

# **BUYERS BEWARE: OLDER HOMES NEED PHYSICAL CHECK-UPS**

Few modern homes can beat the charm and character of Canada's homes built before the twentieth century. Natural wood beams and trim, built-in cabinets and cozy bedroom alcoves are only a few of the features that make older homes special and attractive to many home buyers.

Yet along with their appealing style and atmosphere, many of these houses also possess an array of ailments and conditions specifically because of their age. The Canadian Association of Home & Property Inspectors (CAHPI), an organization of home inspection professionals, cautions buyers to be aware of these problems when they shop.

While a lot may be learned about a home by its outward appearance, its interior condition and future lifespan can only be evaluated by an expert on home construction: the professional home inspector.

CAHPI inspectors know what to look for in older homes, and how to "listen" to what they may have to say. For example:

## **1. PLUMBING**

The plumbing of an older house must be looked at very carefully, since it could be on its second or third generation of piping. If incompatible metals have been mixed in the piping, there may be extensive corrosion.

## **2. SETTLEMENT**

In addition to possible damage to the foundation, settlement of the structure can also cause problems in the plumbing system. Pipes that were once pitched properly to carry waste water away may now be pitched the wrong way if settlement is severe.

## **3. SAGGING**

A common problem in older homes, sagging is often compounded by alterations to the house. Support structures are often cut with no thought to their ability to carry the weight of the building.

## **4. WIRING SYSTEM**

When many of the older houses were wired, the only electrical requirements were a couple of lights and an occasional outlet - clearly inadequate for today's needs. If the electrical system has not been modernized, or if modernization has been done by amateurs, a sizable expenditure may be anticipated.

## **5. ENERGY CONSERVATION**

When these older homes were built, this was not even a consideration. Special attention must be paid to the conservation measures that may or may not have been installed.

## **6. PROPER VENTILATION**

On the other hand, an unknowledgeable homeowner, in an attempt to seal and insulate his house, may have created more problems than he solved. A house can be made energy efficient, but it must also breathe.

## **7. HEATING SYSTEM**

The transition from old systems (wood or coal burning stoves) to modern oil or gas fired central heating was often made by alterations to the existing equipment. Sometimes these modifications were done properly; more often they were not, and supplementary heat is frequently needed. In addition, heat distribution pipes or ducts may have deteriorated with age and need replacement.

CAHPI advises home buyers to look closely at these aspects themselves before they fall in love with that quaint older home of their dreams, and to have a professional home inspection before they commit to a purchase.

Not everyone, though, is qualified to be a home inspector. CAHPI warns against hiring a “moonlighter” who may not be sufficiently knowledgeable in all areas of home construction, and who might use home inspections as a means of obtaining repair contracts. Consumers should verify an inspector’s professional objectivity by making sure he or she doesn’t offer to make repairs on any of the problems discovered during the inspection, or even to recommend a contractor for repair work. CAHPI’s Code of Ethics forbids its members from engaging in any activity which might be construed as a conflict of interest.

CAHPI members are professionals who must meet demanding technical and experience requirements. The Association’s Standards of Practice and strict Code of Ethics provide the nationally recognized benchmark of performance for the home inspection professional.

For further information on home inspections, or to obtain the names of qualified home inspectors in your area, go online to: [www.cahpi.ca](http://www.cahpi.ca) - and link to the website applicable to your province.