

**EXPERT ADVICE**


A movement is underway to ensure that homebuyers are hiring qualified home inspectors to act in their best interests and so they can be more confident in the decisions they make.

# When inspect becomes suspect

**DIANNE DANIEL**  
Special to QMI Agency

In a hot housing market, realtors may be inclined to coach purchasers to waive home inspections. But is that really in everyone's best interest?

Bruce McClure, a registered home inspector since 1998 and co-ordinator of the Home Inspection program at Conestoga College in Kitchener, Ont., would say it's not. McClure is a proponent of a more consumer-oriented approach to home inspection, one he spells out in *Buy or Run: I'm a Real Home Inspector, Not a TV Celebrity*, an exposé he wrote to shed light on the industry.

A lobbyist for home inspection reform, McClure has ideas that ruffle feathers but he's okay with that. His goal is to educate buyers so they know what a home inspection is — and isn't — and will be more confident about the purchase decisions they make.

"A very important message is that home inspectors don't pass or fail a house," says McClure. "We report on a home's condition at a moment in time."

Apparently the moment matters. McClure recalls a story he once heard in the field when a home inspector gave a home a passing grade in the morning,

only to learn it was flattened by a hurricane hours later.

His book is full of similar stories based on personal experiences. In one case, he inspected the roof of a condominium against the advice of the realtor, who told the prospective buyer it wasn't necessary and that other home inspectors didn't do it. When McClure found poorly repaired shingles that had outlived their usefulness, it helped to explain the signs of water damage indoors. The realtor preferred to blame it on the seller's tropical fish tank.

McClure says he was prompted to write his book when he learned of Ontario's pending proposal to establish mandatory guidelines for home inspectors. "I'm trying to get the public's attention so people realize change is necessary," he says, noting that he takes a North American perspective to solving problems in the industry. "It's not just about standards. It's about who the inspector is working for."

The number one problem facing home inspection today, advocates McClure, is the lack of independence between home inspectors and realtors, who he maintains should be at an arm's length at minimum. He writes: "... until the public can be assured of a truly independent home inspection that's 100 per cent out of the realtor's

control or field of influence, there's little chance of public confidence in the home inspection industry."

Just as mechanics routinely inspect cars to ensure driving safety, McClure believes home inspections should be viewed as home safety. To help ensure you are hiring a qualified, reputable inspector who will work to protect your best interests, consider the following:

Is your inspector independent from other influences?

Are you allowed to attend the inspection?

Is your inspector a member of the Canadian Association of Home and Property Inspectors (CAHPI)?

How long will the inspection take? A standards-of-practice inspection for a 2,000-square-foot house should seldom take less than 3.5 hours.

Does the inspector have a contract?

What kind of report will be provided? To meet standards of practice it needs to be written or computerized.

Ontario is currently soliciting feedback for its proposal, entitled *A Closer Look: Report on Home Inspector Qualifications in Ontario*. McClure hopes his book, available at Indigo and Chapter's, will help form part of the discussion. Learn more about his "dream list" for reform at [buyorrunbook.com](http://buyorrunbook.com).

# So you want to renovate your basement?



LISA EVANS

**EIEIHOME.COM**

A basement renovation is a popular home improvement project. Not only can this renovation provide some much-needed additional living and storage space, but it can also significantly increase the value of your home. *eieihome* spoke with Andrew Bridi, owner of On Centre Design Build, a custom home builder and renovator in the GTA, for his tips on what to consider before tackling your basement reno.

**Decide how you want to use the space.** Before starting a renovation, consider your family's needs for now and in the future. Do you want an open family room with plenty of storage space? Do you need a guest bedroom, a bathroom, or perhaps a small kitchen that will allow you to rent out your basement in the future? The function of your basement will help your contractor determine the best layout to maximize both space and budget.

**Consider your budget.** As a general rule, Bridi recommends homeowners estimate \$30 per square foot as a starting point. This includes the cost of perimeter walls, carpeting, drywall and simple light fixtures. Additional retrofits such as a bathroom, a bar or a fireplace will increase the budget.

**Reach for the top.** If you live in an older

home, you may be limited by low ceiling heights. Digging out the basement to add height is one option to create a more functional living space, though Bridi warns this is a very expensive process, costing \$50,000 — \$80,000 for the excavation and underpinning.

**Check for moisture problems.** Before beginning a basement renovation, examine foundation walls and floors, looking for signs of excess moisture, and repair any cracks that could cause trouble down the road. "You want to make sure that the basement is watertight before you do any work on the inside," says Bridi. If you live in an area

that has experienced flooding, installing a backflow preventer is a good safety measure to make sure city water doesn't flow back into your basement.

**Consider electrical needs.** Do you want to set up a home theatre system in your basement with a state of the art sound system? Be sure to talk to your contractor about where you want to position electronics before any walls are put up. "You don't want to have to start cutting holes in the drywall in order to get wiring into the areas of the basement where you need it," says Bridi.

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