

The Home Inspection – Not A “Do It Yourself” Project

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While modern chemists can make nylon out of corn cobs, making a silk purse out of a sow’s ear still eludes us. When you invest in a house, you are looking forward to a profit from your efforts. Alternately, nasty surprises can wipe out projected gains any time in the process.

Would you rather know a house’s condition before you bought it, or wait until after you’ve closed the deal and moved in? It’s really that simple. Remember the movie “The Money Pit”? Some deals are better left on the table.

If all home buyers and sellers were experienced construction engineers, forensic detectives, and talented repair specialists familiar with building standards, plumbing, electrical, structural and HVAC systems, use of materials, identification of destructive conditions and took the time to apply all this knowledge in their home selection process, they may be in an informational position to do their own inspection. How many people do you know meeting that description?

Knowledge is critical, but so is the ability to highlight critical information and convert it into understanding. How important is access and ventilation over and under a pier and beam house, and why? Knowing a little about plumbing can be useful, but do you really understand how likely old galvanized pipe systems are to unravel when you touch them? A little rot here and there may be covered up, but do you understand the potential for whole walls to be eaten from within? An important part of a thorough home inspection is helping you translate the information into understanding.

Then there’s the emotional component. The property is still the seller’s baby, filled with memories. They have trouble focusing on the flaws, and are even likely to deny them. You are supposed to fall in love with the place. Even the most seasoned home investor, while focusing primarily on the financial aspects of the deal, retains some dimension of liking or not liking the place. That’s an integral part of envisioning how to improve its appeal to attract tenants or buyers. Even if you had all the knowledge, understanding and experience necessary to perform your own inspection, you would fail the emotional test.

You’ve probably heard the statement: “A lawyer who represents himself has a fool for a client.” Would you buy a used car by phone, sight unseen? The same logic applies to home inspections.

The “As Is” sale may appear to be a special case. Unless the home is definitely intended as a tear-down where home condition really doesn’t matter, all the conditions above still apply.

A young couple bought a house to refurbish. They were working with a limited budget, and had great

hopes for future profit. It seems some local termites had an entirely different agenda, and had digested so much of the structure that the intended rebuild became a tear-down. Lots of legal wrangling finally produced a resolution. The seller lost, the buyer lost, and both agents lost. The lawyers and the termites won. A thorough inspection may have been a better idea.

Sellers work to achieve the highest possible sale price and buyers work the opposite side of the street, with neither of them necessarily holding a complete picture of the nature of what is being sold. You know quite well how challenging the task of smoothly engineering a mutually acceptable deal can be. Just because a highly talented person can make the process look easy doesn’t necessarily make it so.

The home inspector is a critical part of the process to help you discover those potentially nasty surprises before the deal is done. A thorough home inspection is a tool you can use to enhance your bargaining position. You also maximize your satisfaction, when the deal is done, by knowing you have used every tool at your disposal to insure the best value. Even when the deal doesn’t make – you may have saved your bacon.

A thorough home inspection provides several benefits.

- Identifies potential maintenance problems and necessary repairs, avoiding nasty surprises.
- Clarifies functionality of the house’s critical systems.
- Identifies a wide range of conditions considered to be safety hazards – potential legal entanglements.
- Helps you refine your cost estimates.
- Offers an informed, independent perspective, free of emotional bias.
- Gives you additional information on which to base final price negotiations.
- Helps your peace of mind with an independent confirmation of buying what you thought you were buying.

Will an inspection catch every detail? There can always be hidden damage or flaws, but you will be way ahead in any case.

A good home inspection is a critical tool for building your success. When you do find out how to make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear at a reasonable price, let me know.

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