



HOUSE KEYS

**Top Twenty Home
Improvement Articles
2018**

LISA TURNER

House Keys The Best of 2018

Household Tips and Tricks from a Female Home
Inspector

Lisa Turner

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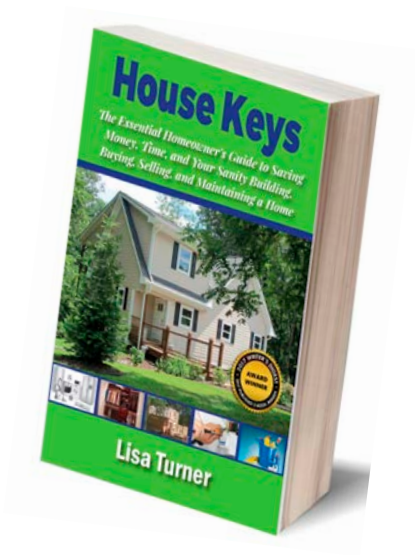
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Contents

Clutter: The Art of Hiding Things	9
How to Declutter Without Remorse	12
Do You Need a Medical Alert System?	15
Home Inspection Myths Quiz	18
Home Maintenance for Millennials	21
Household Tricks You Might Not Know About.....	24
How Much Do You Know About Radon?	27
How to Choose a Home Inspector	29
Do You Need an Air Purifier?	32
Is it Time for a Smart Speaker in Your Home?	34
Can You Kill Weeds Without Using Roundup?	37
Myths About Mold	40
Secret Hiding Places – the Good and the Bad	43
More Myths About Hiding Things in Your Home	46
Overdue Inventions for the Home	48
Is it Time for a Robot Lawn Mower?	51
Should You Buy the Extended Warranty?	53
The Air Freshener Myth	56

Tipping Furniture Danger	58
The Top Five Custom Home Mistakes	61
Top Cleaning Tricks and Places You Forgot	64
The Top Three Home Inspection Myths	67
Lisa Turner’s Messing Down Method Or, Will the Marie Kondo Philosophy Work Here?	70
Everything You Wanted to Know About Home Inspections But Were Afraid to Ask.....	73
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	94

Clutter: The Art of Hiding Things

IF YOU SEARCH ON AMAZON for “de-cluttering, tidying up and finding happiness,” you will find dozens of books. It appears that tidying up and getting rid of things is in vogue. What are people really looking for?

I have a theory. I think there are two types of people – “Clutter Attentive, or “CA,” and “Clutter Non-Attentive, or “CNA.” Here’s how to find out which type you are.

If you are CA, then you:

Put your things away where they belong when you come home

Almost never misplace your car keys or your wallet/purse

Have a cleaning schedule, realizing that it is time to clean even if something doesn’t look dirty

Have a desk at work that is neat even when you’re working

Can get upset with the CNAs when you spend a lot of time with them at home

Think that life can be simplified

If you are CNA, or Clutter Non-Attentive then you:

Drop stuff by the door or on a counter when you come home

Drop your keys and wallet/purse next to the rest of the stuff

Wait until you have to clean something, like five minutes before your girlfriend, boyfriend, or parents come over for dinner

Have a desk at work that is piled with stuff especially when you're working

Can get upset with the CAs when you spend a lot of time with them

Know that your life will never be simplified

The CAs are highly sensitive to clutter. It bothers them so much that they have to do something about it when they see it. The CNAs are not sensitive to clutter, and they literally have to climb over something before it bothers them. The CAs have checklists and update them. The CNAs don't know what you are talking about when you say "checklist" or "maintenance schedule." The CAs know where everything is because they have a place for everything. The CNAs also know exactly where everything is – it's over there on the floor or "by the door," or "in the garage."

The world around us encourages CAs and discourages CNAs. This really isn't fair. If a CNA can find what they need, and they're not getting yelled at by a CA, then why not be who you are? Engineers and artists tend to be CNAs, and can usually find what they need when they need it. Well, sometimes.

The solution for "tidy up happiness," or "mess stress" for both CAs and CNAs is called secret storage. Hide things. Most of the tidy up books tell you to identify what pleases you and what doesn't. Marie Kondo, in her book called *Spark Joy*, says that your belongings should be evaluated for sparking joy.

What if you can't tell? Who has time to interview all their belongings? An item might not please you in the moment, but it may later. If you've put it away somewhere, it doesn't matter because your space will look clean and organized.

This means having a large trunk as a table, or under a table, in the living room to catch little stuff. This is great if you have children. A couple of closets will be handy to throw things in. Space behind books in your bookcase can hold all kinds of things. For serious CNAs, an entire room or closet is great for storing things and closing the door.

The one thing I haven't figured out is how to get the CAs and the CNAs to get along in the same house.

How to Declutter Without Remorse

A READER WRITES, “What is the best way to declutter your home without getting rid of stuff that you actually want or need?”

Great question! Let’s get one thing out of the way first. Most people think that decluttering is only done during spring cleaning. But the concept of spring cleaning does not make any sense at all. Spring is when you go outside and get your garden ready to plant and refresh the landscape. You take a big gulp of clean fresh air after being in the house all winter, and you want to stay outdoors.

The right time to do a major “spring” clean is right now. Winter absolutely is the best time to look around the house and clean top to bottom, and get rid of what you don’t need. Especially after Christmas and before the new year. Why not start out the new year with some decluttering?

The first thing to do is to figure out what you are happy with and what you are not happy with. One of the reasons that Marie Kondo’s book on “tidying up” is so popular is that she tells readers to get rid of things they are not “delighted” with. In other words, you should feel a connection with each of your material

possessions. The problem with this method is that what delighted you five years ago may not delight you now.

Here's where to begin.

Set aside some quiet time to stand in each room of your home with a notebook. Let the scene soak in. Is everything you see contributing to the overall picture of beauty and function? What is extra, what is missing, what is out of sync? Write down what you see. When you have completed this exercise, you may find yourself calling the charity truck for a pickup. Don't do more than one or two rooms at a time, or you'll feel overwhelmed.

Mental approach or attitude. It's not what organizers you buy, it's being disciplined about only keeping what you use and love.

When you feel that your world is organized and where you want it, keep it that way. To do this, clean as you go and put things where they belong immediately after using them. Rather than putting lots of little things in organizers or keeping them out in view, put them away in drawers, cabinets, or trunks. Yes, you CAN teach children to do this.

Make constant decisions about what delights you, and only keep those things. If this scares you, then put things in a closet for a few weeks to experience what it's like without it. You can always pull it back out if you really love it.

If you're really nervous about making decluttering mistakes, spend the money to put it in storage. See how you feel.

Never feel bad about spending money on new setups, layouts, etc. Over time we change what we think of our things.

LISA TURNER

Don't look back. You're going to make some mistakes. Remind yourself it's a material world, the real gifts and possessions you have are in your mind's eye.

Do You Need a Medical Alert System?

OVER THE LAST FEW WEEKS I've written about home security and home security systems. One reader wrote me asking about medical alerts. This is the device you've seen on TV – “I've fallen and I can't get up,” says a woman who needs help. The device is typically worn around the neck or on clothing so that it's easy to press.

Most people think these alert systems are only for incapacitated persons or the elderly, but there are many applications where an alert system can be helpful. These conditions include a variety of illnesses, including Alzheimer's and vertigo, and they can provide lifesaving functions, such as recording medical status and tracking movement. Some devices can even detect a fall.

A medical emergency alert system can be expensive. Monthly charges run from \$30 to \$60, and some carry long contracts. The bulk of this cost is for the monitoring center, so if you already have a security system in your home it may be very inexpensive to add a medical alert function. Some of the home security systems also offer a medical alert option, and it's not

much money to add it to the monitoring. Local Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation offers a medical alert system as well.

Here's what you should look for in a medical alert system:

It works for a user's specific disability. For example, a stroke survivor may need a device he or she can activate with one hand; a person who might wander away should have a tracker (GPS).

It offers a choice of how to wear the device – neck, belt, pin, etc., and extra buttons can be wall mounted.

It offers multiple choices for who to call, from emergency services to a friend or relative who lives nearby.

It has battery backup in case of power failure.

The base station can reach all areas of your home and property.

The company has its own monitoring center, in the U.S., and employs its own trained emergency operators. Some companies even provide medical personnel to advise you over the phone or through the device.

The monitoring center has been certified by Underwriters Laboratories (UL).

There are many companies to choose from. Life Alert, Life Station, Medical Alert, Medical Guardian, LifeFone, Alert 1, and ADT Medical Alert are the top companies if you go for a standalone system. If you decide to invest in a medical alert system, I'd work with someone you trust to do the online research to determine the best option for you or for a loved one. Type in

“medical alert system” in the search function and read the reviews from AARP and Consumer Reports, two trusted sources.

You can delay or even avoid investing in a medical alert system by doing the following:

If you have a smartphone with a strong cellular network, keep it with you at all times and dial 911 if you have an emergency.

Conduct a safety check of your home, looking for tripping hazards, loose railings, and fire and safety dangers.

If you do not have a smartphone but you do have a landline phone, invest in a multi-station cordless system with enough remote stations to put one in every room.

Finally, go about your day with forethought and situational awareness – this will cut down on accidents.

Home Inspection Myths Quiz

“AREN’T HOME INSPECTORS THE SAME as home appraisers?” I was asked. Another reader asked, “They only look at the outside, right?” Another asked, “I can’t be there for the inspection, right?” Myths abound about home inspections. Take the inspection quiz!

1. Home inspector is another name for home appraiser. True or False?
2. Home inspectors always include a termite inspection and a radon inspection. True or False?
3. A newly constructed home doesn’t need a home inspection. True or False?
4. Only home buyers need a home inspection. True or False?
5. Buyers, sellers, and agents should not be at the home when it’s inspected, so the inspector can concentrate. True or False?
6. A home inspector will fix whatever he or she finds wrong – it’s included in the fee. True or False?

ANSWERS:

Home inspector is another name for home appraiser. **False.**
A home appraiser is interested in determining the VALUE of

the home, based upon similar properties they have researched. Typically, this is required by the lending institution. A home inspector is interested in the serviceability and safety of the home, and helps the buyer (or seller) avoid expensive surprises. Home inspectors inspect both in and outside the home.

