

INSPECTION INTROSPECTIONS

**THE MOST IMPORTANT INVESTMENT BUYERS
CAN MAKE WHEN PURCHASING A HOME**

Buying a home is exhilarating, expensive (once you add up commissions, closing costs, moving costs, etc.) and like any investment, risky.

By Holly Herrick



The key to balancing risk and emotion is to have the prospective home inspected, preferably by an ASHI (American Society of Home Inspectors) or NACHI (National Association of Certified Home Inspectors) certified private home inspector.

"An inspection is not legally required, but it's a crucial insurance policy against catastrophe," says Joyce King, a Charleston-based real estate sales veteran of 20 years.

What it is

A home inspection ensures that the buyer's dream house checks out from top to bottom for anything that may adversely affect the safety, habitability and function of the home, so that it doesn't morph into a buyer's worst money pit nightmare. No matter how much a buyer loves a prospective home, an inspection, which occurs prior to closing on a contract, provides a "contingency" to

walk away from the deal if the report is not 100 percent completely satisfactory to the buyer.

"Buyers need to be open-minded and realize that the inspector genuinely has their best interests in mind," says Larry David, co-owner of D&I Home Inspectors Inc. "We're not there to write down that the bedroom door rubs a little bit. Our job is to point out major problems."

Who to look for

Not all home inspectors are created equal. David, who has inspected more than 3,000 homes, highly recommends that prospective buyers seek out those certified by ASHI or NACHI. All inspectors operating in the state of South Carolina must have a state license. This is obtained by passing a two-week course on how to perform a home inspection. After that, prospective inspectors must pass an exam. However,

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certified ASHI or NACHI inspectors are required to jump through additional hoops, including passing at least one more "very tough exam," complete required additional annual training, and carry general liability or EO (errors and omissions) insurance, unlike home inspectors carrying only a state license.

"The state license is a minimum standard and that's their only credential," says

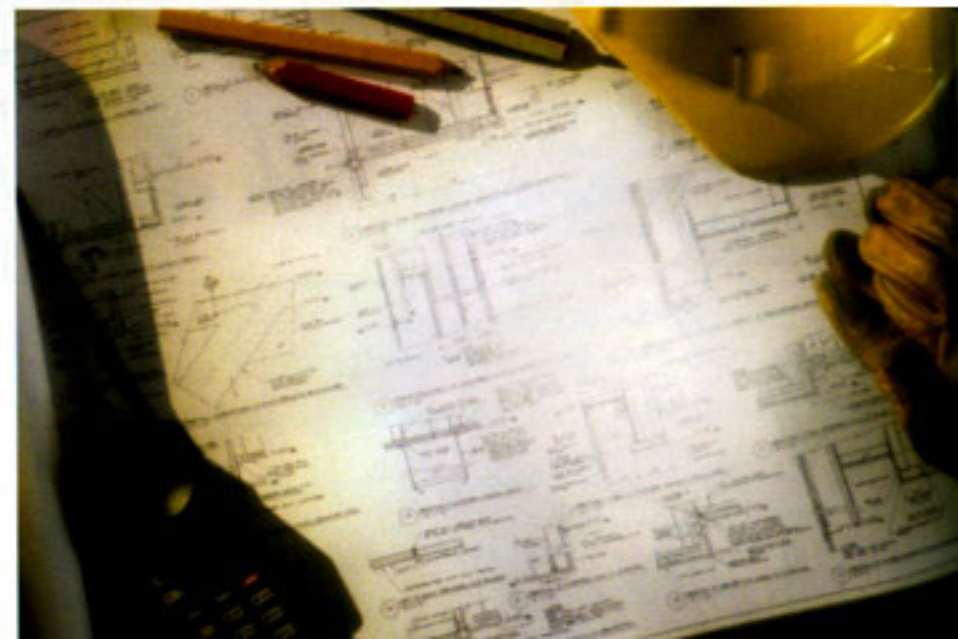
ASHI certified home inspector Kevin Westendorff of Lowcountry Home Inspection.

Another potential hazard that's especially common in buyers of new homes is 100 percent reliance on the results of an international residential code inspection, without the back-up of a private home inspection by a certified, licensed inspector.

"The code inspection meets international standards on hurricane resistance, earthquake resistance, structural codes,

plumbing codes and mechanical codes," explains Westendorff. Unlike private inspections, there is no charge and local municipalities provide their own inspectors.

"People assume that because a home is new, that it's in good shape," says Westendorff. "They put a lot of faith in municipal code inspectors, but these guys are way overworked. They don't really have time to do a thorough inspection the way a private home inspector does."





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Ironically, the only time a certified home inspection could safely be side-stepped is if the buyer plans to demolish or gut an older, decrepit home.

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Time and Money

Of course, a private home inspection costs money and a good one will take several hours. On average, an inspection on a relatively new, 2,000-square-foot home in "good condition" will range from \$350 to \$400 and take three to three and a half hours, according to Westendorff. The fee structures vary but all take a combination of the following factors into

consideration: the size and age of the home and the experience level of the inspector.

"It's the best money you'll ever, ever invest in your home," says realtor Karen Abrams of Prudential Carolina Real Estate.

References are key

The inspection business is largely dependent upon referrals from a multi-tiered

source pool of realtors, the Internet, trusted friends and professionals and experienced home buyers. David recommends a cross-reference approach, beginning with an online search at NACHI and ASHI Web sites which provide a "rotating list" of certified inspectors that can be searched by the address/area of the prospective home's location.

"Next, ask your realtor for a list of three to five names, and then check and see if they're on these sites. Finally, ask friends who used an inspector in the last year. If you do your homework, you get the ones that are the most used and most liked, because they're that way for a reason."

Final thoughts

Inspectors and realtors underscore the importance of either the buyer or realtor being present for all or part of the inspection, when possible. "It's extremely important to be at the

inspection or at least show up for the last 30 minutes so the inspector can walk around the house and point out any issues," says David.

Look for ASHI or NACHI inspectors with a background in construction or engineering and don't be afraid to ask questions.

"If I were going to hire someone that I was about to give \$500, I'd want to know what his credentials are. A good inspector would be more than happy to give that information," explains Westendorff.

Watch out for inspectors that are "substantially less expensive" than others and inspectors that say the inspection will take anything less than 2 hours. "You get what you pay for," Westendorff says. ■