

Choose a contractor based on skills, not just price

We all want a good deal with service contractors, but when it comes to heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), industry watchers say there is too much at stake to rely on the cost estimate alone.

The systems are complex and they need to be installed and serviced by educated, licensed tradespeople. If not, you might put the mechanical functioning at risk, and end up spending far more in the long run.

Most agree that an exceedingly low bid is cause for alarm. It could be that the contractor doesn't understand the scope of the work and is underestimating the amount of time and materials needed. Worse yet, he or she might be intentionally cutting corners by using inferior material or not following industry and government guidelines. Requests for follow-up service could be ignored, and things might break down long before they should, adding to the overall cost and inconvenience.

According to the Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Institute of Canada (HRAI), their member companies are regularly called upon to repair the

shoddy work of contractors who lured in unsuspecting consumers with impossibly low quotes. It means that the incredible deal you got on a new furnace didn't end up being such a great deal after all.

To protect yourself and your home, be sure to get more than one quote so you fully understand the cost parameters of the service in question. Insist that contractors quote you for exactly the same service in each case. Some contractors are known to intentionally give bids for something slightly different from competitors so you can't do a straight comparison.

Beware of companies who provide quotes without an onsite visit, or those who scribble a figure on the back of their business card. In the case of a new AC unit, it is impossible to provide an accurate quote without visiting the home and doing a sizing (heat gain/heat loss) assessment. Anyone who tells you otherwise is misinforming you.

A professional contractor will provide a thorough, written breakdown of services, and a firm dollar value for each. Make sure you understand what is in-

cluded in the quote - and what isn't. Some contractors present an attractive, low offer, only to push up the price by adding services or components later. Inquire whether there might be additional payments tied to the job; if necessary get confirmation in writing that there won't be.

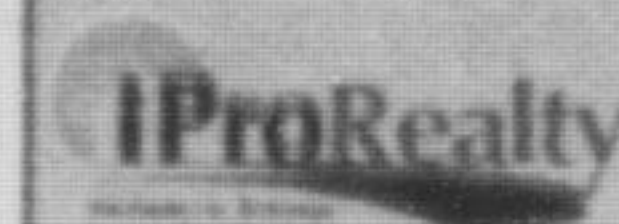
In the end, the best way to avoid poor service is to deal with a licensed, insured professional with the right technical qualifications. Ask the contractor if they have the appropri-

ate licence, and if necessary request to see it. They should also have property damage and public liability insurance. Alternatively, turn to HRAI for guidance, says the organization. All HRAI members have been prescreened and have the required trade licenses, technical certifications and insurance coverage. For help finding a licensed contractor near you, go to www.hrai.ca/mycontractor

