

Home Purchase and Renovation – Tips from a Home Inspector

Buying a home, whether new, nearly new, a well seasoned classic older home, or a fixer-upper of any age, presents challenging decisions, both in what to buy, and what and how to repair or improve the building. Hiring a well qualified home inspector is one vital step in reducing the number of these decisions, but it is also important to know a few techniques to employ while house hunting, before you call the home inspector.

Here are some useful tips to keep in mind while house hunting.

1. No house will fully fit your long terms needs, even if it is custom designed for you. Your needs will change over the years; therefore, it is good to anticipate these changes and choose or design a house that can easily accommodate changes.
2. Every house will need maintenance, some more than others. Ideally, choose a house that either has low maintenance systems and components, or one where the systems and components can be upgraded to provide low maintenance service.
3. Every house is a set of compromises. If new custom built, it is a set of the builder's compromises with the owner. If new spec. built, it is a set of the builder's compromises with his market price. Choosing an existing house forces the buyer to deal with a set of compromises made by the prior owners. The buyers challenge is to determine which of these compromises are acceptable and which can be changed within a reasonable time and budget.
4. Some adverse conditions are more easily changed than others. Most houses can be reroofed promptly given sufficient funds. Most heating plants and water heaters can be changed out quickly. It is not quick or easy to significantly change room arrangements or add plumbing fixtures. It is often very costly to replace windows.
5. Systems in the house affect one another. Insufficient insulation not only reduces comfort and increases heating costs; it requires larger heating systems and may reduce the life of the heating and cooling systems.
6. Older houses generally don't keep many secrets. Systems and components that have not performed well will generally show their flaws, certainly to a qualified home inspector, and perhaps even to the careful house hunter.
7. New or nearly new houses have not experienced many seasons of exposure to the weather and have not shown how they perform under a variety of uses, including lack of maintenance or hard use. These houses may have potential hidden flaws.
8. Simple designs usually outperform complex designs. The more complex the house, the greater potential for trouble, particularly from the standpoint of moisture management. (How well does the building shed water?)
9. Vacant homes, particularly those with utilities shut off, can not be fully evaluated until the systems are all put into operation, and may have adverse conditions that are not readily discoverable until the systems are put into normal use. Example: a clogged sewer may permit water to flow, but backup when solids are introduced.
10. Seller's disclosures, while necessary and occasionally beneficial, are no substitute for a thorough home inspection. Many home owners actually know very little about the physical condition of the systems and components in the house.