Home inspectors always include a termite inspection and a radon inspection. **False.** Most home inspectors are not licensed or qualified to inspect for termites, and radon level identification is almost always an add-on service. If you are buying a home you should always get a termite inspection, and radon is a good idea.

A newly constructed home doesn't need a home inspection. **False.** A brand-new home is likely to have many correctable problems that the municipal inspector is not going to inspect. A home inspection will catch these issues right away, before they become uncorrectable. In fact, if you're building a new home, I recommend several interim inspections by an independent home inspector. The cost will pay for itself in avoiding problems down the road.

Only home buyers need a home inspection. **False.** Sellers can also benefit from a home inspection. Why not find out ahead of time what the buyer's inspection will find? You can use the report to correct problems and then use that as a marketing tool.

Buyers, sellers, and agents should not be at the home when it's inspected, so the inspector can concentrate. **False.** There is no doubt that we inspectors love inspecting by ourselves. We see more, and get more done in less time. But not having the buyer – or seller – there means that we'll have to spend more

time explaining what we found. If you are a seller, buyer, or agent, feel free to attend the inspection and ask all the questions you want.

A home inspector will fix whatever he or she finds wrong – it's included in the fee. **False.** A good home inspection takes three or four hours. We're not supposed to move furniture, see through walls, or fix anything. This said, I have fixed simple things for the seller when they are there to give permission.

How did you do? If you got three correct, you get a C. This is where most people fall in their home inspection knowledge. Four correct? You get a B. Five or more correct? Give yourself an A. Did you get them all correct? A plus and a pat on the back!

Home Maintenance for Millennials

DOES ALL THE TALK ABOUT spring checklists and maintenance notebooks make you depressed? If you are a Baby Boomer (ages in the mid-fifties to early seventies), then you're used to that, and you get over it. Yes, you have all the manuals for your home piled in a drawer, and you can locate them. Well, some of them. But you might not have all the checklists. Most of us wait until something goes wrong and then address the problem.

What if I told you there was an app for that?

A what for what, you say? I sure hope this doesn't have anything to do with computers, you add.

Uh oh, yes, in fact, I did mean computers – sort of. How about an app for your smartphone?

Let me explain. An “app” is a software application that runs on your smartphone. If you do not have a smartphone, and don't want a smartphone, don't worry about any of this. Your notebooks and manuals and checklists will continue to work just fine.

If you are a Millennial, though, ages 20 to 36, then you are not fine with this lack of automation. While 15% of us boomers have the “computer gene,” virtually all of the millennials have built in digital savvy. It's hard for this generation to imagine not having answers on the tip of their phone. The Millennial generation is all about convenience and spending more time doing what they like.

If you're a Millennial, or if you're not a Millennial but you're smartphone intuitive, then you should know that you can command all of the maintenance and repairs in your home from a smartphone application, or intelligent program that keeps track of things.

Here's an example. CentriqHome.com allows you to take a picture of an appliance label – let's say your refrigerator – and then it downloads the manual and a maintenance schedule for it. If you then wonder how to replace the water filter on the refrigerator, the app will show you a video that is specific to that unit, with step by step instructions. It can research prices and find you the best deal on parts. Many of the apps will also keep a home inventory, records of service, and a database of nearby professionals.

Another app at the top of the list is HomeZada.com. This app creates a calendar of to-dos, how-to instructions, integration with your email, has a home inventory feature and cost tracker, and information for home buyers and sellers. It will also run on your PC.

Need tips and how-to instructions for everything from testing your smoke detectors to checking for gas leaks in your home? BrightNest.com has a lineup of tips and tools.

These intelligent applications are also making the world of real estate easier for agents, buyers, and sellers. It's easier to document work that has been done, inventory items that stay with the home, and information on condition and age of the systems. An app called Homekeepr designed for real estate agent use can send clients maintenance reminders for their home.

Other apps to explore include Home Maintenance Manager, Family Handyman DIY, How Your House Works, Thumbtack, and

HOUSE KEYS BEST OF 2018

Zillow Digs. The best news? Most of these apps are inexpensive or even free.

Are you ready?

Naw, I'll stick with my notebooks.

Household Tricks You Might Not Know About

A READER WROTE LAST WEEK, asking for advice on how to get her front-loading clothes washer to stop smelling moldy. I asked her how often she runs the clean cycle on the washer. What clean cycle, she asked.

You might not know that nearly all washing machines – top load and front load – have a specific clean cycle. You'll find the directions in the manual. No manual? Go online and download a copy from the manufacturer. They're free. Generally, the directions will tell you to pour a cup or more of bleach into the washer and then run it on a hot cycle with nothing else in it. How often you do this will depend on how much activity the washer gets – the less activity, the more you will have to clean, since water sits in the machine between washings. Leaving the lid or the door open will help – but if there are small children around, it's better to keep doors closed.

Another trick with front loaders is keeping a clean dishcloth attached to the side of the machine with Velcro. After every wash, wipe the rubber seal and soak up any water that's sitting in the bottom of the seal. Once every week or two (or more often if you have one that gets smelly fast) is to pull on some plastic gloves and

wipe the seal down with a light solution of water and vinegar, or water and bleach.

Here are a few more tricks you might not know.

Toasters and toaster ovens have crumb trays. I read a statistic in Do-It-Yourself magazine that said 76% of people did not know these appliances could be cleaned. Seriously. If you count yourself in that statistic, then go remove those trays right now and clean them before you have a fire.

You can actually scrub the clothes dryer lint filter with soap and water if it is gunky (technical term).

Instead of buying store bought spray cleaner for smooth top stoves, use ordinary water and a paper towel. If stuff has caked on, use a razor blade (flat side, not vertical) to remove it, then use water. You'll only need to use the cleaning lotion, or dressing I call it, after major cooking events. The lotion is protective, so don't skip it.

Wrestling with cleaning the shower head nozzles while you're showering? After your shower, fill a Ziplock sandwich size bag with cleaning vinegar and fasten it around the shower head – zip as much as you can above the head and then put a clip on it. Let it work overnight.

Some of us here in the mountains actually have garbage disposals in the sink. There's nothing wrong with having them as long as you don't put a lot of vegetable matter down them. Throw the leftovers in the trash and only use the disposal for what's left. To keep it smelling pleasant, freeze some lemon wedges in an ice cube tray and then throw a few at a time into the disposal. It will sharpen the blades and smell nice at the same time.

Remember to save your instruction manuals for gadgets and appliances. Keep them all in the same place so you know where to look, OR keep them with the gadget or appliance. These manuals have some of the best tricks to get the most utility and longevity from your household devices.

How Much Do You Know About Radon?

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW about radon? If you are new to the area, you may not know anything about radon gas. And you may have lived here your whole life and not know about radon. I write about it every year, because exposure to radon over many years can cause lung cancer. Take the radon quiz to see how much you know.

Radon causes twice as many deaths every year than drunk driving in the U.S. True or False? True. Radon causes about 22,000 deaths a year from lung cancer, while drunk driving causes about 11,000 fatalities.

Testing for radon is complicated and time consuming, and you need a professional to perform the test. True or False? False. You can buy a test kit at your local home improvement store for about \$15. The test takes a few days – you simply hang the kit in your home and then send it to a lab.

The top floor of your home will test the highest for radon because the gas rises. True or False? False. Radon seeps in to the lowest level of your home from the ground, and barriers such as plastic, insulation, and flooring slow it down. Sometimes simply sealing foundation cracks and slab cracks and other leaks into your home will lower it to safe levels.

Radon gas comes from outer space during the daytime and is similar to radiation from the sun. True or False? False. Radon

comes from the natural radioactive breakdown of uranium in soil, rock, and water, and ends up in the air we breathe. Radon is colorless, odorless, and tasteless.

The amount of radon in the air outside your home is zero. True or False? False. The average outside level is actually .7 pCi/L, or picocuries per liter.

Radon is found in other areas of the United States, not just the mountains. True or False? True. Although radon levels vary throughout the United States, radon has been found in every state. Levels can be medium to high in this area of the mountains.

Clay County radon risk levels are low to medium. True or False? False. Whereas the national average for indoor radon levels is 1.3 pCi/L, Clay County is in a "red" zone with average indoor levels approaching 4.2 pCi/L (North Carolina State Radon Office).

Radon levels averaging over 4.0 pCi/L are considered unsafe. True or False? True. Radon in the air is measured in "picocuries per liter of air", or "pCi/L." Levels less than 4 pCi/L are considered safe, although if you can reduce the level further it's a very good idea.

If you test your home for radon and find levels exceeding what is considered safe, you will have to move out and have the building remediated. True or False? False! This is the good news - if you need to reduce the levels of radon in your home, it is not overly expensive to do. A vent and fan system is usually the first line of defense, and will lower the radon to acceptable levels over 75% of the time.

How did you do? Learn more by going to the Environmental Protection Agency's web site (www.epa.gov) and www.radon.com.

How to Choose a Home Inspector

I WRITE ABOUT HOME inspectors every few years because I get the question several times a year from readers.

Home inspectors are not the same as building inspectors. If you are building a new home, it will be inspected at intervals by a building inspector, whose job it is to make sure the home meets building codes. A home inspector looks at the functionality of all systems, safety, condition of materials, and if there might be any big surprises in store for a buyer. A home inspector is not a general contractor and vice versa, although some contractors are also home inspectors.

Here's what to look for in a home inspector.

Professional qualifications. Your inspector should be credentialed by a major home inspection organization. The best known is ASHI (American Society of Home Inspectors). ASHI requirements for membership are strict and they provide ongoing education. Your inspector may also be licensed in the state in which they are working. Here in North Carolina home inspectors must be licensed. Georgia, however, does not yet have state licensing.

Experience. As inspectors, we all had to start somewhere. I know that in the first few years of my own home inspection career I made plenty of mistakes, missed things I should have seen, and called out things I should not have worried about. So learn from

me; employ a home inspector with at least three, but five is better, years of experience. You are going to pay the same amount of money either way. Experience is the single most important qualification a credentialed inspector can have.

