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Home Buying and Home Inspectors: Why Guess When You Can Have the Facts?



Looking to sell or purchase a property? Well, if you are, then you definitely need the services that only a home inspector can provide.

Buying or selling a home is perhaps the single most important financial decision you ever have to make in your entire life. It's also a smart move. But no matter how smart a move it is, you still have to make sure that it's an investment that's sound. It is for the best that when you do get to that point (and you will), you employ all the professional assistance that you can get.

Why Have Your House Inspected

Interest rates are so enticing these days it wouldn't be a wonder if many of us will find ourselves in the market for another home, whether for personal reasons or purely for investment purposes. In home buying, the old rule is that when shopping for a house, the three most important things are location, location, location. However, while that much is true, you have to remember that once you do buy a house, it does not matter how convenient it is to everything because you are still going to have to live in it.

There are many things to consider when buying a home. Certainly, it does not merely involve location. Even the house itself is composed of several major components, all of which you have to take into account when assessing it for its value. And add to that the many types of homes available in the market and you have yourself one HUGE decision to make.

Unlike a car that depreciates in value, a house actually appreciates in value over time, provided that it remains in good condition. And how can you expect a house to remain in good condition for a long period of time? That's where a home inspection comes in.

What's in a House? Ask the Home Inspector!

So what is a home inspection? What does a home inspector do? And to what extent? These are some of the questions you might find yourself asking when faced with the decision of getting a professional inspect your possible new home.

Let's start with the first question. To put it simply, a standard home inspection is a visual examination of a house. The examination is usually limited to the physical structure and major interior systems of a residential building, consisting of one to four dwelling units. You can think of it as having a physical exam

conducted by a physician, only that in a home inspection, the VISUAL aspects of a house are being examined.

Home inspections are not intended to point out every small problem or any invisible or latent defect in a home. Most minor or cosmetic flaws, for example, should be apparent to the buyer without the aid of a professional.

The inspector is someone, a professional, who is trained and licensed to perform home inspections. During an inspection, the inspector will review the readily accessible exposed portions of the structure of the home, including the roof, the attic, walls, ceilings, floors, windows, doors, basement, and foundation as well as the heating/air conditioning systems, interior plumbing, and electrical systems for potential problems.

Currently, there are no strict laws regulating the licensure of home inspectors so consumers are advised to exercise discretion when they hire individuals claiming to be professionals. One good tip to avoid home inspection fraud is to ask for certification that your home inspector is ***a member of any of the known associations*** of home inspectors in your state.

Common Misconceptions about Home Inspection

It's funny, but a lot of people do commonly misunderstand what home inspection connotes. They often mistake the occupation for something else together. The reason probably has to do with the fact that home inspection has become such a common trend in real estate so that many brokers and realtors tend to offer it as a package, along with several other separate and completely different services.

No. 1: Home Inspection vs. Appraisal

One common misconception that people have about home inspection is that it is similar to appraisal. In an appraisal, your house is being assessed for its VALUE

in the real estate market. A home inspection is more on finding out the CONDITION of the structure of the house, which may or may not affect its value.

No. 2: Home Inspection vs. Building Code Inspection

Another is that a home inspection is really just similar to a building code inspection. Now, this mistake is understandable, considering how the two basically concern themselves with how the structure of a building is up to standard. One glaring difference, however, is that a home inspection is a visual examination of a HOUSE, while a building code inspection is of a BUILDING, not just a house. Another difference is that the building code inspection is mandatory in most states and often conducted by an agent of government. A home inspector is no agent of government. Neither is a home inspection mandatory.

No. 3: Is a home inspection similar to a guarantee?

Many seem to believe that a home inspection is a guarantee when buying a new home. Well, surprise, surprise. It is not. True that when you get a home inspection, you are essentially making sure that your house is in good condition, but you will find soon enough that a home inspection is *far from making you feel good about your choice of home*. In fact, a lot of buyers have felt disappointed after the home inspector pointed out all the bad aspects of their potential homes. And some even went so much as to not go through the sale.