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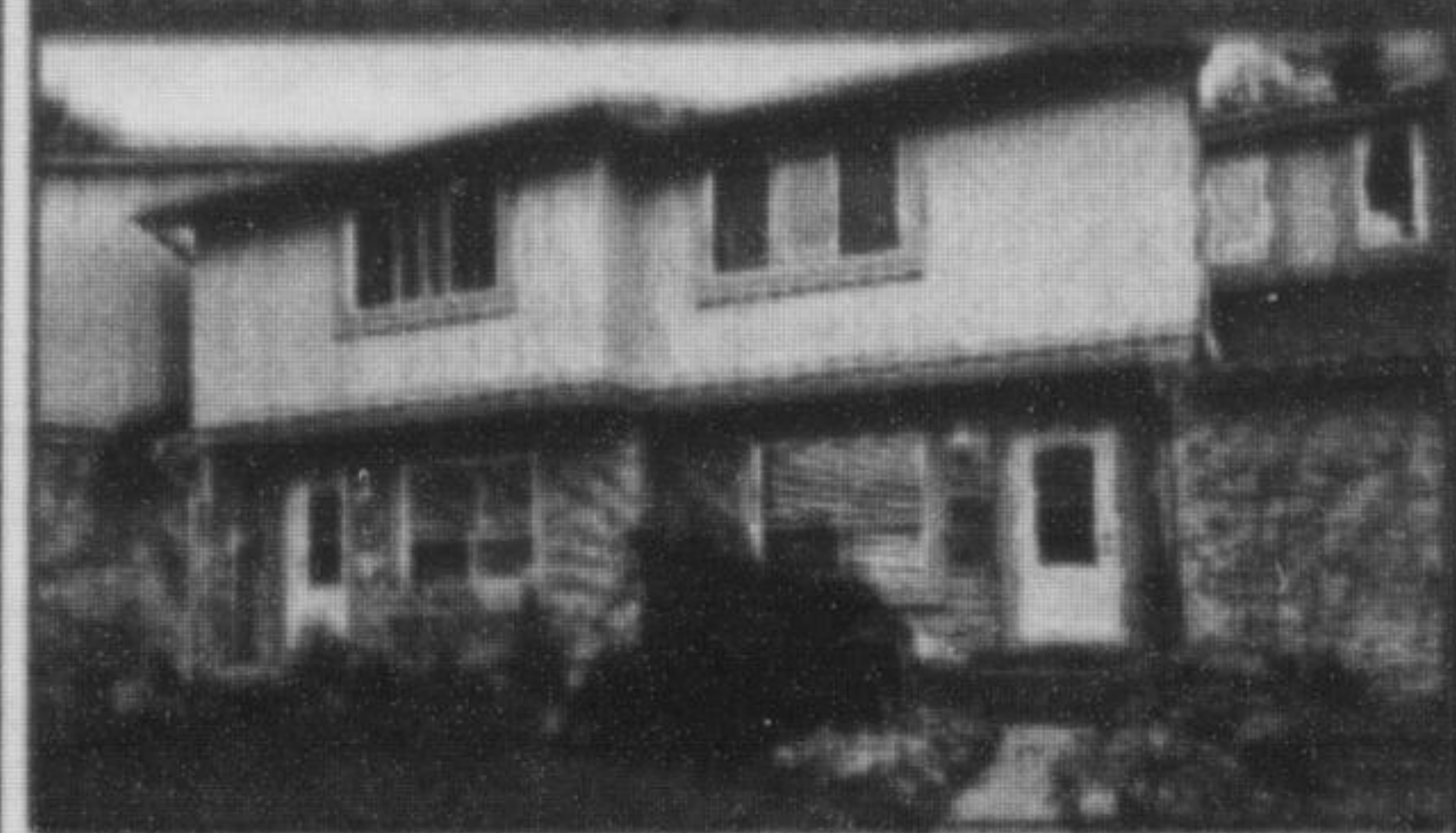
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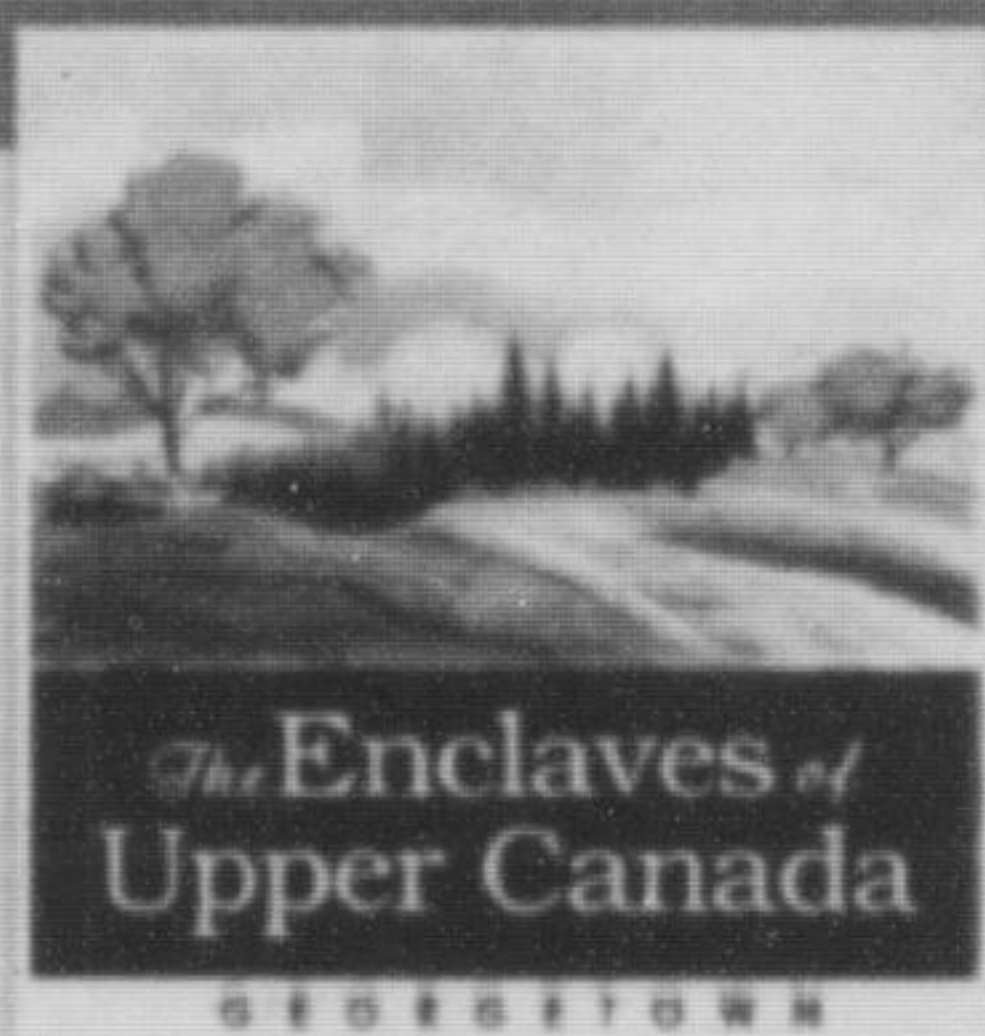


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Sales Representative

\$599,900 - This lovely country style bungalow in "Old Milton" on a large 100' x 158' private lot. This stunning property features: professionally landscaped grounds - on ground pool - large deck - hot tub - sunroom - large shed. Inside you will find a beautifully renovated kitchen - large cozy Family Room - elegant Living/Dining Room combination with fireplace & hardwood floors - large Master Bedroom with walkout to deck & 3 pcs Ensuite Bathroom. This home features: 4 bedrooms - 2.5 bathrooms - large eat-in kitchen - part finished basement - parking for 4 cars - Great Location - Great Large Lot!

