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HouseSmart

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New house, old truth: Inspect as you build

WHAT COULD be more hassle-free than a brand-new house? No appliances on the verge of extinction or hairline cracks in the walls. Answer: a brand-new house whose construction was overseen by a building inspector hired by you, the buyer.

No new house is perfect. It is, after all, the ultimate in handmade objects. But you're entitled to one that's well-built, and the best way to ensure that is to hire a pro to oversee the process.

Most people are familiar with public building inspectors, who make



sure a house conforms to building codes. Unfortunately,

these guys don't pay any attention to the nuts and bolts. I've looked at certified, finished houses and found appalling lapses, from whole sections of walls without insulation to windows that simply don't work. Once, while ripping apart a wall on a fairly new house to build an addition, I found the fossilized leftovers of the carpenter's lunch smoldering inside!

To protect yourself, hire an inspector who reports to you five or six times during construction. (Try the American Society of Home Inspectors at www.ashi.com.) Involve him or her from the start. Be upfront during contract negotiations with your builder about the inspector's role. If the builder balks over what amounts to having someone watching over his shoulder, you may want to find another builder. Then, as the inspector catches mistakes — and there will be mistakes — ask the builder to fix them.

Yes, it's pricey. Expect to pay an inspector \$1,000-\$1,500 over the course of the project. But trust me: The investment will buy you a home that is, indeed, practically perfect. **W**

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