couldn't fit elsewhere.

The bookcase is built into the wall and is filled with Harry Potter books; true-crime novels; autobiographies of musicians; one or two of those hip, cynical memoirs of suburban childhood; and a tattered copy of my favorite book, John Kennedy Toole's "A Confederacy of Dunces."

A large Woody doll sits on the top shelf, legs hanging over the edge, gesturing somewhat inappropriately. Kermit the Frog sits next to him.

The windows are large and the natural light is great. When it's warm, birds nest in my air conditioner. I wake up to hear them pecking and chirping around.

**Advantage:** My house.

### The living room

**Concept home:** A three-seater couch sits about 20 feet in front of the TV, a 50-inch high-definition flat-screen job that looks great hanging over the fireplace. The living room is spacious and wide open; you could fit 10 people in here and not feel crowded.

The living room flows right into the kitchen. There are no walls between the two, making ingress and egress a piece of cake during snack breaks on game day.

**My house:** A four-seater couch with two recliners and a fold-down drink holder in the middle sits about 20 feet in front of our TV, which does not have a flat screen or HD, but does have a plug that comes loose and makes the picture wavy sometimes.

My favorite feature of our entertainment system is that if you turn the TV up using the remote control, sometimes the DVD player switches on. This gives us another fun trick to play on first-time visitors.

Our living-room furniture is a glorious hodgepodge; in addition to the couch we have floor seating including a bean-bag chair and a low-riding red rocker. We also have a blue leather Barca-Lounger I got at a garage sale for \$10.

A wireless Guitar Hero II controller rests upon a guitar stand in the corner, but the room's undisputed decorative masterpiece is the entertainment center. Resting atop it are three candlepins, a Go-Bot and a giant Boston Celtics foam finger.

An autographed photo of Hulk Hogan in his prime presides over the room.

**Advantage:** A close one, but the framed photo of the Hulkster puts a big yellow boot to the face of the concept home.

### **The kitchen**

**Concept home:** This is the nicest and most practical kitchen I have ever seen. They thought of everything.

Need to boil water? There's a faucet over the stove. Got two cooks working at once? There are two sinks. Need to keep guests out of the way while you're cooking? They can sit at the counter and hold a conversation without everybody having to step around each other.

And that's just the functional aspect. The kitchen also happens to be gorgeous. A mixture of recessed-can and pendant lighting is bright and comforting. The garbage can and recycle bin are kept neatly in a large drawer under the sink. All the appliances are hidden; the refrigerator and the dishwasher both have faux-cabinet doors.

**My house:** The cabinets won't stay shut no matter what we try. No dishwasher. Freezer door pops open when you close the refrigerator. The sink rattles if you turn the water on the wrong way.

Our garbage can fills up fast, and we do tons of recycling, none of which fits under the kitchen sink. Sometimes on the way in, we bump into our tower of boxes and bottles and send it crashing to the ground, in our home-game version of the arcade classic "Rampage."

**Advantage:** Though our kitchen has the distinct advantage of a "Rampage" reference, the concept home's kitchen chews ours up and spits it out.

Much of the concept home is intimidating; you're worried you're going to spill something, and you feel like you're not supposed to touch anything. But the kitchen is very welcoming, a place where you feel you can really dig in and get something done.

### **Conclusion**

I left out the concept home's children's bedrooms, a couple of bathrooms and the attic rec room because my house has nothing to compare. No surprise, the rooms are lovely and very impressive.

Whoever buys the concept home will have a lot of house to fill. With 5,250 square feet of living space, the place is enormous. But once all the people have moved in, the real challenge will be to make it a home.

Though I am unskilled in interior decorating, I am highly skilled in moving to new quarters and making them feel like home. The concept home's perfection is unsettling.

A few aesthetic scars with good stories behind them could add a lot; perhaps some marks on the walls to track the kids' growth, or a pile of grass-stained, dirt-covered clothes in the mud room.

It should be obvious by now that I like my house better, even with all its shabbiness and perhaps because of it. It is what I need, no more, no less.

What more could you want?

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