Detailed reporting. If you spend the time to research your inspector, ask for a sample copy of their report. The inspection report detail is important and can run more than twenty pages. More is better. Look for easy to read copy with trouble areas broken out with explanations. The inspector will email you a pdf.

Reputation. Social media may be helpful in finding out what experiences other clients have had with a given inspector. While you don't want a "picky" inspector, you do want a "thorough" inspector. Your real estate agent can be helpful on this point, since they deal with inspectors on a constant basis. Real estate agents go crazy with an inspector that does not elevate the real, and serious, issues in a home and spends time picking out small details. Contrary to popular opinion, real estate agents are not choosing the "easiest" inspectors to make a sale. Agents want you to be happy in your new home, and they have their own reputations to protect.

Cost. Don't haggle over an inspection. In any given geographical area, inspections will cost about the same. The money you spend on a home inspection will pay for itself in maintenance knowledge, resale potential, and heading off any major expenses.

Agreement. Make sure your inspector gives you a detailed agreement ahead of the inspection. Read the detail. It's your only course of action if there's a problem. Make sure you understand that your inspector can't see through walls and doesn't inspect for termites.

HOUSE KEYS BEST OF 2018

If you're looking for a home inspector, take some time and do the research. Consult with real estate agents, ask for a report sample, and look for someone with experience and credentials.

Do You Need an Air Purifier?

I'VE TALKED ABOUT THINGS you can do to improve the air quality in your home without resorting to special filter installations or air purifiers. But there are special cases, especially where the outside air contains a lot of allergy producing pollen.

One reader wrote me and said that the pollen counts are so high that they have to keep the windows closed and the air conditioning on. Is there a solution in the form of a machine that purifies the air for one or two rooms?

The answer is yes. But before you invest in a portable air purifier, make sure you've checked the boxes on the other things you can do to keep your indoor air clean. These include vacuuming with a clean filter and keeping the machine clean; making sure the humidity is not over 60% on a constant basis (promotes molds and dust mites), and keeping air conditioning filters clean.

The good news on portable air purifiers is that they work well in a single room, such as a bedroom. Being portable, they are easy to move around. They are especially good at filtering pollutant particles such as dust, smoke from candles or fireplaces, and pollen. The units are quiet and most have programmable controls.

The bad news on air purifiers is the expense to keep them maintained. According to Consumer Reports magazine, portable models have annual operating costs of \$150 to \$200 for filter replacement and electricity (with the majority of that cost being for

filters). Filter prices can range from around \$10 each to over \$100. These units also use carbon filters, which need to be replaced every three months if you're using it every day.

I turned to Consumer Reports to find the top-rated units. Keep in mind that these ratings are usually good for about a year until the new models come out. A top-rated model this year may or may not be at the top next year, due to improving technology and quality fluctuations.

CR looked at the ability of each unit to filter pollen and smoke, how quiet the units are, and the cost to operate. The small room models rated very poorly, with the large room models rating much higher. The Blueair Blue Pure 211 rated at the top, with a score of 89 and a purchase price of \$250. Next down was the Blueair Classic 605 at \$750, and then the Honeywell HPA300 at \$200, a best buy.

Remember that an air purifier is not a plug in and forget type of appliance like your refrigerator. If you spend \$200 on a new unit, plan on spending \$150 every year to keep the filters working. Filter-based air purifiers cannot capture gases, so they won't protect you from some of the most dangerous indoor air impurities, including carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, radon, and volatile organic compounds. And unless they have a carbon filter, they won't rid your home of odors.

It may actually be a better plan to follow a clean indoor air checklist and open windows once and a while. But if you absolutely need super clean air in one room, do your research and buy one of the top-rated models.

Is it Time for a Smart Speaker in Your Home?

“IS IT TIME FOR A SMART SPEAKER do you think?” I asked my husband.

“A what?”

“A smart speaker. They are on sale.”

“I don’t have a clue what you are talking about.”

“They are electronic devices that listen for their key word, like ‘Alexa’ or ‘Ok Google,’ and then you can ask it a question, such as, ‘What time is it,’ or ‘What’s the weather,’” I replied.

“I have a watch and I can look outside.”

“No, no, you are not getting it. These smart devices are practical. You can ask them how many ounces are in a quart and they will know the answer.”

“32 ounces.”

“No, I mean you can ask them questions you don’t know already.”

“Me? Not know everything? I’m still not sure why you would want one,” replied my husband.

“Ok, then. It’s for fun. Just pure fun.”

“Wait. Are these the things that I read about that eavesdrop on your conversations and laugh in the middle of the night? Creepy.”

Is it time for you to bring an Amazon Echo or a Google Home into your private space?

The Amazon Echo and Echo Dot have become surprisingly inexpensive—between \$20 and \$100, and the Google Home speaker and Home Mini are similarly priced. They both connect to your WIFI network and act basically like your smartphone assistant. Connected to the internet, they can go out and quickly find the answer to questions that you would normally type into Google. They are voice controlled. They work by listening for their code word—“Alexa” or “Ok Google” and then perk up, listening for your question.

The devices can be timers, intercoms, and smart home assistants. They can interface with security devices. They can make calls and send messages. They can play music. If you have a smartphone, they can interact with apps you already have and play music from your library.

If you like listening to music, consider getting the full-size speaker because it sounds better.

Now that you know what a smart speaker is, should you get one?

It depends. If you are a gadget geek and love electronics, and you already use the assistant on your phone, then you'll enjoy having the extra functionality.

If you still don't know what I'm talking about and don't have a smartphone or internet connection, then you will not want a smart speaker. And that is absolutely ok.

If you are concerned about privacy and personal things staying private, you might not want a smart speaker. Although the precision of the technology has improved over the last few years, if

your Amazon Echo THINKS you said the wake up word “Alexa” or your Google Mini THINKS you said the wake up words “Ok, Google,” then it’s going to listen to the next thing you say. And if the next thing you say SOUNDS like “Send a message to Michael,” then Michael might hear something you had no intention of sending him.

Earlier this year more than a dozen Echo device owners reported that their smart speakers were randomly laughing for no apparent reason. Amazon said that the devices thought they had gotten the laugh command, and so they made the phrase longer—“Alexa can you laugh,” instead of “Alexa, laugh,” hoping to prevent random laughter in the future.

Creepy.

Can You Kill Weeds Without Using Roundup?

THERE ARE SO MANY WONDERFUL things about springtime – the warm gentle breeze, the buds on the trees, the color beginning in the garden, and the fun of planting. There's one thing that you may not like about spring though, and that is weeds.

It feels as if the weeds are just waiting to spring out in force, laughing at you as they stretch through garden beds, driveways, mulched areas, and grow from between the expansion joints in your path and patio.

In the past, many of us have used the now famous weed killer Glyphosate, known as Roundup. Glyphosate is an herbicide (weed killer). It is applied to the leaves of plants to kill both broadleaf plants and grasses. Those of us who have (or who are) using Roundup enjoy its amazing effectiveness.

But hold on. You may have noticed that many once popular pharmaceutical drugs were found to cause cancer or some other problem, and then the law firms came out of the woodwork. That is now happening to Roundup. Many of us have had our doubts about a product that is used in over 750 applications in the United States, including being sprayed on crops. How could something that works so well not be bad for you?

The company Bayer acquired Monsanto last year, the maker of Roundup, and now faces lawsuits involving more than 11,200 people who say the exposure made them sick.

If you don't want to use Roundup anymore in your yard, is there anything else you can do besides spend all day on your hands and knees pulling weeds? Yes! Here are some methods you might not have known about.

- **Vinegar Mix.** Regular 5 percent household vinegar can be used on its own against weeds. It's even better mixed with salt and dish soap. Mix 1 gallon of white vinegar with 1 cup of table salt and 1 tablespoon of liquid dish detergent. Put the mixture into a plastic spray bottle and spray directly on weeds.
- **Flame Weeder.** Flaming will only kill the weed parts above the ground, not the roots, so you will need to flame your weeds a few times before they're gone. This should not be done during any dry spells when there is a risk of fire. Follow directions carefully.
- **Vodka.** Mix 1 ounce vodka, 2 cups of water and a couple drops of dish soap and spray. You may not want to use your premium Stolichnaya, however, which costs \$25 for 26 ounces.
- **Rigorous Mulching.** Covering the area with organic material will cut down on the weeds.
- **Borax.** Add 10 ounces of powdered borax to 2.5 gallons of water, mix thoroughly, and spray.
- **Commercial non-toxic herbicides.** Check the herbicide aisle in your favorite home store. There is sure to

be several products that claim to be non toxic. If one of them works well, stick with it.

There are many benefits to not using strong chemicals in our yards. The safety of the water supply and long-term health effects for people and pets are two of the biggest reasons. You won't have to suit up in a hazmat suit for most of the natural remedies either, though you should not breathe in any of the mixes.

Weeds be gone! Good luck.

Myths About Mold

AS A HOME INSPECTOR, I get questions all the time about mold. They range from “How do I get mold off the shower door?” to “Is that dark stuff in the basement Black Mold?” Home inspection experience plus a little science study reveals some surprising answers.

Here are the top five questions, and my answers.

Mold always smells bad. True or False?

False. It takes a while for mold to invade enough material to smell. It’s not the mold that smells, by the way, but the material that it spreads to that smells. Who of us has not pulled back a carpet only to find crusty mold and “that smell” underneath? It is the moisture that drives the mold growth, and the moisture then drives the rotting of materials such as carpet, wood, and drywall.

I can prevent mold from growing by keeping a disinfectant on surfaces. True or False?

False. Mold growth is driven by humidity. Water molecules in the materials (walls, carpet, baseboard) feed strains of fungi that thrive in low light, high humidity environments. Using disinfectant only delays surface growth, while more growth is taking place inside the materials themselves.

All mold is dangerous. True or False?

False. Our lives are full of mold spores floating around in the air both inside and outside. Mushrooms are fungi, and I bet you’ve had some on your salad. The key is balance. If mold spores

are allowed to “take over” in an environment that feeds them, then an enormous number of spores are produced. Breathing an overabundance of fungi spores can cause a variety of health problems.

Black mold is the most dangerous mold. True or False?

