

13+ Secrets Home Inspectors Won't Tell You

Before you hire a home inspector, read some of their little-known secrets.

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1. Don't find a home inspector through your real estate agent.

It's in the agent's best interest to have the deal go through quickly, so some pitch inspectors who find few problems.

2. If I don't spend at least two hours at the house...

...I'm what we call a drive-by inspector, and you're not getting your money's worth. A thorough inspector checks the crawl space, opens the breaker box, and walks the roof. Most houses take me every bit of three hours.

3. I won't tell you not to buy a house, because I'm not supposed to give real estate advice.

But if I keep telling you that the house has "a lot of issues" or has "a major issue," read between the lines—or at least be prepared to spend big money to fix some problems.

4. If you're a seller...

...you should clean and prepare your house the same way you would for a showing. Most people leave a mess, and when the buyers arrive with me, their jaws hit the floor.

5. Ask to see a sample report before you hire me.

It will give you a good idea of what kind of inspector I am. Do I include digital pictures and estimate repair costs or not? It's a great way to compare two inspectors.

6. Even brand-new homes should be inspected.

We find a ridiculous amount of stuff wrong in new construction: leaks, electrical issues, improperly installed washing machines, clogged pipes because the tile guy cleaned his tools in the sink.

7. Please, if you're going to pay for my services, read my full report—not just the summary.

Many people don't. In one report, I specifically noted that the fireplace damper didn't work. The homeowner called me a few weeks later to complain about all the smoke in the house.

8. If you want the sale of your home to go smoothly...

...have the house inspected before you put it on the market. Working with me can give you time to find a reasonably priced contractor or to make the repairs yourself.

9. If you have a lot of questions, don't ask them as I'm walking through the house.

It will distract me, and I might miss something. Let's go through them at the end.

10. I can't see under the cement slab or inside the walls.

So if a dishonest seller wants to go out of his way to hide defects, I might not be able to find them.

11. Some of the worst homes are those owned by do-it-yourselfers.

I've seen toilets flushing with hot water, weird appliance hookups, and indoor electrical panels dangerously mounted outside in the elements. Hire a professional if you don't know what you're doing.

12. Roof and foundation issues can stop a sale fast.

If you're selling and are not sure of their conditions, get a professional to evaluate them ahead of time—and make sure tree limbs are trimmed far away from the roof to prevent damage.

13. I've encountered every kind of hazard.

Once, I was crawling underneath a bathroom, and I felt something strange beneath me. I looked down and discovered I was on a huge pile of double-edged razor blades. I took a picture of it because I thought no one would believe me.

13 +1 A growing number of people are having us inspect condos, co-ops, and even apartments before they move in.

I can evaluate the space you'll be responsible for, and if it's a condo or co-op, I'll inspect the roof and boiler and let you know if you're likely to be hit with a capital charge in a year or two for the cost of a new one.

13 +2 . You should be there during the inspection of a house you're buying, so I can talk to you about what I find.

A good inspector will also show you how to change the furnace filter, and where to find the main plumbing trap, electrical disconnect and water shutoff valve. If your inspector doesn't want you there for the inspection, that's a red flag.

13 +3 Sellers: If you have a detached garage, leave me the keys.

And if you have an attic door in your closet, move your clothes out of the way. I'm not going to move your stuff, so if you don't make it accessible, it may hold up your deal because I'll have to come back another day.

13+ 4 Be especially careful if you're buying from a home flipper.

Unfortunately, I've run into a lot of unethical flippers looking to make some quick money who intentionally hide problems.

13 +5. Some simple steps sellers can take before the inspection to save time and trouble later:

Make sure every light fixture has a working bulb, test all electrical outlets, repair holes and cracks in drywall, have your carpets and air ducts cleaned, test your smoke detector and have your HVAC system serviced.

13 + 6. If you're building a house...

...bring me in once before the drywall is put in, so I can look at the bones of the house as well as the plumbing and electrical work. If you wait until it's finished, a lot of the defects will be hidden.

13+7. Look for an inspector who is licensed (if your state has a licensing program) and belongs to a national home inspector organization.

The American Society of Home Inspectors (ASHI), the National Association of Home Inspectors (NAHI) and the International Association of Certified Home Inspectors (InterNACHI) are the three big ones.

13 +8. Always get a home inspector who will walk on the roof if conditions permit.

There are so many defects you can't identify from the ground with binoculars including hail damage, chimney problems, and the condition of the shingles and flashing.

13 +9. If my report includes 10 or more recommendations

to have "further evaluation" by other professionals—a plumber to check the water heater, an engineer to look at the foundation, an electrician to look at the breaker box—I don't blame you for wondering what you're paying me for. Some inspectors do that to cover their butts because they don't want to get sued.

13 + 10. I love kids and dogs, but they don't belong in a house when I'm doing an inspection.

If you're a seller, put your dog at a neighbor's until I'm done. If you're a buyer, get a sitter instead of bringing the kids along for the inspection.

13 +11. A lot of buyers assume that the seller is required to fix problems or lower the price.

But in reality, the seller is under no obligation to fix anything, and it's your decision whether you want to go ahead with the sale.

13 +12. It drives me crazy when sellers stick around for the inspection.

They tend to get extremely defensive because their home is their castle, and I'm pointing out everything that's wrong with it.

13 +13. If your realtor says not to hire me because I'm a "deal killer"...

...that might be a reason *to* hire me. If a house has a ton of problems, don't you want to know before you buy?

Sources: Reuben Saltzman, owner of Structure Tech Home Inspections in Minneapolis, Minn.; Kent Keith owner of Green Tag Inspection Services in Fort Worth, Tex.; [Tom Walsh, owner of All Aspects Home Inspections Inc. in Long Island, N.Y.](#); and Ed Blazek, owner of Blazek Building Inspection Services in Spotsylvania, Va.

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