

# MURDOCH PRICE

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## NEWSLETTER

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## Mortgagee Sales – Do Your Homework Before You Buy

If you buy a property at a mortgagee sale, be aware that you are entering a contract that is quite different in its nature to an agreement entered into in other circumstances. The agreement is likely to be weighed heavily in the mortgagee's favour as mortgagee sales involve factors outside of the mortgagee's control, which it will want to protect itself from. This may include a very unwilling and impecunious owner occupier who is being forced to leave their home by the mortgagee which assisted them to get there in the first place. In such circumstances the mortgagee is usually unwilling to negotiate terms with the purchaser and adopts a take-it-or-leave-it stance.

It is not uncommon for purchasers to face difficulties after settlement, such as having to evict a previous owner occupier or having to deal with damage caused to the house by the disgruntled owner. In one instance the occupier took all the chattels from the property and sold them to pay other sundry debts, leaving the purchaser out of pocket.

Other common issues for purchasers at mortgagee sales can include:

There is less protection for purchasers as the agreement usually does not include standard provisions. For example, the mortgagee will have removed the section in the agreement relating to the vendor's warranties and will have removed the right for the purchaser to approve title. Often purchasers will not be able to view the property beforehand as the owner does not allow an inspection, so it will not be clear whether work has been carried out that should have required a permit.

- Purchasers may not be able to claim against the mortgagee for late settlement/possession as there may be situations where the mortgagee is unable to evict the owner. The mortgagee does not guarantee that it will give vacant possession on the day of settlement.

### CHRISTMAS GREETING

*The partners & staff wish you and your families all the best for the festive season and the coming year.*

*Our offices will close at 1pm  
on 23 December 2009  
and reopen on 11 January 2010.*

- Once the contract is signed it is unconditional and so requires thorough due diligence prior to signing. Even though a contract is unconditional, the terms may allow the mortgagee to cancel the agreement prior to settlement if the owner pays the debt. This means the purchaser is unable to know whether settlement will actually occur until the day of settlement.
- The mortgagee may require the purchaser to insure the property from the moment the agreement is signed, because the mortgagee ceases to accept responsibility for loss from the moment the hammer falls.

Buying a vacant property at a mortgagee sale reduces the chance of the house and chattels being interfered with prior to, or after, settlement.

Mortgagee sales offer an opportunity to buy a property at a reduced cost. To lessen the chances of problems occurring you must understand the agreement well and undertake a thorough due diligence investigation prior to entering into the agreement. You should seek legal advice before the auction, as well as checking the title, council records and the property in advance, if possible. However, there may still be some issues that arise that are out of your control as purchaser.

The above is by no means an extensive list of the issues that a purchaser could face, but it is a reminder to do your homework before putting your hand up at a mortgagee sale auction.

## Every Rose has its Thorn

New Zealand's highest appellate court, the Supreme Court, has recently delivered its decision in *Rose v Rose*. The case is about the classification of property. The Property (Relationships) Act 1976 ('the Act') defines relationship property and separate property. Relationship property is the pool of common property and at separation it is to be divided equally, unless there are extraordinary circumstances that would make equal sharing repugnant to justice. However, *Rose v Rose* exemplifies how there are also pathways whereby separate property becomes relationship property.



### Relationship Property

Relationship property as defined in the Act includes:

- the family home – whether acquired before or during the relationship
- family chattels – whether acquired before or during the relationship
- all property jointly owned
- property owned immediately before the relationship began, if it was acquired in contemplation of the relationship and it was intended for the common use or the common benefit of the partners
- all property acquired after the relationship began, with some exceptions such as inheritances, gifts, and trust distributions, provided same are kept separate
- increases or gains in relationship property, subject to exceptions
- increases in the value of one partner's separate property, if the increase is attributable to:
  - the use of relationship property
  - the direct or indirect actions of the other spouse or partner

### Separate Property

Separate property is defined in the Act as being any property that is not relationship property.

### Rose v Rose

The basic approach of the courts has been that if the non-owning partner contributes to an increase in the value of the other partner's separate property that increase in value becomes relationship property.

In this case, Mr Rose's separate property included a farm that he owned prior to the marriage.

Mrs Rose sought to share the increase in the value of the farm at the date of separation. Mrs Rose argued that during the course of the marriage relationship her outside earnings combined with her duties as a homemaker enabled her husband to keep his farm and develop it into a vineyard. During the term of the marriage relationship the farm appreciated in value significantly due to inflationary pressures and its location within a prime grape region in Marlborough.

The Court accepted Mrs Rose's argument and held that Mrs Rose was entitled to a 40% share in the increase in the value of the separate property. Mr Rose was given a 60% share giving him greater credit for the inflation and general increase in the value of the land.

It is considered a landmark decision because despite the apparent indirectness of Mrs Rose's contributions, she was awarded a 40% share of the increase in the value of the separate property.

### A Suggestion

One way you may possibly prevent separate property becoming relationship property is to record it in a section 21 Agreement, which also specifies that no matter what the contributions made to the relationship by the other partner during the life of the relationship, it is to remain separate property.

## How to Secure your Debts

The Personal Property Securities Register ('the Register') is an electronic record of any debt security interests held against any personal property (except land) owned by an individual or organisation. In order to register a security interest over property a creditor needs to have ownership rights in the property.

### Purpose of Register

If someone owes you money ("the debtor") for personal property that you have provided to them, then you are a secured party and have a security interest in that property. Your security interest attaches to that property for the purposes of the Personal Property Securities Act 1999, if you have given value to the debtor and the debtor has rights in that property. For example, an electrician installs lighting into a shop and the shop-owner fails to pay for it. The electrician has given 'value' to the shop-owner (the lighting) and the shop-owner has 'rights' in the lighting because they own it. Therefore, the electrician has a security interest in the lighting.