False. Fungi color has nothing to do with its toxic properties. Rather, it is the extent and variety of the mold that creates problems for humans. For example, a green mold growing in your shower is unlikely to cause a problem but looks bad. But if your basement has a water leak in the wall and over time mold has taken over the insulation area, then the mold could be producing enough mycotoxins to be a health hazard, no matter what the color is.

Air filters can help stop the spread of mold in your home. True or False?

False. If you have a mold problem in your home, it means that moisture is driving mold growth. The only way to stop mold growth is to take away the moisture.

What to do about mold?

Measure the humidity in the areas where you have mold, or suspect mold. If the humidity is more than 60%, you are providing a ripe environment for mold growth. Consider installing a dehumidifier to bring the level down to 45-55%.

If you already have a serious problem with mold growth, call a professional to clean and remediate it. This is not a job you want to try yourself.

While bleach products do work well on mold, it's a strong chemical that you should not be breathing. Regular soap and water will work. If you have carpet that is moldy, it should be pulled

up, the area cleaned, and new carpet or another type of flooring put down.

The key to keeping mold at bay is moisture control. Run the air conditioning, run a dehumidifier, and run the vent fan in bathrooms during use.

Secret Hiding Places – the Good and the Bad

READERS WRITE, ASKING FOR more “secret space” advice for hiding valuables. Secret hiding places bring out the child in all of us. Especially me. In one home that we built, I decided to design in a “secret room.” Even the folks who bought that home couldn’t find the room without help.

But most of us do not need an entire room to hide special jewelry, coins, or cash. The spaces that we need tend to be small. There are good ideas for these spaces, and there are some really bad ideas I’ve heard about that I wouldn’t try.

Good secret spaces don’t change over time and you won’t lose what’s in them. Here are some examples.

Simple hollow shelves that “float” on the wall. These are small shelves that attach to the wall with hidden brackets and screws, and are hollowed out. You can build these yourself by typing “shelf with hidden storage” in to your online search bar, or purchase online. These are really handy in a closet or bath for jewelry or cash.

Dining table secret storage. Most folks would never think to look all the way under your dining table for things. There are several versions of this trick. The first is a secret panel under the tabletop, and the other is a cutout in the top that looks like a seam. Again, look this up online and you’ll find many different versions.

Family picture album. Way back when you had to actually go get your pictures developed at a photo shop or the drugstore, we all made lovely photo albums memorializing our get-togethers and special events. Now the albums are sitting on the shelf with the books. If you drag them out and put your cash under a picture, no one will ever know. You might even forget it. And I guarantee that burglars are not going to look at your pictures.

Here are some bad examples. I really did read about these, and they are not good ideas unless you want to lose what you put in them.

Slit open a tennis ball. Put your jewelry and cash in and reassemble. Only do this if you want your dog playing with your pearls in the front yard.

Sneaker insole liner trick. Pull out the sneaker insole, insert cash, put the insole back, and store back in the closet. Thieves will have no idea! Neither will you.

“Honey, where is that \$200 I gave you last week?”

“I don’t know,” you say, it’s somewhere in the closet in a sneaker.”

“You mean the old pink sneakers I took to Goodwill last week?”

“Uh, yeah, those are the ones.”

Vegetable can. This is an old trick, and it’s not smart unless you live by yourself. Using a smooth edge can opener, open a non-descript can of something no one likes, empty and clean it, put your jewelry inside, put the lid back on, and place in the very back of the cabinet where the food cans are. The reason this is a poor idea is that even you are likely to say “Oh gosh, I really hate diced rutabaga, I’ll give this to the thrift kitchen.” And there go your

HOUSE KEYS BEST OF 2018

pearls that cleaned up so nicely after the dog danced with them in the yard.

More Myths About Hiding Things in Your Home

I'VE WRITTEN SEVERAL ARTICLES about secret hiding places in your home. Readers wrote, suggesting some ideas they found in a magazine. Here they are, along with some comments on why these are not the best ideas. From hiding documents to cash, here's what can go wrong.

Mistake 1: Place small containers of valuables inside the bottom of a tub of kitty litter. No. Don't do this. Besides the dust and trouble of digging around in clean kitty litter, the chances that someone in the household will do the right thing and change the kitty litter pans for the first time ever is just too high. In fact, Murphy's Law guarantees that someone will dump your pearls into a kitty litter pan that hasn't been washed.

Mistake 2: Store a smaller box in a bigger box, such as putting your pearls and cash in a plastic container and then putting this into a plastic tub of uninteresting clothes. I can hear it now: "Honey, did you take those old clothes to the thrift center?" and hearing, "Yes, last week."

Mistake 3: Glue a magnet to the inside surface of an outside vent (they are aluminum so metal won't stick to it) and then put your spare key there. Don't do this. Burglars don't just look under the mat. They also look around the house for fake looking rocks

and hidden areas. Wasps and spiders also like your vents. It's not a great place to reach into sight unseen.

Mistake 4: Put envelopes with cash on the outside backs of drawers. While this is a pretty good idea, since it's very unlikely ANYONE is going to release the drawer catches and pull your drawers completely out to examine the outside back, YOU are very likely to forget that the cash is there unless you make a note to yourself. Then you'll have to hide the note. If you've ever moved into a house and discovered something like this, it's clear that the previous occupants completely forgot about it. About 8% of all homes have things hidden in them that the previous owners forgot about.

Mistake 5: The wheelbarrow tire trick. Seriously, this hiding place for everything from a USB drive to a passport is shown, in a national do-it-yourself magazine, being placed into a deflated wheelbarrow tire and then inflated. Besides being a dirty and humid place to put electronics and valuables, you should never put your passport anywhere but in a locked safe bolted to the floor or in your safe deposit box. You're likely to hear this the day after you place your valuables there: "Honey, who borrowed the wheelbarrow?" "I have no idea," you hear back.

Mistake 6: From the same national do-it-yourself magazine comes this hiding trick: take apart the spring bar that holds a toilet paper roll. Roll up a wad of cash and hide it there. Good? No. The cash prevents the spring from working and the paper falls off the holder when you use it. In this case, you might hear this: "Hey I went and bought a new spring bar for the toilet paper, the old one wasn't working." You say, "Oh, what did you do with the broken one?" You hear, "I threw it out."

Overdue Inventions for the Home

THE YEAR IS 2018 and there are a number of things that we don't have yet in our homes. I'm talking about time saving and safety enhancing items that should be part of our home lives and for some reason, are not.

Several weeks ago, I wrote about electronic home assistants – Google Home and the Amazon Echo. Now Apple is making one – the Home Pod. They all connect to the internet and have voices that respond to your questions and play your music. These are all the rage but they still don't do some basic things that would make our lives easier. Here are some examples of what I'd like to see in the near future.

Automatic range turn-off device. Are there any of us who have left something on the stove and forgotten about it? Or forgotten to turn a burner off? I don't know about you, but I have. In this modern age, I can't understand why every single manufacturer of ranges and cooktops do not have this feature built in to their products. The National Fire Protection Association reports that over the last five years, ranges or cooktops produced 62% of home cooking fire incidents because someone walked away and forgot to come back. 46% of all structural home fires are caused by unattended cooking. There are aftermarket devices that you can buy that have sophisticated timers and motion sensors for a range, but they are expensive – between \$300 and \$500 installed. That's

almost the cost of a range! To add this functionality to a range at the factory might add \$40 to the manufacturing cost – and would save lives. When you research the aftermarket devices, they are marketed for the elderly with dementia. I don't consider myself to be in either category (yet), but I still forget! So, I say to the range and cooktop designers: get with it. The rest of us need it also.

I'm thinking of other appliances that should ALL have auto shut off. This would include irons, coffee makers, lithium battery chargers, and heaters, just for a start.

Clothes-washers should all have an exact readout of how much time is left in the complete cycle. How many times have you gone to look, wondering when the laundry would be ready to move to the dryer? Yes, some of the higher end units have this, but I've never seen one that was accurate.

Auto lint collector. How many times have I reminded every person reading this column to go look inside their clothes dryer lint trap or vent on the outside of their home and clean it? There are nearly 16,000 home fires a year in the United States caused by lint catching fire. I'm sure the appliance design people could come up with a way to identify hotspots in the vent and sound an alarm. Even better, have some kind of gadget that would automatically clean the vent for us.

Timer tray for leftovers. How many times have you forgotten to write a date on food and then wondered how long it had been sitting in the refrigerator? Why couldn't appliance makers have a few shelves that when you set something on it, it knows how long it's been there?

Auto-closing toilet seats. These should come with every toilet assembly. Need I say more?

LISA TURNER

I'm sure you could add to this list. We have the technology to do these things. Instead, we are talking to a box on the kitchen counter connected to the internet. Send me your own ideas for what you'd like to see in your home that would add to safety or save you time and stress.

Is it Time for a Robot Lawn Mower?

IS IT TIME for a robot lawn mower?

Scientists and technicians are working hard to automate everything. If we will soon have automated cars, then why not a lawn mower?

“They already have them,” said my husband.

“No, I mean machines that really work, and are affordable,” I replied.

“Well, that’s another story,” He replied.

Automated lawn mowers are a reality. Some models claim the ability to mow up to an acre and climb steep slopes. They have GPS and can communicate with your phone. When they get tired they return to their charger for a short rest. Many mow in the rain (not such a great idea). Unless you enjoy mowing, and some of us actually do, why wouldn’t you want one?

Here’s why you might not want an automated lawn mower.

Setup. You’ll need to secure the perimeter of your yard with a strand of wire. This wire tells the robot to stay inside, like an invisible fence. For large areas like we have in the mountains, this is going to be labor intensive. And you hope it doesn’t break, or your robot may end up cutting your neighbor’s yard.

Power. You’ll need to set up one or more charging stations that the robot can reach when the battery goes flat.

Slopes. Most robot lawn mowers can handle up to a 20 percent slope. This is not much of a slope. The “lawns” that many of us have are more like wavy fields. You’ll end up doing the worst parts of the cutting yourself.

Robotic lawn mowers only mow a little bit at a time. If you love mowing a nice clean edge and having it look terrific for four or five days, you won’t be happy with the random pattern of your little robot. Most of the robots chop the grass, not cut it cleanly. This dries out the lawn and looks bad.

