

WHO ? KNEW



13 Things Home Inspectors Won't Tell You

BY MICHELLE CROUCH

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** 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.
- 9** 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.
- 10** 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.
- 11** 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.
- 12** 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.
- 13** 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. **R**

Sources: Reuben Saltzman, owner of Structure Tech Home Inspections in Minneapolis; Kent Keith, owner of Green Tag Inspection Services in Fort Worth, Texas; Tom Walsh, owner of All Aspects Home Inspections, Inc., in Long Island, New York; and Ed Blazek, president of Blazek Building Inspection Services in Spotsylvania, Virginia.