The purpose of the Register however, is to allow you to further protect your security interest by registering it. This enables you to enforce your security interest against a third party. For example, a debtor may sell property that you have a security interest in to a third party. If your security interest is registered then you are able to enforce your interest against that third party.

### Priority of secured parties

The goods that you have a security interest in may also be subject to a security interest from another party. By registering a security interest on the Register, you are granted priority over other unregistered security interests. If all security interests are registered, then priority is given in order of the date of registration. Therefore, when it comes to registering a security interest against goods, time is of the essence.

### Registering your security interest

In order for you to register an interest on the



Register, you must register a financing statement. The cost for registering a financing statement is \$3.00 and the process for doing so is as follows:

You must set up a Secured Party Group ID ("group ID") the first time you access the Register. All future registrations are made under this group ID. Once you have set up your group ID then you are able to register a financing statement against your debtor.

The following details are necessary in order to register a financing statement:

- In regards to a debtor that is an individual; full name, date of birth and address.
- In regards to a debtor that is an organisation; type of organisation i.e. company, partnership or trust and organisation's contact address.

It is imperative to retrieve this information from a debtor when entering into a security agreement with them as the fields are mandatory and a financing statement cannot be registered without it.

You must also enter information about the collateral (personal property) including the type (e.g. goods) and a description.

### Searching the register

The Register can also be searched by anyone at a fee of \$1.00. The following searches are all available on the Register:

- Debtor Person Search
- Debtor Organisation Search
- Motor Vehicle Search
- Aircraft Serial Number Search
- Financing Statement Number Search

It is advisable to search the Register before entering into an agreement to sell, supply or buy in order to avoid people that repeatedly do not pay their debts.

## Cross Lease Ownership

Ownership of a cross lease property means you own a share of the underlying land and lease flats (or houses) to yourself and other owners for (normally) 999 years. A cross lease plan is annexed to the certificate of title and is commonly referred to as the 'Flats Plan'. This shows common areas, restricted areas and delineates the area of each flat.

### The common areas

The common areas, for example a driveway, may be used by all owners by virtue of their joint ownership of the land (if marked as a common area on their lease). There will be a covenant that the common area is not to be used for any purpose other than access for vehicles and pedestrians.

**The restricted areas**

The restricted areas are intended to provide each owner with a private area for their use such as a courtyard or garden. The rights that the owner enjoys over the restricted area depend on the actual terms of the lease itself. It is imperative that a prospective purchaser search all the leases of the property in order to ascertain the full extent of all restricted areas.

**The flats**

The area of each flat should be clearly delineated on the plan. A prospective purchaser should take the opportunity to compare the Flats Plan with the actual buildings on the property to ensure that there have been no additions, alterations, or demolitions which are not shown or recorded on the Flats Plan. The alterations or additions may encroach either on to the common area or on to a restricted area and the owner has no leasehold title to them, and is in breach of the lease if consent is not sought and the Flat Plans altered.

**Objecting to title**

If you are purchasing a cross-leased property you can object to title if the Flats Plan is defective. You are able to object to title subsequent to signing an agreement for sale and purchase, provided you do so within the correct timeframe.



If alterations or additions have been made to the flats so the exterior dimensions have changed, the vendor will be unable to give you a leasehold title to the alterations/additions and the title is defective.

On receiving an objection notice from a purchaser, the vendor usually has one of three options. S/he can correct the title, cancel the agreement, or negotiate with the purchaser.

To correct the title, the vendor must:

- have a cross-lease plan of the alterations or additions prepared and deposited in the Land Registry Office, and
- surrender the cross-lease and have a new cross-lease of the altered or enlarged building executed and registered.

This process is costly and relies on the co-operation of all parties.

In summary, a cross-lease title should be checked carefully to ensure there are restricted areas, common areas and the Flats Plan is correct. If you want to purchase a cross leased property and there is a problem with the Flats Plan, you may be able to have the vendor rectify the issue and proceed accordingly

**Snippets**

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**Early release of deposit**

When a deposit is paid, the stakeholder (usually a real estate agent) is required to hold it for 10 days. Vendors often ask the agent to release the deposit early to use it as a deposit on another house. The agent can do so, provided the purchaser agrees. Be wary of agreeing to the release, because the transaction might not settle. If the transaction does not settle and the vendor has already spent the deposit, you as the purchaser have no security and your deposit is gone.

Retention of the deposit until settlement by the stakeholder has merit, especially where there is a mortgage on the title. If there is a mortgage, be aware that the deposit might be needed to settle the vendor's mortgage debt, and if released early and spent in other ways by the vendor, then the vendor might not be able to discharge the mortgage.

The key is to consider the issues carefully before agreeing to the early release of the deposit, particularly where the title is encumbered.

**Is Your Family Trust Safe?**

As a consequence of a number of court decisions over the past few years and a growing trend, we recommend a review of on-going administrative procedures to help protect the integrity of your family

trust against challenges by third parties such as WINZ, IRD, creditors, beneficiaries and ex-relationship partners.

The first thing that happens when there is a challenge is a requirement for a complete copy of all trust documents including any financial accounts and trustee minutes.

**Recommendations:**

Annual meetings of trustees with the solicitor for the trust to review the past year and future plans with a trustee minute recording same.

Reviews of trust documentation to ensure all actions of the trust have been properly recorded. The frequency of review would depend upon the complexity of the family trust e.g. annual or three yearly.

If you have an annual gifting programme with us, then that is a good time for the trustees annual meeting. Otherwise contact your usual advisor at Murdoch Price Limited.

*If you have any questions about the newsletter items, please contact us – we are here to help.*