

WELCOME home

HOUSE OF THE WEEK

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Inspections are designed to inform homebuyers and protect their interests



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Home inspections are a smart investment

By G.A. Peck

The past few pandemic years have upended so much of the real estate market. Prices spiked, while inventory plunged. Buyers found themselves competing against other buyers for homes, and some — wisely or foolishly, time will tell — opted to waive their rights to a home inspection in the interest of endearing the seller. But a home inspection is a critical part of the homebuying process that is intended to reveal potential problems with a house or its systems, allowing buyers to make informed decisions about the current value of the home and whether it's a smart investment for them.

"You can quote this: I, Holly Powell, emphatically recommend to all of my clients to get a home inspection. I would never and have never recommended to any buyer to waive a home inspection," Realtor Holly Powell said. Powell is associated with Berkshire Hathaway Home Services, New England Properties in Westerly.

She noted that the current "sellers' market" has caused buyers some anxiety as they bid against others, and some have chosen to opt out of an inspection in the interest of getting the final nod from the seller. But this can be a costly decision, Powell cautioned.

"Buying a home is one of the biggest decisions you'll ever make in your life, and there's no turning back if you waive the home inspection," she said.

The home inspection doesn't simply alert the parties to problems with the home, it's part of the negotiation process. For example, if a problem is discovered during the home inspection, the parties can negotiate who will assume the cost and coordination of the repair. A seller might choose to remedy the problem and absorb the out-of-pocket costs, or the buyer may assume a minor repair and accept a monetary "credit" from the seller at the closing table. It's also an opportunity for a buyer to look at all the information available and decide whether to move forward with the transaction or not.

In the case of homes being sold "as is," or with buyers who intend to absolve sellers of any problems that arise during inspection, a home inspection can still be a helpful tool for buyers — acting as a blueprint for future improvements.



In a highly competitive housing market, when buyers are often bidding against other buyers, it may be tempting to waive the right to inspection, but that can be a costly decision. Photo: Adobe Stock

Buyers are responsible for the cost of a home inspection, which can run them from about \$500 to \$1,000, depending on "add-ons," Powell explained. Beyond a basic top-to-bottom inspection, a buyer may wish to have the inspector test for radon, lead or mold, or take a targeted look at septic systems, wells or the home's connections to public utilities.

Though we think of the home inspection as a tool for homebuyers, it can also be in a seller's toolbox. Prior to listing a home, if a seller is unsure how the home will perform during an inspection — or if they don't want to be surprised by what may be revealed by one — the seller can invest in an inspection of their own and make strategic repairs or improvements to the property prior to unveiling it to the market. Few sellers need to take this extra step, Powell said, but in cases for which there are questions about a home's safety, it can be insightful.

When she works with homebuyers, Powell provides her clients with a short

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The time to inspect a home thoroughly varies, depending on the size and age, but often, it can take as much as three or more hours to complete one. This is not wasted time for homebuyers, who have the opportunity to ask questions of the inspector and get an up-close and personal look at the home's construction and systems. Photo: Adobe Stock



Tom Morgan is the owner of Sound Home Inspection, LLC. He began his career as an inspector more than three decades ago, after working in home construction and historic restoration. He estimates that he's inspected more than 5,000 over the course of his long career. Video still, courtesy of Sound Home Inspection LLC



Tom Morgan's appreciation of antique homes began when he was a child living in a 300-year-old home. Today, as a home inspector, he has sage insight into problems that arise with older homes and the costs and labor it takes to repair them. Video still, courtesy of Sound Home Inspection LLC

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list of several home inspectors from which to choose. "It's their purchase," she said. "They are hiring the home inspector, so I encourage them to do their own research. I give them a list of inspectors that my clients have used regularly, who I feel have integrity, and then let them take it from there."

INTRODUCING SHERLOCK HOMES

Tom Morgan has been inspecting homes in Connecticut and Rhode Island for more than 31 years. He estimates that he's worked in more than 5,000 houses. He's the owner of Sound Home Inspection, LLC, based in Mystic.

Prior to becoming an inspector, he served in the U.S. Coast Guard and worked in construction and historic restoration.

The years of labor took a toll on his body, Morgan recalled, and one day he had an epiphany, thanks to a print advertisement. The ad promoted a new training program for home inspectors in Washington, DC. He made the leap, went to the nation's capital and returned with a new professional focus.

That was more than three decades ago, and Morgan recalled that he wasn't always a welcome presence in real estate transactions back then. Realtors and homeowners were skeptical of the value that home inspectors brought to a home's sale. "Back then, they thought, it's just a gimmick, and that we were all contrac-

tors just trying to get work. ... There was absolutely resentment."

In the decades since, home inspectors have proven their value to homebuyers, whose interests and investments are at stake.

Morgan had grown up in a 300-year-old house and developed an affinity for their character and appreciation for their upkeep. If he has a "specialty" as an inspector, it's older homes.

The Day published a profile on Morgan back in 2004, referring to the inspector as "Sherlock Homes." It's an apt nickname for a guy who spends his days stooping, snooping and crawling through a house's rooms, attics, basements and crawl spaces.

Asked about some of the most hazardous or dangerous things he's detected for his buying clients, Morgan said that one of the most memorable inspections unfolded at a house in Noank.

"Years ago, Noank wasn't a desirable neighborhood. It was a fishing community with no public sewer and limited water," he explained. "You couldn't drill through the rock there to get a well, and as a result, many of those homes had cisterns. Well, I was in the basement of one, knowing this. I started crawling around, fell through the plywood floor and ended up in a concrete pit under the house." Morgan made it out in one piece, but it was a memory not soon expunged from his mind.

His detective work has turned up all sorts of safety concerns, like fire hazards

and old houses with poorly-capped wells in their basements.

When a prospective homebuyer hires Morgan, they get more than just a tour and a post-inspection report. They get a real education. He uses the time to

engage the buyers in the process — for example, showing them where to find shut-off valves for gas and water and how to use them. He likes to speak in plain

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language during the inspection, so that even first-time homebuyers will understand what's a potential problem and why it is. These details are critical for a buyer as they enter into final negotiations with the seller. When an inspection reveals too many problems, or particularly costly ones, it allows the buyer to stand back and decide if they want to move forward with the purchase or not.

A basic home inspection costs about \$600 today, on average, but there are additional services that Morgan and others offer as a la carte adds on. For example, the buyer may wish to have the inspector

test for high levels of radon on the property, or test the water quality. They may want a closer look at a septic system or well, for example.

Completing a home inspection can provide assurances to buyers, that they're making a sound investment in a home, or that they're going into the purchase with a realistic perspective of what may need work. The goal is to become more intimately familiar with the home.

"When (clients) drive away from the inspection, they're certainly going to look at the house through a different set of glasses than they had three hours before," Morgan concluded. ■

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■ SOUND ADVICE

Selling a house requires a plan for the future, including where you'll move to next. This week's Sound Advice comes from Broker-Owner Heather Ford-Bunn of Riverview Realty in Norwich:

"This current real estate market is amazing, but many prospective sellers are apprehensive. One of the biggest obstacles that we hear is a fear of selling without having somewhere to go. In these scenarios, sellers can add a clause to the listing agreement and purchase/sales agreement that any sale is contingent upon the sellers finding suitable housing of choice within 30 days of an accepted offer.



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