

HOME INSPECTION 101

*Rely on a professional to be sure that
what you see is what you will get*

In no other industry is the term *caveat emptor* — let the buyer beware — more fraught with meaning than in a real estate purchase. A professional home inspection is an essential step not to be underestimated or overlooked, and the best way to make sure what you see is really what you're going to get.

"There is always a degree of risk involved in buying any house," says Steve Surette, former president of the Indiana branch of the American Society of Home Inspectors. "A good inspection helps educate you, and gives you the tools you need to minimize that risk."

Although an inspection is not required in a home sale transaction, nearly everyone in the industry agrees that getting one is without a doubt a smart idea — even on a newly constructed home. The services of a home inspector come into play right after the contract or purchase agreement is signed.

Home inspections may reveal some not-so-pleasant surprises that can make or break a sale. A thorough inspection should include a report on the heating, air conditioning, plumbing, electrical systems, roof, attic, walls, insulation, ceiling and floors, windows and doors, foundation and structures, and basically any other visible factors that affect the home's condition and liveability.

While it can be a bummer to find out the house you're so in love with may have defects, a home inspection yielding positive results can provide priceless reassurance. It can also call sellers' attention to items they might want to work on before putting their homes on the market in order to generate a faster sale. In either instance, knowledge is power.

"There are two primary myths when it comes to home inspections," Surette says.

"The first myth is that we will be able to find every single defect, and second, that we will be able to provide protection against any possible defect in the future. What we provide is a snapshot at a given moment in time of any existing risks that are present during a visual inspection."

"A home inspection is not a warranty," agrees Patty Thornberry, vice president of Carmel-based Security Home Inspections. "It's not a crystal ball that says 15, 20 days after we do the inspection ... something's not going to break."

The cost of a home inspection can vary depending on the home's location, size, age and price. Additional testing or a closer look at extenuating circumstances can also increase the price of an inspection. However, in the end, a good inspection should be viewed as an investment in the home's safety and security — one that's well worth the money.

"The client is usually with us during the two to four hours it takes to inspect a 2,000- to 4,000-square-foot home," Surette says. "We show them where the filter is, how the mechanics work, and they get a sense of where the risks might be. If we can show you what those risks are before you move in, you're going to have a much more successful experience as a homeowner."

To find the best home inspector for your job, Surette advises asking trusted friends and family for references. Consider the inspector's level of experience, training and professional affiliations.

Members of the American Society of Home Inspectors are required to follow a rigorous code of standards and ethics. Surette says a new law up for public review will require all home inspectors to receive licensing by July 2005 in order to perform paid inspections. ■