

Buyer Beware!

**The Importance
of Home
Inspections.**

**Special Report Presented
by**

Randall Brennan
Equity Colorado
303-909-2365
RandallBrennan.com

Buyer Beware!

The Importance of Home Inspections.

When making an offer on a home, don't be fooled by the number of rooms, the interesting decorator touches or the charming back deck and garden. The home you fall in love with may be impossible to heat or cool, have rot buried beneath the new carpet, or feature a potential swamp outside the back door.

The purchase of a home is usually the largest single investment most families will ever make. You need to learn as much as you can about the condition of the property and the need for any major repairs before you sign on the dotted line, so there are darn few unpleasant surprises after you move in.

Hiring a professional building inspector to perform a thorough visual investigation of your dream home can alert you to any impending or existing problems. Your bank or lending company may insist on a home inspection prior to finalizing the loan. Even if they don't, you should invest in an inspection for your own peace of mind. And be sure your real estate agent has an inspection contingency clause written into the contract.

Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your purchase puts you in a better bargaining position, as you will have some idea of the true value of what is there and the expenses any repairs will incur. A complete house inspection should alert you to defects that could affect resale value, safety, and comfort.

A home inspector is usually called right after the contract or purchase agreement has been signed should be available within a few days. A good home inspection should take between two and four hours and cost between \$200 and \$500—an investment that could save thousands of dollars in repairs down the road. Additional services such as septic, well or radon testing may be recommended for your area, check with your buyers agent or the local municipality. Remember the cliché “Forewarned is forearmed”? Take notice.

A home inspection is all encompassing.

The inspector should work with a checklist that incorporates a detailed examination of interior and exterior elements of the home. You should be on hand for the inspection so that you can see for yourself areas of concern or reasons for celebration. It will also enable you to negotiate with confidence.

The inspection also provides an opportunity to understand how all the systems work and where the valves and panels are located. In short it allows you to become familiar with all aspects of your new home. Before the inspection begins you or the home inspector should request permission to operate all appliances, heating, and ventilation systems. Also be sure all utilities are turned on and you can access all parts of the home and yard.

1. Outside the home:

Because first impressions count, the **exterior of the property** is a good place to start. The inspector will be looking to see that:

- adjacent lots do not affect the value of the property or pose potential hazards
- patios, decks, fences, sheds, steps, retaining walls, and garages are in good shape and there are no indications of bugs or rodents that may cause damage
- the land, driveway, and sidewalks slope away from the home
- there are downspouts and they too drain away from the home
- there is no pooling or stagnant water
- there is no flooding from the water system
- the yard and landscaping are in good repair
- trees and bushes are a safe distance from the home
- stair and deck handrails are secure.

The inspector will also be checking the **structure** of the home to make sure all lines, including those of windows, doors and siding, are all straight or square and in good repair:

- **Outside surfaces** should be free of stains and damage, such as, cracks in joints or stucco or siding.
- **Windows and doors** are inspected for tight-fitting frames, intact glass, and the use of energy-efficient materials.
- A sagging or uneven **roof** may indicate inadequate framing.

2. Looking under the hood:

Of extreme importance is the condition of the **mechanical systems**: plumbing, electrical, heating & ventilation, air conditioning and heat recovery.

- In the **plumbing** department, in addition to leaks and inadequate drainage, the inspector will be checking craftsmanship. Old and jumbled plumbing that is pieced together with dissimilar materials may hint of poor work. The condition of the water heater, pump, pipes, and drains will also be covered in the inspection.
- The breaker box or **electrical** panel should have adequate amperage for all of the appliances you want to operate. The inspector will also be looking for exposed wires, adequate wall outlets, and proper cables for branch circuits.
- When it comes to **heating and ventilation**, consider the age of the house. If it's older, it may have a forced-air heating and cooling system that will eventually need to be replaced at considerable expense—an expense that should be factored into future costs.
- The fresh air exchanger should operate efficiently in every room of the house; the air filter should be clean; separate flues for gas, oil, propane, wood or coal should slant up to the outside and there should be no open seams. Warning signs of trouble ahead include the odor of gas, rust in the area of the cooling unit, ductwork deterioration, and the presence of asbestos on steam and water pipes.

