

5 Questions You Should Ask Your Home Inspector

1. How bad is it - really? The best home inspectors are pretty even keeled, emotionally speaking. They're not alarmists that blow little things up into big ones, nor do they try to play down the importance of things. They're all about the facts. But sometimes, that straightforwardness makes it hard for you, the home's buyer, to understand what's a big deal and what isn't so much - the information you need to know whether to move forward with the deal, whether to renegotiate and what to plan ahead for.

In many states, home inspectors are not legally able to provide you with a repair bid, but if you attend the inspection and simply ask them whether or not something they say needs fixing is a big deal, nine times out of ten they will verbally give you the information you need to understand the degree to which the issue is a serious problem (or not).

2. Who should I have fix that? I always ask this question of home inspectors, with dual motives. First, very often, the inspector's response is - "What do you mean? You don't need to pay someone to fix that. Go down to Home Depot, pick up a this, and here's how you pop it in. Should cost you \$15 - tops." And that's useful information to know - it eliminates the horror of a laundry list of repairs and maintenance items at the end of an inspection report to know that a number of them are really DIY-type maintenance items. Even buyers who are really uncomfortable doing these things themselves then feel empowered to either (a) watch a few YouTube vids that show them how it's done, or (b) hire a handyperson to do these small fixes, knowing they shouldn't be too terribly costly.

And even on the larger repairs, your home inspector might be able to give you a few referrals to the plumbers, electricians or roofers you'll need to get bids from during your contingency period, which you may be able to use to negotiate with your home's seller, and to get the work done after you own the place. Dropping the inspector's name might get you an appointment booked with the urgency you need it in order to get your repair bids and estimates in hand before your contingency or objection period expires. And same goes for any further inspections they recommend - if neither you nor your agent knows a specialist, as the general home inspector for a few referrals.

3. If this was your house, what would you fix, and when? Your home inspector's job is to point out everything, within the scope of the inspection, that might need repair, replacement, maintenance or further inspection - or seems like it might be on its last leg. But they also tend to be experienced enough with homes to know that no home is

perfect. Many times, the inspector described as “at the end of its serviceable lifetime” and they may say, “I wouldn’t do a thing to it. Just know that it could break in the next 5 months, or in the next 5 years. And keep your home warranty in effect, because that should cover it when it does break.”

4. Can you point that out to me? Often, when you attend the home inspection, you’ll be multi-tasking, taking pictures of the interior, measuring for drapes or furniture, even meeting the neighbors, or fielding several inspectors at a time. Worst case scenario is to get home, open up the inspector’s report and have no clue whatsoever what he or she was referring to when they called out the wax ring that needs replacement or the temperature-pressure release valve that is improperly installed.

Your best bet is to, at the end of the inspection, while you’re all still in the property, just ask the inspector to take 10 or 15 minutes and walk you through the place, pointing out all the items they’ve noted need repair, maintenance or further inspection. When you get the report, then, you’ll know what and where the various items belong. (One more best practice is to choose an inspector who takes digital pictures and inserts them into their reports!)

5. Can you show me how to work that? Many home inspectors are delighted to show you how to operate various mechanical or other systems in your home, and will walk you through the steps of operating everything from your thermostat, to your water heater, to your stove and dishwasher - and especially the emergency shutoffs for your gas, water and electrical utilities. This one single item is such a time and stress saver it alone is worth the lost income of missing a day of work to attend your inspections.