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New Homes Need Inspections Too: The Three Steps in a Builder's Process Where You Bring Your Own Inspector

City inspections do not shop for the buyer: three stages, three third-party inspections — in one guide

That a new home was inspected does not mean it was inspected for the buyer: city inspections check the minimum code, and the builder's quality control checks the builder's own work. This guide works through the three nodes where you bring your own third-party inspector — pre-pour, pre-drywall and final — how the blue-tape walkthrough creates evidence, how the 1-2-10 warranty works, and how a builder's contract differs from a resale contract: look for yourself, before it is covered up.

New Homes Need Inspections Too: The Three Steps in a Builder's Process Where You Bring Your Own Inspector

Look Before It Is Covered Up

1. First, clear up a misunderstanding: “someone inspected it” does not mean “someone inspected it for you”

Many buyers think a new home can skip the inspection: the city has inspectors, the builder has its own quality control, it is brand new and nobody has lived in it — what could be wrong? The issue is standpoint. A city inspection checks whether the lowest building code is met — pass the line and it is fine; it does not hunt for defects on behalf of any individual buyer. The builder's quality control checks whether its own crews built to plan, and when a schedule is pressing, checklists get ticked faster than anyone. Neither gate was set up for the buyer's interest. On top of that, a large community is assembly-line work: dozens of homes advance at once, workers rotate by trade, and a pipe joint in one stretch of wall or a circuit run in one room, installed wrong or left out and then covered over, can go undiscovered for years.

So the logic of a new-home inspection is not “distrusting the builder”; it is, at the key nodes, hiring a third-party inspector who answers only to you, to look at — and photograph — the things that will soon be covered and never seen again, while they can still be seen. That is not extra consumption; it is doing the checking while it is cheap.

2. The three stages: miss one, and some things can never be seen again

The first stage is before the foundation is poured (pre-pour / pre-slab). The inspector looks at the layout of the foundation rebar or cables, where the pipe runs come up out of the ground, the waterproofing and the lot's drainage grading. A position error found at this stage is a small thing to change; found after the concrete is poured, it is a big thing. This stage's window is very short — from the foundation forms being set to the pour is often only a few days — so you need to notify the builder's sales staff and construction manager in advance and get the inspection scheduled into their timeline.

The second stage is before the drywall goes up (pre-drywall), and it is widely regarded as the most valuable of the three steps. At this moment the home's "bones and blood vessels and nerves" are all open: the spacing and bracing of the wood framing, the routing and fastening of the plumbing and electrical runs, the sealing of the HVAC ducts, the waterproofing transitions at door and window openings, and the moisture barrier on the exterior walls — all of it can be seen and touched. Once the drywall is sealed, these things will never be seen again in this lifetime, short of tearing out walls. Problems found at this stage — missing framing bracing, loosely fastened pipe runs, leaking ducts — are all still out in the open, cheap for the builder to correct, and builders usually cooperate.

The third stage is before closing (final), once the home is complete, going through everything one by one: every faucet, toilet, appliance, heating and cooling function of the HVAC, doors and windows, and the garage door, each tested in use; the finish quality of walls and floors, drainage slopes, and the attic and exterior details, checked once more against the second stage's photographs. This stage's list becomes the direct basis for requiring the builder to complete the corrections.

3. The final walkthrough: blue tape is not nitpicking — it is evidence

At the final walkthrough before closing, the sales representative walks with you carrying blue tape to mark items: paint dings, a cabinet door out of line, a floor that creaks — one mark per spot. The point of this step is to be slow and thorough: test every switch and outlet, open every faucet and watch the drainage, walk a circle of every room's floor. Put every issue found onto a written list on the spot, sign it on both sides, and note the completion time — a spoken "we'll come back and fix it" is worth less than one line on paper. Keep the list together with the photographs taken at the walkthrough; when you later run the warranty process, this is the evidence of the home's "condition at delivery."

4. How the warranty is structured: what 1-2-10 means

Houston's mainstream builders' warranties are broadly three layers, commonly called 1-2-10 in the trade: in year one, workmanship and materials issues (paint, trim, small defects) have the widest coverage; through year two, what is covered is the piping and wiring portions of the plumbing, electrical and HVAC systems; the ten-year layer covers structure — the foundation, the load-bearing frame, the big items. The exact terms are written differently by each builder; when you sign, keep the warranty manual separately and do not rely only on the sales presentation. One thing is worth marking on the calendar: at about eleven months in, before the first year expires, go through the whole home in detail yourself once more, or hire an inspector again for a "warranty-expiry inspection," and report the year's accumulated small issues to the builder in one batch, to be fixed inside the free window. The nail pops and joint cracks that appear on walls during that year are often normal material shrinkage — but report and log them anyway; whether they get repaired is a separate question, and the record comes first.

5. The contract is not the resale contract — just know that going in

A new home is signed on the builder's own contract text, which is not the state standard contract used for resale homes: the deposit ratio and refund terms, the pricing and payment nodes for selections and upgrades, the flexibility on the closing date, and how changes are handled all follow the builder's version. Reading it line by line before signing, and putting what the sales staff said out loud onto paper, is ordinary common sense; keep an original copy each of the floor plan, the selections sheet and the site plan. These documents, plus the photographs and reports from each inspection stage, form the home's complete file from birth — and when you resell later, a new buyer who sees that file will trust the home in a completely different way.

For the full purchase process, from offer to keys, see this site's **Houston Home Buying & Mortgage Guide**.

6. The order of magnitude of the cost

Phased inspections are charged per visit — one fee per stage — and the fee varies with the size of the home; a single stage commonly falls in a reference range on the order of a few hundred dollars, and three stages together are a very small proportion next to a one-time major repair; the specifics follow the inspection company's actual quote. In

a new-home budget, I suggest listing these three fees from the very start rather than remembering them later — a stage whose window has passed cannot be bought back at any price.

7. To close

A new home's question was never “is it new?” but “before it was covered up, did anyone look at it for you?” None of the three inspection points is expensive or hard to arrange; the only difficulty is knowing in advance and booking in advance. Hold the nodes, and a new home's certainty is real certainty.

If you are considering a new home, send me the community and the floor plan: I will first look at roughly which construction stage it has reached, and which stage's inspection can still be scheduled in time.

If this is sitting inside your transaction right now, ask me — free consultation: (347) 774-5396 | owenrealestatetx.com

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This guide is general information only and is not an inspection conclusion or legal advice. For a specific home, rely on a licensed inspector's report and the contract text.

Feel free to share this guide with friends who may find it helpful.