This is not saying, of course, that the home inspector will only tell you all the bad news. The truth is the home inspector is an independent examiner and he will tell you the facts, good or bad, about your potential home. That's the closest you're going to get to a guarantee. So don't go getting a home inspection, thinking that you are only confirming your choice of a house. Instead, go through it with an OPEN MIND and the knowledge that the home inspector is giving you the facts, stripped of sales talk.

No. 4: Home Inspection, Home Insurance?

And last, a home inspection is nothing like an insurance policy on the condition of the property. It is an inspection. Period. It is nothing more, nothing less. It does not provide you coverage for anything. If potential problems are found in your new home, then those problems exist and it is up to you if you still want to buy the house or not. Sometimes, however, a seller will pre-package a home inspection with policy coverage for your new home so that's probably where the misconception arose.

When to Hire a Home Inspector

A typical time to hire a home inspector is right after you, as potential home buyer, sign the offer to purchase contract. Any time prior to executing the final purchase and sales agreement is a good time to have a house inspected.

When it comes to home inspection, you have two choices. You can either hire an independent home inspector to have your potential home inspected, with consent of the owner or seller. Or the seller can arrange one for you. If you decided on the latter, then remember that before you sign the offer to purchase contract, make sure that there is an inspection clause in the contract that includes a home inspection. This clause will make the purchase obligation contingent upon the findings of a professional home inspection.

Also, be sure to pay attention to the terms and conditions stipulated in that particular clause. The clause should specify the terms to which both you and the seller are obligated.

If, however, you chose the former option, then it is your responsibility to get a competent and professional inspector. As mentioned earlier, you might want to start with home inspection associations in your state as these groups are the

closest thing to a guarantee that you are hiring real professionals who know what they're doing. Much is at stake in a home inspection, as you know already.

Below are some more tips to help you find a home inspector:

Choosing a Home Inspector

Besides home inspection associations, good referral sources for home inspection services are friends, neighbors, or business acquaintances. Ask them if they can recommend to you a home inspector of whose services they are satisfied with when they had their own houses inspected.

In addition, lawyers and mortgage brokers may also recommend a home inspector. Real estate brokers and salesmen may not directly recommend a specific home inspection company or home inspector unless representing the buyer as a buyer's broker. Brokers, however, may provide assistance to buyers in accessing information on licensed home inspectors.

A word to the wise about broker-suggested home inspectors: BEWARE. While this isn't true most of the time, some people *have* complained that the home inspector cannot be trusted to make an impartial examination of a home because of conflict of interest. Think about it: A mortgage broker recommends a home inspector to examine a home which the former is brokering. The end result is that both of them owe favor to each other, so it's logical to think that they may not always have *your* best interest in mind. So just exercise caution when you decide on this alternative, or better yet, look for other means of finding a home inspector.

Most state official websites have a list of names of professionals engaged in particular occupations, home inspection included. The State of Massachusetts, for instance, has the names of local inspectors included in their page for Division of Professional Licensure. If your state does not include such directory listing,

you can always consult the Yellow Pages. Many home inspectors advertise under “Building Inspection Service” or “Home Inspection Service.”

Important Note about “Home Inspector Certifications”

You should not confuse a home inspector’s license with these so-called “certifications.” These are just documents offered by, or sold by home inspection trade societies or companies. They can even be obtained via home study courses, or provided by home inspection companies that certify their own inspectors. While they are persuasive at best, when it comes to proving the competence of a home inspector and his reputation for delivering good services, it should not be accepted at face value. Again, it is not a license. Because the home inspection business is unregulated in most states, certifications are available to anyone.

So now that you know what a home inspection is and how to select a good home inspector, it is now time for you to pick up the phone and call your chosen home inspection company. Just a few more things to remember before closing: Your home inspection company should have an OPEN DOOR POLICY when it comes to answering questions you might have. In addition to that, the home inspector himself should be WILLING TO ADDRESS all of your questions and provide you with a full verbal and written report.

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