Here’s why you might want a robot lawn mower.

You can afford the best. The really latest technology in automatic lawn mowers is expensive. Really expensive. As in \$3K or more. At this price, your robot will work well, but will still present some of the same problems listed above. The top models will cut cleanly and only miss about 10% of the area.

Small lawn. If you have less than a quarter acre and the lawn is flat and even, and you have several outside power outlets adjacent to your lawn, then a robot mower may be just the thing.

You love gadgets, hate mowing, and don’t care what the lawn looks like day to day. The best unit out there now for consumers is the Husqvarna Automower 315 at \$1,797. It has a clean cutting set of blade discs, is quiet enough to cut at night, and has a 70-minute battery life.

Should you buy a robot lawn mower? Here’s the short answer: unless you are an early adopter gadget freak, I would wait until the technology and prices improve.

Should You Buy the Extended Warranty?

FALL IS RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER, and with it comes a rush to get deals on electronics and appliances. New models will be rolling out soon, and last year's models will be discounted. Whether you go to Walmart or other local stores, or buy online at Amazon and eBay, the sellers are sure to offer you a deal on an extended warranty.

As the salesperson makes a convincing argument for the warranty, you have images of finding someone to help you lug the appliance back to the store, or save the gigantic box the big screen TV came in, hire an army to remove it from the wall, and load it into a truck to return it. One person said this to me in a Black Friday checkout line: "I'm sure getting the warranty. No way will I take this thing off the wall," as she pointed to the sixty-inch television on the cart. Nightmares are made of just thinking about appliances breaking down and return lines, both on the phone, and in person.

My advice? Don't buy the warranty. Here's why.

Electronics are highly reliable. I used to be a manufacturing electronics technician in the nineteen eighties. When and how did our telephone equipment break? When we plugged it in, brand new off the manufacturing line. This is called an out of box failure. All manufacturers will send you a new unit when this

happens. Most electronic devices will fail in the first thirty days. After that, failure is very rare.

When you purchase an extended warranty it does not necessarily mean that the repair people will come to you. You'll still spend a lot of time on the phone or online.

Many credit cards double or triple your warranty coverage when you use their card to make the purchase. Check with them to see the exact terms before buying an extended warranty.

No warranties cover damage that you cause or lightning strikes. All computers and televisions should have effective surge protection. Some surge protectors feature battery backup. They usually cost less than a warranty and are reliable for years.

Should you ever buy an extended warranty? Here are the things to consider.

Peace of mind. Just want to feel good about not worrying about repairs? Then buy the warranty.

If you have had problems in the past with an appliance, and you buy another one, consider the extended warranty. For example, I run a dehumidifier all year long in the basement. After two years it quits. For the five-dollar extended warranty, Square Trade has Amazon send me a new unit, free. This happens every two years.

Realize that you can purchase the warranty from someone else, after the sale. You've got thirty days to buy a Square Trade warranty, for example. You'll usually save some money on the price by doing this.

Consider taking the ten percent of every purchase that would have gone to an extended warranty and putting it in a reserve sav-

HOUSE KEYS BEST OF 2018

ings fund for future repair costs. I guarantee that you will come out ahead on electronics and appliances.

The Air Freshener Myth

SOMETHING SMELL A LITTLE OFF? Pull that can of aerosol from the cupboard and give the air a shot. Ah, that's better. Or is it? There are two problems here. The first is that we are masking an odor we don't like. Unless the odors we don't like are obvious and temporary, we could be masking smells in the home that are trying to tell us something. This could be a mold issue, an electrical problem, a pest presence, or a lack of air circulation.

The second problem is that If you are using an air freshener – either an aerosol or one of the units that releases a scent, you are filling your home with pollutants. Manufacturers create these scents using chemicals that combine to create formaldehyde, a carcinogen (cancer producing), petroleum distillate (an oil – flammable), and p-dichlorobenzene, an eye and throat irritant. Aerosol versions also contain butane or propane. And “secret formula” designs for air fresheners (like the plug-ins) include multiple chemicals that are not named on the can or package.

Right now you are probably asking yourself how is it possible for something so bad to be sold to consumers. I don't have a good answer for you. The consumer marketplace is profit driven, and often we have to assume the “buyer beware” motto. This is one of the reasons that the saying “automatic air fresheners are a nice addition to any room” is a myth.

It's difficult to know where to turn. Because there are no standards for air fresheners, my advice is to be careful and consider some of the following natural solutions.

Buy some plants and open the windows. After checking your home for causes of bad smells (mold, pests, water intrusion, leaking fireplace, electrical overheating, etc.) fresh air and natural air purifiers – plants – are a great way to stay sweet smelling. If you have a highly insulated home and do not have a fresh air exchanger – called an ERV (“Energy Recovery Ventilator”) – you should consider installing one if you do not like opening windows.

Essential oil diffusing. Many essential oils have antibacterial, antifungal, and antiviral properties. Boil a pot of water, take it off the heat and add a few drops of essential oil such as lemon or eucalyptus. The scent of the oil will infuse the house.

Cook some vanilla. Place a capful of vanilla in a small oven proof dish or cup and bake at 300 degrees for 30 minutes. Leave it in the oven for an hour. This is a great trick if you have guests coming over, or buyers on a walk through.

Put a teaspoon of baking soda, a teaspoon of lemon juice, and 3 drops of an essential oil in 2 cups of hot water. Stir, allow to cool, then pour this into a spray bottle. Shake well before use.

Don't want to go to so much trouble? There are some ready to go versions available on Amazon. Some of the names you can search for are Eco-Me, Aura Cacia, MoSo Natural Air, and Lac Larde Organic.

Now you know.

Tipping Furniture Danger

EARLY LAST YEAR I WROTE about the IKEA bureau recall. IKEA is the largest furniture maker in the world, and they were getting reports that their dressers were tipping over and injuring owners. There are two interesting facts about this problem. The first is that it's not just IKEA furniture that presents a hazard. The second fact is that all of these kits included an important safety attachment that 80% of the owners never installed after assembly.

I've decided to write about this again because it's so serious. Every 17 minutes a piece of furniture, a TV, or an appliance tipping over causes an injury in the U.S., according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The most disturbing findings relate to tip-overs and children: a child is killed by a falling piece of furniture in the U.S. every two weeks.

This issue is far larger than the IKEA drawer chests that were unstable without wall anchors. Tipping items are not confined to furniture; tipping dangers apply to televisions, boxes, beds, and anything else leaning against a wall or sitting atop a bookcase.

Back to my point about 80% of the furniture kit builders and buyers: once it is assembled, and once it is delivered, we don't think about doing anything else to it, much less getting a wall anchor kit and installing it. As much as I would love to see the furniture manufacturers and sellers address the problem, I don't

think it's going to be adequate unless we, the furniture owners, address it ourselves. So, here's how to do that.

Every bookcase, set of drawers, or wall hanging object needs to be secured to the wall. Most items that you buy as a kit will include this message in the instructions, and in the package you should find an anchor kit. Follow the directions to the letter. If you do not find an anchor kit, you can order one or buy one at the hardware store, or if you are handy, you can fashion your own bracket. Make sure you screw the bracket in to a solid part of the wall or use a special drywall screw anchor.

Have a large TV on top of a dresser or bookcase? This is an accident waiting to happen. The backs of TVs have multiple threaded receptacles that you can use with an eye and bolt fitting to secure it to the wall or to the back of the dresser, assuming the dresser is already secured to the wall.

Objects on top of bookcases and bureaus. Look around. If a child can see something they are interested in, they will try to reach it. Secure ceramics and other objects with heavy duty Velcro or bottom brackets.

Wall objects such as mirrors and televisions should be secured with brackets designed for their weight. I'd rather buy a bracket that can handle twice the load, just to be sure. These brackets should be secured to the wall studs, not the drywall. Drywall anchors are fine for light artwork, but industrial sized and weighted items such as 65 pound TVs must have a well-engineered installation.

Children of all ages see the home as a vast playground of toys and obstacle courses. At their young age they are clever enough to understand that they need to climb up to reach something, but the

LISA TURNER

brain hasn't developed enough for them to know that objects have mass and balance. Don't let a tip over hurt family or property: give your home a safety audit today and act on what you find.

The Top Five Custom Home Mistakes

IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW many custom homes you build, whether they are for you or for someone else, there will always be something that goes wrong. Sometimes a lot of things go wrong. Often these mistakes and mishaps are not the fault of the designer or builder, but a perfect storm of circumstances plus a little bit of Murphy's Law.

If you're planning to build a home of any type or size, take note of the top five mistakes I've discovered over time and avoid them if you can. Each one can bust your budget or cause upset at the end of the project.

Not spending time on the contract. It doesn't matter whether you are a do-it-yourself builder, the contractor, or you're the owner – anyone who works on your new home needs to understand exactly what you want and you need to understand exactly what they want. The only right way to do this is with a very detailed contract agreement. If you're not sure what should be in a contract, go online to LegalTemplates.net and take a look. Consult an attorney if you need more help. What you pay them for a contract review will be well worth it.

Not understanding the complete design. When you begin designing a home, you have a picture of it in your mind's eye. When you look at the 2D and even 3D plans it's hard to get a sense for the size of the physical spaces. Now the home is built, and you

walk in only to discover that the living room is “too small.” Not much you can do about this at the end, so get your designer or architect to provide you with a complete walkthrough movie in 3D before you approve the plans.

Not having an independent inspector review the construction stages. While contractors generally don’t like any independent inspections because they think you are looking over their shoulder (and you are), they will understand and accept it. I can tell you personally that this practice with homes I’ve worked on have saved thousands of dollars’ worth of tear outs and re-dos. The inspector should also be a GC, and the inspections should be conducted before concrete is poured, during framing, after framing and before drywall, and at the walkthrough.

Not designing in some hidden spaces and built-in storage. When guests come in to my kitchen they have no idea there’s a full pantry hiding in the wall. Looking like cabinets, two seven-foot tall doors swing open to a six by five-foot area with copious shelving. These tricks are easy to do when you’re designing.

