

The top 5 defects to look for in a property

Although it is the appearance of a home that buyers often fall in love with, there is sometimes more to a home than meets the eye. "Purchasing a property is a large investment and rectifying severe structural defects will be a costly affair that impacts on the home's potential return on investment," says Adrian Goslett of RE/MAX of Southern Africa. According to Goslett there is some protection offered to buyers by the Consumer Protection Act (CPA), in that it is the buyer's right to be fully informed of all known defects that exist in the home they are purchasing.

However, he notes that it is still worthwhile for a buyer to have the home inspected for hard-to-detect defects, which may have been overlooked by the seller. "There is always the chance that some defects may have been unintentionally missed or are simply unknown to the seller. If this is the case, then those problems will not have been disclosed in the sale agreement and it would be in the buyer's best interests to either inspect the home themselves or have a professional assist them - a small price to pay considering the size of the investment, he says.

Goslett provides buyers with the top five potential defects to look out for:

Cracks in the foundation walls

While this may sound like it is fairly easy to spot, cracks can be hidden by layers of plaster and paint. "Not every crack will mean that there is a major defect, in fact a fair number will be of little or no significance. However, some cracks could indicate structural damage that will be extremely costly to fix. In some cases cracks occur in the walls when the foundation of the home has shifted. If this is what has happened, the crack will move along a horizontal plane, which is of more concern than a vertical crack", Goslett explains.

He adds that the width of the crack is another consideration in determining the severity of the issue. Vertical narrow cracks are often not a sign of a foundational shift, while wide cracks should definitely be assessed. The burning question is whether the cracked wall can continue to provide support to the structure or whether it needs to be completely replaced -which will cost far more than repair.

Roof damage

Yellowing marks on the ceiling is normally an indication that the roof is leaking and in need of repair. This should not be ignored as the roof provides the home with protection against the elements and if not repaired, could result in other problems forming such as structural damage or damp in the walls. Added to this, exposure to moisture will rot the wooden components inside the roof's structure, which could lead to collapse. If it is merely a matter of replacing broken or missing tiles, it can be a relatively cost-effective endeavour; however an old roof that has structural damage will cost a lot to replace completely.

Foundation drainage

There must be sufficient and effective water drainage around the exterior of the home to avoid water pooling or damp problems in the low lying areas of the property. Not only can poor drainage cause mould and rot, but persistent water intrusion can compromise the structure of the foundation and be a very expensive problem to rectify. Drainage systems should be properly graded to better channel water away from the home and foundation.

Faulty electrical system

Legislation requires the homeowner to be in possession of a valid Electrical Certificate of Compliance (ECOC), which will ensure that the electrical work and installations are safe and meet the required regulations of the South African National Standards. That said, it is still important for a buyer to ensure that the wiring installations in the home match those on the certificate and that they have been maintained throughout the period stipulated on the certificate. Be aware of amateur repairs that have been completed by the homeowner, as these will not be covered on the certificate and could result in a faulty electrical system.

Plumbing problems

Plumbing issues are often difficult to detect or check as the problem may be underground. The more common defects include outdated piping materials and faulty fixtures. While replacing a fixture is a simple repair, replacing an entire plumbing system will require far more extensive measures. When viewing a home, buyers should look under the sinks for pipes that are leaking or in need of repairs, although it is best to have the plumbing system inspected by a professional plumber.

"Taking the time to ensure that the property is in good repair may require some initial work on the buyer's part, however the time and effort will pay off in the long run by providing the buyer with an appreciating asset that grows in value," Goslett concludes.

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