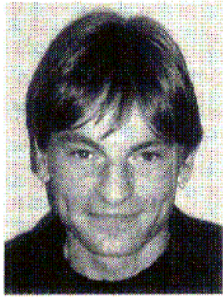


The Business And Art Of Home Inspection

By Ron Sawlor



By now many of you have probably heard of the recent court case in British Columbia that awarded a North Vancouver couple damages totaling nearly \$200,000, after a home inspector, who was a registered member of the Canadian Association of Home and Property Inspectors (BC) under-represented the severity and cost of repairs by a huge degree in his assessment of a home being considered for purchase by the couple. Subsequent to his report, the couple did purchase the home, only to learn the report missed or under-represented serious issues, including structural problems and the actual cost of repairs exceeded the report's estimated cost estimates by an approximate factor of ten(!).

Among all the media coverage and analysis of this story, it was consistently noted, reported or implied that some aspects of the home inspection business are areas of concern – specifically mentioned several times was the fact that it seemed some home inspectors had little training and/or very few qualifications.

I would explain why I find this somewhat surprising and disturbing through the use of an analogy: Even were I to attend an excellent, two-week training course in how to inspect used cars for potential problems for prospective buyers, at the end of such a course I would not be able to bring to this task the degree of experience and knowledge of someone who has worked on vehicles for a significant portion of their lives. While it

would be quite possible for me, after this hypothetical training course to identify some problems and perform an inspection that might yield some useful results, I could never compare to someone with true, directly-related, hands-on familiarity and experience. This seems quite obvious and logical, so I was surprised to learn of the small amount of training required to achieve certification as a home inspector in some jurisdictions or situations, according to some reports.

In fact, an interview with Mike Holmes of 'Holmes on Homes' fame caught my attention as he outlined some of his concerns with the story, for example pointing out the apparent conflict of interest involved in both assessing problems as a home inspector and quoting prices as a contractor.

The consequences of the risks involved include safety issues as well as possible financial hardship or ruin, so it seems with such serious stakes some sort of solution would be found, and this need is only becoming more pressing as the reliance on home inspectors increases.

I remember it wasn't that long ago when a home inspection comprised most often of a knowledgeable buddy or relative having a poke around in a house you were thinking about buying ... these days it seems every bank, realtor, insurer, home buyer, etc. requires a home inspection certificate to do anything!

I actually don't mind this idea, as properly done, it can only help home buyers, builders and inspectors in the long run. But, since these inspections are only going to continue to increase in prevalence, it seems only sensible to figure out how to 'do it right', to borrow a phrase from the aforementioned Mr. Holmes.

Speaking personally, were I de-

pending on the work of a home inspector, I would always choose the man or woman who had the most experience building homes, all else being equal. It is not always easy to explain how years of experience can translate into a sixth sense about knowing what to look for, but it is something we all can understand. Additionally, it is wise to always be vigilant, in any trade or profession, for any chance to improve on standards, techniques or practices – this is the art of applying experience to improve performance. The recent court case from B.C. presents a window into a potential problem and an opportunity to prevent such problems in the future.

It is important to point out one thing that often seems to get forgotten in these reports, namely the fact that undoubtedly there are many serious, dedicated, professional and qualified people working as home inspectors and it is a disservice to their efforts to paint all home inspectors or home inspection organizations or training programs with one brush. These qualified people know who they are and I am sure they dislike being associated with stories like this as much as I dislike being associated, however erroneously, with stories of bad contractors or carpenters simply because we share a trade.

However, in order to weed out those bad apples in any trade, a discussion of failings and their solutions is required, and this recent court case makes as good a starting point as any.

If enough people, both inside and outside the industry who care about having quality standards for builders and home inspectors speak out and make this an issue, everyone in the end can benefit, without the need for costly litigation first. I would wholeheartedly support some sort of reasonable standards of qualification for home inspectors, just as I believe some sort of training should be required for builders and contractors in my own area of expertise.

For more information or to send your ideas, email Ron Sawlor at thoughtcriminal7@yahoo.ca.

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