Not building in all the “smarthome” stuff you will miss later when you move in. Most designers and builders don’t think about the extras, so you should. These extras shouldn’t add much cost when you’re building, and you’ll be glad later. These include large fixed windows, water main automated shutoff valve with sensors in the event of a leak, smoke detectors that also signal your smartphone, security system components, determining if you need water filters, and adding extra hose bibs and electrical outlets to the outside.

I’m sure you can think of more. The important thing is to spend time on the detail and not leave it all up to others. Your de-

HOUSE KEYS BEST OF 2018

signer and builder aren't moving in with you (or so we hope), so your thoughtful and creative review beforehand will please you long after you've settled in.

Top Cleaning Tricks and Places You Forgot

WE HAVE ENOUGH TO DO every day without thinking of extra places where we can clean in our homes. Use these tips to get everything spic and span without spending a lot of extra time.

Shower walls and tubs. Clean these while you're in them! Don't forget the sides and cubbies.

Dishes. Put in the dishwasher. It's ok if they sit there for a day. Then while you're thinking about it, wipe down the sink(s) and surrounding area. Then take a dishtowel and wipe dry. You'll be amazed at how nice it looks, and others will hesitate to get it dirty (maybe).

Sponges. You can disagree, but putting sponges in the microwave or in the dishwasher will not get rid of all the bacteria. Over time sponges will just get grungier and grungier. Replace your sponges regularly. Better yet, use wash clothes you can throw into the wash.

What's in the refrigerator? Every time you reach in, take a look at just one area. For example, look at the lowest shelf on the right. Make sure there isn't anything there that's expired, and if it is, place it in a small plastic bag in the freezer. When it's time to take the garbage out, grab this bag. Eventually you won't have any foods that are expired, and you won't have to turn off the fridge to do this.

Refrigerator quick cleaning. Use a similar technique to keep the inside clean. Wet a washcloth with some soap and water and clean a single area at a time – it will take you 45 seconds and nothing will get too warm.

The Quick Pass. We stop seeing clutter and out of place items because we live with it day to day. Take two minutes to stop as you walk through a room and ask if it looks neat enough for company right now. No? Straighten up, fluff cushions, organize magazines, and put things away. You'll be amazed how much better it looks. The only problem with this technique is that after the two or three minutes you will have forgotten why you were walking through the room in the first place.

Like your vacuum. Do you hate to vacuum? Join the party. The key is to have a vacuum you really like. This means it's not heavy or loud, and it's easy to clean. I don't know how many times I've thought about vacuuming and then said nope because I didn't clean it before putting it away. Once you have a nice vacuum, clean it before you put it away. And if it's not quiet enough for you, wear earplugs.

Dusting. The trick is to use a duster in one hand, and a hand vac with a brush attachment in the other. Put your earplugs in, and attack every surface with the duster first and then the vacuum close behind. This also works for blinds.

Computer screens and TVs. Are you afraid to clean these? Don't use anything but clean water or the spray cleaner that the cable company guy or gal gave you. Using a totally clean cotton cloth, dampen it in the water – not wet. Wipe the screen; then turn the cloth to the dry side and polish any wetness off or it will stay as a streak. It will look terrific.

Germ areas. Take five minutes or less to sweep around your home with a washcloth with a little vinegar and soap on it, and wipe light switches, doorknobs, faucets, drawer handles and knobs, and the remote control for the TV.

See? That wasn't so bad was it?

The Top Three Home Inspection Myths

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW about home inspections? In case you're new to the practice, here are the top three myths about what a home inspection is and isn't.

What is a Home Inspection? A home inspection is designed to provide both buyers and sellers with critical information about the health of the home's systems – heating and cooling, electrical, plumbing, water tightness, roof condition, and safety. The resulting report is highly detailed and provides a wealth of information on the home. Home inspections are not required, but an inspection can help buyers avoid a “money pit” and can help sellers understand what things might turn buyers away. Here are some of the misconceptions about home inspections.

A home inspection covers everything, including looking for hidden termite infestations.

Myth! Home inspectors will point out any pest infestations that they see, but they will advise the buyer to get a separate professional pest inspection. Most home inspectors are not licensed or qualified to do pest inspections.

The other error in the above myth statement is “covers everything.” A home inspector will spend hours on an inspection, but there's a lot that they cannot see. They cannot determine if there's a problem inside the walls, they cannot move furniture to see

something, and they cannot determine if there will be a failure right after the buyers move in.

You should not attend the inspection on the home you are buying, because it will disturb the inspector.

Myth! While it is true that home inspectors are a somewhat introverted, geeky bunch of professionals that secretly say they would rather be alone, the truth is that misunderstandings and communication errors will be greatly reduced if you attend the inspection. Attending the inspection will also allow you to get good advice on the home's systems. And most inspectors will be able to convey far more information to you in person than you'll find in the report, no matter how detailed it is.

A home seller won't benefit from getting a home inspection, because it will tell them everything that's wrong with the home that they are trying to sell.

Myth! Sellers in particular can benefit from getting a home inspection before listing the home. Here are just a few of the advantages for the seller:

The seller knows the home. The home inspector will be able to get answers to his/her questions on the history of any problems they find.

A home inspection will help the seller be more objective when it comes to setting a fair price on the home.

The seller will be alerted to any safety issues found in the home before they open it up for open house tours.

Many inspectors will make a return visit to update the report for very little additional money.

The seller can take the updated report and make it into a marketing piece for the home.

A few final points. The first is that there is no requirement to do anything with a home inspection report. The report contains the advice of a qualified and experienced inspector so that the seller and buyer can determine the condition of the home and head off unanticipated surprises. The second point is to rely on your real estate agent for perspective. They have done this many times, and as a professional will nearly always give you accurate and thoughtful advice.

Lisa Turner's Messing Down Method Or, Will the Marie Kondo Philosophy Work Here?

MARIE KONDO'S BOOK, *THE LIFE-CHANGING Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing*, has sold over five million copies. I bought one, and enjoyed it. Marie has gathered quite a following, and there's a waiting list for her consulting sessions in Japan. Now called the KonMari Method, here in the U.S. you can hire a certified KonMari Method certified specialist.

But is the United States really ready for the KonMari Method? Here is the core of Marie's philosophy:

Start with categories - clothing, books, papers, miscellaneous household items and finally sentimental items.

As you look at and feel each item, ask yourself if it pleases you, or "sparks joy." If it doesn't, tell it thank you and put it on the donation pile.

Fold, don't hang, clothes, and store in drawers (except suits and dresses of course).

There's more to the method, but the key here is to realize that Marie's philosophy is about relationship. Relationship with your things. This is a new concept to Americans. Will it work? Yes, I

think it will work here in the United States, but with some modifications. Here's what I call the Lisa Turner Messing Down Method: The Art of Recluttering.

Begin with an assessment of what makes you happy in your home. Are you a compulsive cleaner? Are you a messy person and it really doesn't bother you? Do you clean and organize out of guilt?

Once you've figured out who you are and what you want, set up a system that works for you. If you have a family, you'll need to have a group discussion about expectations.

If you're the compulsively clean person, then the KonMari Method may be just right for you. I really think you can accomplish the goals in the book simply by reading it and then being disciplined about completing the steps. One of the things I like about the method is that there is no good reason for keeping something in your closet if you know in your heart that you don't like it and aren't going to wear it even though you spent a lot of money on it or your great grandmother gave it to you. The process of respecting your belongings and sending it to a new home lessens the guilt.

If you're not someone who particularly cares about everything being in its place, then just be yourself. In this case, getting rid of things and cleaning are simply practical matters that you can do when you have to. Having plenty of storage spaces will be helpful, since you're not inclined to periodically make the joy/no joy decisions.

If you're clearly a messy person, or a hoarder, then the junk drawer system I talked about in a previous article will be perfect for you. The art of recluttering is having enough junk drawers and

junk closets so that you know what junk is in what drawer or closet. With this system, there is no reason whatsoever to give anything away to anyone. You will never say, “Oh gosh, where is that sweater, I must have Kondo’d it out.”

One last word about sentimental items. I think it’s a mistake to throw out anything that sparks great memories. These are the photographs, letters, and heirlooms. Have a special place for them. You never want to hear, “Oops, I must have given that away.”

Everything You Wanted to Know About Home Inspections But Were Afraid to Ask

A HOME INSPECTION IS an evaluation of the visible and accessible systems and components of a home (plumbing, heating and cooling, electrical, structure, roof, etc.) and is intended to give the client (buyer, seller, or homeowner) a better understanding of the home's general condition.

Most often it is a buyer who requests an inspection of the home he or she is serious about purchasing. A home inspection delivers data so that decisions about the purchase can be confirmed or questioned, and can uncover serious and/or expensive to repair defects that the seller/owner may not be aware of. It is not an appraisal of the property's value; nor does it address the cost of repairs. It does not guarantee that the home complies with local building codes or protect a client in the event an item inspected fails in the future.

A home inspection should not be considered a "technically exhaustive" evaluation, but rather an evaluation of the property on

the day it is inspected, taking into consideration normal wear and tear for the home's age and location.

A home inspection can also include, for extra fees, Radon gas testing, water testing, energy audits, pest inspections, pool inspections, and several other specific items that may be indigenous to the region of the country where the inspection takes place.

Home inspections can be used by a seller before listing the property to see if there are any hidden problems that they are unaware of, and also by homeowners simply wishing to care for their homes, prevent surprises, and keep the home investment value as high as possible.

The important results to pay attention to in a home inspection are:

1. Major defects, such as large differential cracks in the foundation; structure out of level or plumb; decks not installed or supported properly, etc. These are items that are expensive to fix, which we classify as items requiring more than 2% of the purchase price to repair.
2. Things that could lead to major defects - a roof flashing leak that could get bigger, damaged downspouts that could cause backup and water intrusion, or a support beam that was not tied in to the structure properly.
3. Safety hazards, such as an exposed electrical wiring, lack of GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters) in kitchens and bath-

rooms, lack of safety railing on decks more than 30 inches off the ground, etc.

Your inspector will advise you about what to do about these problems. He/she may recommend evaluation - and on serious issues most certainly will - by licensed or certified professionals who are specialists in the defect areas. For example, your inspector will recommend you call a licensed building or structural engineer if they find sections of the home that are out of alignment, as this could indicate a serious structural deficiency.