3. Inside rooms:

An **interior inspection** should begin in the **attic** with an examination of trusses, insulation, and covering materials. Inside rooms should not be surveyed for cosmetic appeal but for substance. Here the inspector will be looking for:

- cracks and stains in ceilings, floors, and walls

- level plumb lines
- windows and doors that may not open and close easily and are in need of repair
- paint, paper, and other wall coverings and trims that may need replacing
- smoke and water detectors
- proper masonry and chimney flue operation
- properly affixed stair treads and handrails
- light switches and electrical outlets that may malfunction
- a sufficient number of electrical outlets in each room
- ample insulation in the walls and adequate heating and cooling delivery systems.

Kitchen - One of the most important—and costly to renovate— rooms is the kitchen. Really think about the kitchen and assure yourself it already has most of the features you are looking for. A good inspector will then concentrate on electrical and plumbing to make sure the:

- exhaust fan works
- countertop ground fault interrupters provide adequate protection
- pipes leading to sinks, dishwasher, and other appliances are not leaking
- under-sink cabinet is dry and decay-free
- flow of water in the sink is substantial and drains readily
- garbage disposal works properly
- all doors and drawers open and close easily.

Bathroom - Bathrooms are also expensive to repair and renovate, so, in addition to many of the same concerns that apply to the kitchen, special care is taken to ensure that pipes and drains are clog- and leak-free; there is adequate ventilation and the exhaust fans work; the toilet is stable and flushes properly; tiles are secure and all coverings are solid and water flow is of an acceptable level in all accessories. Because bathrooms are frequently redesigned, the inspector should make sure bearing walls and plumbing routes will facilitate easy alterations.

Basements & Crawlspace - Cold, clammy rooms are often found in basements and crawlspaces primarily due to improper air circulation. Here the inspector will be looking for water stains, signs of rot, insects, rodents, foundational inadequacies, satisfactory insulation, and wet/dry floors and walls.

Finding a good inspector is paramount.

Like most everything in life, you get what you pay for. Hiring a reputable, thorough inspector will pay off in the long run. Please don't consider doing it yourself even if you are fairly knowledgeable. It will be difficult for you to remain neutral and objective, which could affect the negotiation process. Hiring a generalist who specializes in home inspections is probably your best bet, as this person will have inspected at least hundreds of homes during their career and will be working for a pre-determined fee, which helps ensure impartiality.

Asking friends and business acquaintances for recommendations is a good starting point. You can, of course, look in the Yellow Pages under Building Inspection Services or Home Inspection Services. If this is your route, check to see whether any of those listed are members of the American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI). ASHI is a professional society with a high code of ethics, standards, and practices. Your real estate agent should also have a list of members. Before hiring someone, be sure to check the inspector's references, qualifications, and experience.

What the home inspector does and does not do.

The home inspector provides a visual evaluation of the home and property and reports on its physical condition, indicating which areas may need attention. In other words it's the home inspector's job to find any "skeletons" in the closet (or more likely in the plumbing, wiring, roof or basement).

The private home inspection is not a guarantee and it is not an appraisal that can be used to ascertain market value. Nor is it a municipal inspection verifying code compliance. However, if you are curious about code compliance, in many areas it is possible for you or your real estate agent to visit your civic government's building department and have a look at the building file for the property of interest to you. Within the file you will see whether inspections have been performed at each stage of construction and, depending on the region, you may even view original blueprints and drawings.

What if the inspection reveals lots of flaws?

You may want the house in spite of its flaws but at least an inspection will help to show you exactly what you are buying. The inspector can give you some idea of repair costs, which may assist you in the final negotiations. You may request that certain items be fixed prior to final sale or you may simply reconsider the amount you offer to pay.

In conclusion:

Hiring an impartial building or home inspector is a worthwhile investment. It will allow you to become more knowledgeable about your new home and property; give you confidence in negotiating the sale; provide forewarning of what's ahead and give you an opportunity to alter or repair small imperfections before they become major catastrophes.

If the final contract is dependent on an acceptable inspection, any shortcomings must be repaired or financially offset. With such a contingency clause, you may cancel the contract when alterations are not taken care of to your satisfaction.

Keep in mind that a home inspection is not a guarantee that problems won't develop after you move in. However if you feel that a problem was already visible at the time of the inspection and was not mentioned in the report, your first step should be to call and meet

with the inspector to clarify the situation. You will find this usually resolves any misunderstandings.

Additional information:

Home Inspection Connection
<http://realestateinspection.info/>

American Society of Home Inspectors
<http://www.ashi.com/>

Allstate Home Inspections, Inc.,
<http://www.allstatehomeinsp.com/frame1.html>

Hometime, check local listings for air time on TLC and PBS
<http://www.hometime.com>