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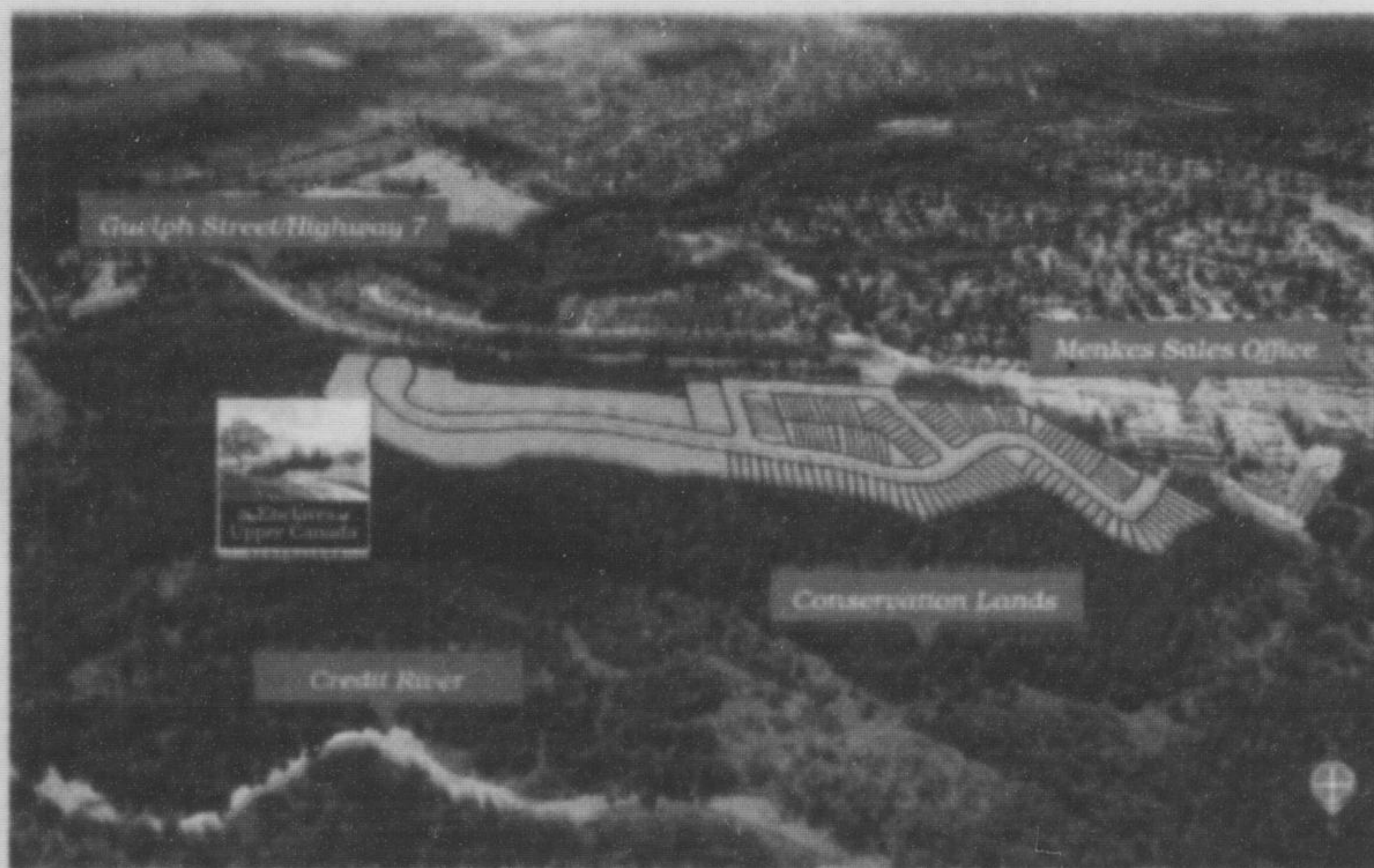
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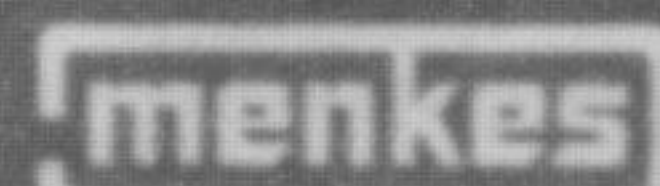
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