Home Inspections are only done by a buyer after they sign a contract, right?

This is not true. A home inspection can be used for interim inspections in new construction, as a maintenance tool by a current homeowner, a proactive technique by sellers to make their home more sellable, and by buyers wanting to determine the condition of the potential home.

Sellers, in particular, can benefit from getting a home inspection before listing the home. Here are just a few of the advantages for the seller:

The seller knows the home! The home inspector will be able to get answers to his/her questions on the history of any problems they find.

A home inspection will help the seller be more objective when it comes to setting a fair price on the home.

The seller can take the report and make it into a marketing piece for the home.

The seller will be alerted to any safety issues found in the home before they open it up for open house tours.

The seller can make repairs leisurely instead being in a rush after the contract is signed.

Why should I get a home inspection?

Your new home has dozens of systems and over 10,000 parts - from heating and cooling to ventilation and appliances. When these systems and appliances work together, you experience comfort, energy savings, and durability. Weak links in the system, however, can produce assorted problems leading to a loss in value and shortened component life. Would you buy a used car without a qualified mechanic looking at it? Your home is far more complicated, and to have a thorough inspection that is documented in a report arms you with substantial information on which to make decisions.

Why can't I do the inspection myself?

Most homebuyers lack the knowledge, skill, and objectivity needed to inspect a home themselves. By using the services of a professional home inspector, they gain a better understanding of the condition of the property; especially whether any items do not "function as intended" or "adversely affect the habitability of the dwelling" or "warrant further investigation" by a specialist. Remember that the home inspector is a generalist and is broadly trained in every home system.

Why can't I ask a family member who is handy or who is a contractor to inspect my new home?

Although your nephew or aunt may be very skilled, he or she is not trained or experienced in professional home inspections and lacks the specialized test equipment and knowledge required for an inspection. Home inspection training and expertise represent a distinct, licensed profession that employs rigorous standards of practice. Most contractors and other trade professionals hire a professional home inspector to inspect their own homes when they purchase a home.

What does a home inspection cost?

This is often the first question asked but the answer tells the least about the quality of the inspection. Fees are usually based on size, age and other aspects of the home. Inspection fees from a certified professional home inspector generally start under \$400. An average price for a 2,000 square foot home nationally is about \$375-\$400. What you should pay attention to is not the fee, but the qualifications of your inspector. Are they nationally certified (passed the NHIE exam)? Are they state certified if required? How many years of experience do they have? I'd also advise against choosing an inspector with less than 3 years of experience; they will drive you crazy on the details.

How long does the inspection take?

This depends upon the size and condition of the home. You can usually figure 1.2 hours for every 1,000 square feet. For example, a 2,500 square foot house would take about 3 hours. If the company

also produces the report at your home, that will take an additional 30-50 minutes.

Do all homes require a home inspection?

Yes and No. Although not required by law in most states, I think that any buyer not getting a home inspection is doing themselves a great dis-service. They may find themselves with costly and unpleasant surprises after moving into the home and suffer financial headaches that could have been avoided.

Should I be at the inspection?

It's a great idea for you be present during the inspection - whether you are buyer, seller, or homeowner. With you there, the inspector can show you any defects and explain their importance as well as point out maintenance features that will be helpful in the future. If you can't be there, it is not a large problem since the report you receive will be very detailed.

If you are not present, then you should be sure to ask your inspector to explain anything that is not clear in the report. Also read the inspection agreement carefully so you understand what is covered and what is not covered in the inspection. If there is a problem with the inspection or the report, you should raise the issues quickly by calling the inspector, usually within 24 hours.

If you want the inspector to return after the inspection to show you things, this can be arranged and is a good idea. But, you will be paying for the inspector's time on a walkthrough, usually \$100 to \$175.

Should the seller attend the home inspection that has been ordered by the buyer?

The seller will be welcome at the inspection (after all, it is their home), although they should understand that the inspector is working for the buyer. The conversation that the inspector has with the buyer may be upsetting to the seller if the seller was unaware of the items being pointed out, or the seller may be overly emotional about any defects. This is one reason why the seller might want to consider getting their own inspection before listing the home.

Can a house fail a home inspection?

No. A home inspection is an examination of the current condition of a home. It is not an appraisal, which determines market value, or a municipal inspection, which verifies local code compliance. A home inspector, therefore, cannot not pass or fail a house. The inspector will objectively describe the home's physical condition and indicate which items are in need of repair or replacement.

What is included in the inspection?

The following list is not exhaustive. Not all of these may be in the inspection you get, but the inspector will be following a standardized checklist for the home:

Site drainage and grading

Driveway

Entry Steps, handrails

Decks

Masonry

Landscape (as it relates to the home)
Retaining walls
Roofing, flashings, chimneys, and attic
Eaves, soffits, and fascias
Walls, doors, windows, patios, walkways
Foundation, basement, and crawlspaces
Garage, garage walls, floor, and door operation
Kitchen appliances (dishwasher, range/oven/cooktop/hoods, microwave, disposal, trash compactor)
Laundry appliances (washer and dryer)
Ceilings, walls, floors
Kitchen counters, floors, and cabinets
Windows and window gaskets
Interior doors and hardware
Plumbing systems and fixtures
Electrical system, panels, entrance conductors
Electrical grounding, GFCI, outlets
Smoke (fire) detectors
Ventilation systems and Insulation
Heating equipment and controls
Ducts and distribution systems
Fireplaces
Air Conditioning and controls
Heat Pumps and controls
Safety items such as means of egress, TPRV valves, railings, etc.

Other items that are not a part of the standard inspection can often be added for an additional fee:

Radon Gas Test (if your home falls in a high radon area)

Water Quality Test

Termite Inspection (usually performed by a separate company)

Gas Line Leak Test (usually performed by the gas company)

Sprinkler System Test

Swimming Pool and Spa Inspection

Mold Screening (sometimes performed by a separate company)

Septic System Inspection (usually performed by a separate company)

Alarm System (usually performed by a separate company)

Your inspector will work with other companies on some of these specialized inspections. You should ask about the arrangement and what extra fees might be involved.

What is not included in the inspection?

Most people assume that everything is inspected in depth on inspection day. This misunderstanding has caused many a homebuyer to be upset with their inspector.

If you hired someone with licenses for heating and cooling, electrical, plumbing, engineering, etc. to inspect your house, it would take about 16 hours and cost you about \$3,000. It is much more practical to hire a professional inspector who has generalist knowledge of home systems, knows what to look for, and can recommend further inspection by a specialist if needed.

Your inspector is also following very specific guidelines as he/she inspects your home. These are either national guidelines (ASHI - American Society of Home Inspectors, InterNACHI - International Association of Certified Home Inspectors) or state guidelines.

These guidelines are carefully written to protect both your home and the inspector. Here are some examples: We are directed to not turn systems on if they were off at the time of the inspection (safety reasons); we are not allowed to move furniture (might harm something); not allowed to turn on water if it is off (possible flooding), and not allowed to break through a sealed attic hatch (possible damage).

The downside of this practice is that by not operating a control, by not seeing under the furniture, and not getting into the attic or crawlspace, we might miss identifying a problem. However, put into perspective, the chances of missing something serious because of this is quite low, and the guideline as it relates to safety and not harming anything in the home is a good one.

There are other items that 95% of inspectors consider outside a normal inspection, and these include inspecting most things that are not bolted down (installed in the home) such as electronics, low voltage lighting, space heaters, portable air conditioners, or specialized systems such as water purifiers, alarm systems, etc.

What if there are things you can't inspect (like snow on the roof)?

It just so happens that some days the weather elements interfere with a full home inspection. If there is snow on the roof the inspector will tell you they were unable to inspect it. They will be

looking at the eaves and the attic, and any other areas where they can get an idea of condition, but the inspector will write in the report that he/she could not inspect the roof. It may be impractical to return another day once the snow melts, because inspectors have full schedules. However, you can usually pay an inspector a small fee to return and inspect the one or two items they were unable to inspect when they were there the first time. This is just the way things go. If you ask the inspector for a re-inspection, they will usually inspect the items then at no extra charge (beyond the re-inspection fee).

Will the inspector walk on the roof?

The inspector will walk on the roof if it is safe, accessible, and strong enough so that there is no damage done to it by walking on it. Some roofs - such as slate and tile, should not be walked on. Sometimes because of poor weather conditions, extremely steep roofs, or very high roofs, the inspector will not be able to walk the roof. The inspector will try to get up to the edge though, and will also use binoculars where accessibility is a problem. They will also examine the roof from the upper windows if that is possible. There is a lot the inspector can determine from a visual examination from a ladder and from the ground, and they will be able to tell a lot more from inside the attic about the condition of the roof as well.

Now that drones are common, most inspectors use them to photograph areas they are unable to get to, or are unsafe for climbing. If your inspector uses a drone, that's a plus.

Should I have my house tested for Radon? What exactly is Radon?

In many areas of the country, the answer is a definite yes. You can ask your real estate agent about this or go on to the internet for a radon map of the country. Radon is a colorless, odorless, tasteless radioactive gas that's formed during the natural breakdown of uranium in soil, rock, and water. Radon exits the ground and can seep into your home through cracks and holes in the foundation. Radon gas can also contaminate well water.

Health officials have determined that radon gas is a serious carcinogen that can cause lung cancer, second only to cigarette smoking. The only way to find out if your house contains radon gas is to perform a radon measurement test, which your home inspector can do. Make sure the person conducting your test has been trained to The National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) or The National Radon Safety Board (NRSB) standards.

What about a newly constructed home? Does it need a home inspection?

Yes. In fact, inspectors find far more problems, some quite serious, in newly constructed homes than in homes that have been lived in for years. This is not due to your builder's negligence - he/she has done the best job they could with subcontractors and planning - it's just that there are so many systems in a home, that it is close to impossible to inspect everything, and correct it before the Certificate of Occupancy is issued.

Then, for some reason, the subcontractors no longer want to work on the home, and final jobs and details are missed. We recom-

mend getting several professional home inspections near the completion stages of the home to discover everything that should be corrected.

If the house is still new but sitting for a while before sale, it's even more important to get a home inspection. I have seen water lines not hooked up, plumbing lines not hooked up, sewer lines not hooked up, vents not hooked up, and a variety of other serious but easily correctable problems.

