

Before-you-renovate inspection checklist

Walk through your home with a flashlight and this list before design begins



Outside the house

- ☐ Ground slopes away from the foundation on every side, rather than toward it.
- ☐ Gutters are clear and downspouts discharge at least 6 feet (about 2 m) from the house.
- ☐ Roof has no curled, cracked or missing shingles, and flashing around chimneys and vents looks sound.
- ☐ Siding, stucco and trim are free of cracks, gaps, rot and staining.
- ☐ Windows and doors close and seal well, with no rot in sills or frames.
- ☐ Foundation walls show no wide cracks, bulging or crumbling parging.
- ☐ Decks and stairs are solid, with sound posts and railings.
- ☐ Trees are not overhanging the roof or too close to the foundation.

Basement and foundation

- ☐ No water stains, efflorescence, musty smell or damp spots on walls and floor, especially after rain or snowmelt.
- ☐ Cracks are narrow and stable. Note any that are wider than a coin's edge, horizontal or growing.
- ☐ Sump pump, if present, runs and discharges away from the house.
- ☐ A backwater valve is installed on the main sewer line, or the plan includes one.
- ☐ Ceiling height is enough for the space you want to create. Measure to the bottom of joists and ducts.
- ☐ The home has been tested for radon. See our radon guide.
- ☐ Posts and beams look straight and solid, with no rot where they meet the floor.

Structure

- ☐ Floors are reasonably level, without bounce, sag or sloping toward one side.
- ☐ Doors and windows open and close without sticking, which can signal movement.
- ☐ Diagonal cracks above door and window corners are noted and photographed.
- ☐ No signs of past structural changes without support, such as walls removed with no beam.
- ☐ Any walls you plan to remove have been checked for structure. See our load-bearing wall guide.

Attic and roof

- ☐ Insulation is deep and even. Many older attics have far less than current standards.
- ☐ Insulation that looks pebbly, gold or grey may be vermiculite and should be tested before anyone disturbs it.
- ☐ No water stains, dark sheathing, frost or mould on the underside of the roof.
- ☐ Soffit and roof vents are open and not blocked by insulation.
- ☐ Bathroom and kitchen fans vent to the outside, not into the attic.

Electrical

- ☐ Service size is noted, often 60, 100 or 200 amps. A big renovation may need an upgrade.
- ☐ The panel has breakers, not fuses, and no signs of scorching, rust or double-tapped breakers.
- ☐ Wiring type is noted. Knob and tube and aluminum branch wiring need attention.
- ☐ Two-prong ungrounded outlets are noted.
- ☐ Outlets near water have GFCI protection.
- ☐ Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are present and working on every level.
- ☐ Have a licensed electrician assess anything you are unsure about.

Plumbing

- ☐ Supply pipe material is noted. Galvanized steel and grey Poly-B are usually replaced during a renovation.
- ☐ Main shut-off valve is found, labelled and works.
- ☐ Water pressure is good at the top floor with two taps running.
- ☐ Drains run freely, with no gurgling or slow fixtures.
- ☐ Cast iron or clay drains in older homes have been checked with a camera if a renovation will tie into them.
- ☐ Water heater age is noted. Tank heaters often last about 8 to 12 years.
- ☐ No signs of leaks under sinks, around toilets or on ceilings below bathrooms.

Heating, cooling and ventilation

- ☐ Furnace or boiler age is noted. Many furnaces last about 15 to 25 years.
- ☐ Ducts reach every room, and rooms heat evenly.
- ☐ There is a working exhaust fan in each bathroom, and the range hood vents outside.
- ☐ Air feels fresh, without condensation on windows, mould or lingering smells.
- ☐ If you plan a bigger kitchen hood, ask whether makeup air will be needed.

What I found

Fix now (safety)

Fix during the renovation

Watch

Possible hazardous materials

- ☐ Textured or popcorn ceilings and older drywall compound.
- ☐ Vinyl floor tiles, especially 9 by 9 inch tiles, and the glue beneath them.
- ☐ Pipe and duct insulation, and older furnace wrap.
- ☐ Vermiculite attic insulation.
- ☐ Layers of old paint on trim, windows and doors.

Paperwork worth gathering

- ☐ Permit history for the address, which shows what was done before and whether it was approved.
- ☐ Past home inspection reports.
- ☐ Receipts and warranties for the roof, windows, furnace and water heater.
- ☐ The land survey or real property report, which shows lot lines and setbacks for additions.
- ☐ Your home insurance policy, so you know what is covered during construction.