I am having a home built. The builder assures me he will inspect everything. Should I have an independent inspector make periodic inspections?

Absolutely yes. No matter how good your builder is, he/she WILL miss things. They are so concerned with the house, they get so close to their work, as do the subcontractors, that important items can, and will be, overlooked. Have a professional inspector make at least 4-6 interim inspections. They will be worth their weight in gold.

What is the Pre-Inspection Agreement?

Most service professionals have a service agreement, and home inspection is no different. In fact, there is enough confusion about what a home inspection should deliver that the agreement is even more important. Some homeowners who get a home inspection expect everything in the home to be perfect after the repairs. This is not the case. Imagine getting a call from a homeowner a year later who says the toilet is not flushing - remember that the inspection is a moment in time snapshot.

In the inspection agreement, the inspector is clear about what the inspection delivers and the things that are not covered, as well as what you should do if you are not pleased with the services. By reviewing this before-hand you will understand much more about the inspection and be happier with the results.

A home inspection does not guard against future problems, nor does it guarantee that all problems will be found.

What kind of report will I get following the inspection?

There are as many versions of a "report" as there are inspection companies. Guidelines dictate that the inspector deliver a written report to the client. This can range from a handwritten checklist that has multiple press copies without pictures to a computer generated and professionally produced report with digital pictures 35 pages long and can be converted to Adobe PDF for storage and emailing.

Check with your inspector about the report he or she uses. I recommend the computer-generated report, since the checklist is more detailed and easier for the homeowner/buyer/seller to detail out the issues with photographs. In this modern age, the reports must be web accessible and emailable to match the technologies most of us are using.

There are some great things you can use the report for in addition to the wealth of information it simply gives you on your new home:

Use the report as a checklist and guide for the contractor to make repairs and improvements or get estimates and quotes from more than one contractor.

Use the report as a budgeting tool using the inspector's recommendations and the remaining expected life of components to keep the property in top shape.

If you are a seller, use the report to make repairs and improvements, raising the value of the home and impressing the buyers. Then have a re-inspection and use this second report as a marketing tool for prospective buyers.

Use the report as a "punch list" on a re-inspection and as a baseline for ongoing maintenance.

Will the report be emailable or available as an Adobe PDF file?

Yes. As discussed in the last question, you will probably want your inspector to be using the latest reporting technology.

What if I think the inspector missed something?

Inspectors are human, and yes, they do miss items. However, they routinely use advanced tools and techniques to reduce the possibility that they will miss something. This includes very detailed checklists, reference manuals, computer-based lists, and a methodical always-done-the-same-way of physically moving around your home. That is one of the reasons that an inspector can miss an item when they get interrupted. The inspector will have a set way of resuming the inspection if this happens. If, in the end, something IS missed, call the inspector and discuss it. It may warrant the inspector returning to view something that you found.

Remember, the inspector is doing the very best job they know how to do, and probably did not miss the item because they were lax in their technique or did not care. When I was an inspector, I always returned to look at something at no charge if the client asked.

What if the inspector tells me I should have a professional engineer or a licensed plumber or other professional contractor in to look at something they found? Isn't this "passing the buck"?

You may be disappointed that further investigation is required, but your inspector is doing exactly what they should be doing. The purpose of the inspection is to discover defects that affect your safety and the functioning of the home; the inspector is a generalist, not a specialist.

The inspection code of ethics as well as national and state guidelines dictate that only contractors that are licensed in their specialty field should work on these systems and areas. When they tell you that a specialist is needed, there may be a bigger, more critical issue that you need to know about.

If you move into the home without getting these areas checked by a qualified specialist, you could be in for some nasty and expensive surprises. The inspector does not want to cause you any more expense or worry, so when they do recommend further evaluation they are being serious about protecting you and your investment.

Will the inspector provide a warranty on the inspected items?

Most inspectors do not give the homeowner a warranty on inspected items. Remember, a home inspection is a visual

examination on a certain day, and the inspector cannot predict what issues could arise over time after the inspection. However, some inspectors are now including a warranty from the largest home warranty company in America - American Home Warranty Corporation, as well as others, on the inspected items for 60 or 90 days. This is a very good deal, and the agreement can be extended after the initial period for a relatively small amount of money.

Do most inspection companies offer money back guarantees?

Most inspection companies do not offer a satisfaction guarantee nor do they mention it in their advertising. It's always a good thing if you can get extra services for no additional cost from your inspection company, and of course a satisfaction guarantee is an indication of superior customer service. You usually have to call your inspection company right after the inspection and viewing of the report to tell them you are not satisfied.

If you are not happy with the services, you should talk to your inspector first and let him/her correct the issue(s) you are unhappy with first.

When I ran my own inspection company, I did offer a 100% money back guarantee to customers, and I had less than a half percent of customers ask for it. The few that did ask had misunderstood what I was inspecting (thought the inspection covered termites). That was my error in not explaining it well enough.

What if my report comes back with nothing really defective in the home? Should I ask for my money back?

No, don't ask for your money back - you just received great news. Now you can complete your home purchase with peace of mind about the condition of the property and all its equipment and systems.

You will have valuable information about your new home from the inspector's report, and will want to keep that information for future reference. Most importantly, you can feel assured that you are making a well-informed purchase decision.

What if the inspection reveals serious defects?

If the inspection reveals serious defects in the home (I define a serious defect as something that will cost more than 2% of the purchase price to fix), then pat yourself on the back for getting an inspection. You just saved yourself a ton of money. Of course it is disappointing, even heart wrenching, to find out that your well researched house is now a problem house, but you now know the facts and can either negotiate with the seller, or move on. You may want the home so much that it will be worth it to negotiate the price and then perform the repairs. Imagine, though, if you had not gotten the inspection - you would have had some very unpleasant surprises.

Can I ask my home inspector to perform the repairs?

You can, but if your inspector is ethical, he/she will refuse, and correctly so; it is a conflict of interest for the person who inspected your home to also repair it. Inspectors are specifically barred from this practice by licensing authorities, and it's a good rule - an inspector must remain completely impartial when he or she inspects your home.

This is one reason you should have a professional home inspector inspect your home and not a contractor - the contractor will want the repair work and you are likely to not have an objective inspection from this person even though they mean well and are technically competent.

Does the Seller have to make the repairs?

The inspection report results do not place an obligation on the seller to repair everything mentioned in the report. Once the home condition is known, the buyer and the seller should sit down and discuss what is in the report. The report will be clear about what is a repair and what is a discretionary improvement. This area should be clearly negotiated between the parties.

It's important to know that the inspector must stay out of this discussion because it is outside of their scope of work.

After the home inspection and consulting with the seller on the repairs, can I re-employ the inspector to come re-inspect the home to make sure everything got fixed?

You certainly can, and it's a really good idea. For a small fee the inspector will return to determine if the repairs were completed, and if they were completed correctly.

What if I find problems after I move into my new home?

A home inspection is not a guarantee that problems won't develop after you move in. However, if you believe that a problem was visible at the time of the inspection and should have been mentioned in the report, your first step should be to call the inspector. He or she will be fine with this, and does want you to call if you think

there is a problem. If the issue is not resolved with a phone call, they will come to your home to look at it and they should not charge you for this. They will want you to be satisfied and will do everything they can to achieve this goal.

One way to protect yourself between the inspection and the move-in is to conduct a final walkthrough on closing day and use both the inspection report AND a Walkthrough Checklist to make sure everything is as it should be.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa grew up taking things apart and playing with the boys. After graduating from college, she started a bicycle shop, attended night school for an engineering degree, and took on odd jobs in residential and commercial construction.

Lisa dreamed about flying airplanes. In the mid-nineties, she bought the parts to build a kit airplane in her garage. Twenty months later she made a dream-come-true solo round



trip in her homebuilt craft, called a Pulsar XP, from south Florida to Bar Harbor, Maine, to visit her family.

Lisa met her antique aircraft restorer husband, Jerry Stadtmiller, in 1999 as she was beginning to build her second airplane. They married in 2003, and several years later moved to the mountains of Hayesville, North Carolina.

In 2006, Lisa started Your Achievement Coach, a coaching and teaching practice that focused on delivering planning skills to people wanting to reach their goals. Lisa believed that whether it was starting a business, writing a book, or building an airplane, developing the skills of disciplined planning and goal setting could get you there. Lisa said to her clients, “Shine the light of possibility on your dream, and it will leap to action.”

Switching gears again in North Carolina, Lisa founded and ran Your Inspection Expert, a residential inspection company, from 2008 to 2011. Experience gleaned from hundreds of residential inspections form the basis for the advice in this book.

Lisa has worked for 3 major U.S. corporations at the executive level, most notably as Chief Training Officer for Tyco Fire and Security Services in Boca Raton, Florida, in the early 2000s. She was certified as an ASQ Six Sigma Black Belt and Quality Engineer; she holds a 50-ton coast guard captain's license, a private pilot license, an FAA airframe and powerplant license (A&P), and FAA Light Sport Repair Certificate Instructor certification.

In 2001 Lisa earned the EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association) Technical Counselor designation and a few years later, Flight Advisor status. On February 5th, 2008, Lisa became the first civilian female AB-DAR (Amateur Built Designated Airworthiness Representative) for the FAA. In these roles Lisa volunteers her time to help experimental aircraft builders become technically proficient and make their airplane as safe as possible. She also helps them determine the testing program for their aircraft and understand the critical factors required for the first flight and early flying hours.

Lisa holds a Doctor of Science, a Bachelor of Arts in English and Philosophy, a Masters in Business, and an Associate of Science in Engineering.

Lisa was a United States Coast Guard volunteer in the 1980s and 90s, worked with Junior Achievement and the Flying Start

program, and continues to volunteer for the Experimental Aircraft Association.

People have asked Lisa whether being a woman in male dominated professions has made her journey more difficult. Lisa answered, “No, not at all. In fact, men have encouraged me and helped me to be successful. If anything, being unconventional has made the path easier. Appreciating the contributions of both men and women in unusual endeavors brings balance.”

Want to read more? See House Keys the book, at:

<https://housekeysbylisaturner.com/>

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