

PUT YOURSELF IN THE FRAME

Building a new home is a big undertaking, and not for the faint-hearted! From the original concept through to final handover, there are a myriad steps and decisions to make. You'll need to keep a close check on the construction work through every stage, to make sure it is being built to your specifications. Discrepancies can sometimes occur between the original design documentation and what you actually see being built. And it can be daunting having to deal with builders or developers who speak in jargon!

Harnessing the experience of a property inspector, with a building background, can be invaluable. Not only will you have a knowledgeable eye on the project at critical stages, but you will also have someone who can explain the process to you in easy terms.

And if things do go wrong, your inspector can also act as an advocate to assist you with any disputes that might arise with your builder.

Building a house can be an exciting experience when you know what's going on, and you're confident of the outcome.

People can make the mistake of assuming that everything is in hand – when all said and done, the house is brand new, it will be inspected by a council inspector or private building surveyor, and it is fully covered by the builder's warranty.

However, while all of these scenarios are true, this does not necessarily mean that your house will be a faultless construction. Workmanship will vary, and this depends of course on the skill of your builder and their sub-contracting tradesmen. It will also depend on the quality of the materials used throughout the construction, and if any shortcuts have been taken to make those materials go that extra bit further.

Inspections by regulatory agencies are carried out professionally but the time spent at each property is generally far less than that of an independent property inspector. For the surveyor, the quality of workmanship and materials is generally not the focus – it is more about whether the house complies with the relevant building codes and regulations.

The Builder's Warranty is a legal requirement to protect the owner against poor workmanship, incomplete delivery of the project and failure to ensure everything is in working order. However, it can only be acted on if the builder dies, becomes insolvent or disappears. In all other respects, you are effectively on your own.

The fact still remains that you need to be able to recognise poor workmanship, inadequate services and incomplete delivery – and if you're not familiar with the building process yourself, you may not know what to look for.

The wisest course of action is to engage an independent property inspector, with sound building knowledge and experience, who can scrutinise the building on your behalf. It could save you many dollars in repair bills and possibly legal fees.

There are several key stages in the construction process where an independent inspection is particularly worthwhile. These stages may coincide with the progress payment schedule, so you can be assured that progress is occurring satisfactorily and, at the same time, avoid payment disputes during construction.

The most effective inspection stages are:

Base Stage

At this stage, the site has been scraped or cut and filled. It is then a smart move to have an inspection prior to the concrete being poured, so items can be checked before they are concealed by concrete. This inspection will be timed ahead of the Base Stage payment on your progress payment schedule, so any issues can be raised before money is handed over. Items to check would include:



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- the site conditions such as gradient, surface drainage, retaining walls, access etc.
- orientation of the building, and positioning of reinforcement and starter bars
- damp-proofing membrane
- services, including drainage, plumbing, stormwater, electrical, phone/data
- termite protection.

Frame Stage

This is the stage when the frame of the house has been completed and approved by the building surveyor. Aspects of the construction that a building inspector will check are:

- the quality of finish on the slab surface, to ensure it is acceptable as this will affect the installation of floor coverings later
- the frame, to see it has been erected correctly and that the trusses are in their proper position and supported by load-bearing walls
- the layout, to ensure it is as per plan
- the rooms, to confirm they are the correct sizes.

Lock-up/Pre-Plaster

This is the stage when the home's external wall cladding and roof covering is fixed, the flooring is laid and external doors and windows are fixed, even if only temporarily. We would inspect at this stage to ensure that:

- the roof tiles are installed correctly and that the fascia and guttering meet an acceptable standard
- the frame ties are fitted to brickwork and there is bracing to all timber walls as required
- walls are straightened and plumbed
- the brickwork is installed as per plan, with quality workmanship
- plumbing and electrical services are fitted in correct locations and are ready for final connections
- the insulation is fitted to external walls.

Fixing Stage

At this stage, all internal cladding, architraves, skirting, doors, built-in shelves, baths, basins, troughs, sinks, cabinets and cupboards of the home are fitted and fixed into position. The inspector would assess:

- all of the interior work, to check it is complete and ready for painting. Plaster surfaces are inspected for workmanship.

- the waterproofing, particularly in the bathroom areas, where so many problems can develop. The waterproofing should be complete so that the tiling of walls and/or floors can begin.

Final Handover

This inspection occurs prior to the builder's final 'To Do' list at handover. At this stage, it is essential to check that:

- the fixtures and fittings are installed correctly
- appropriate sealing has been made to all wet areas
- external treatments have been completed and the workmanship is acceptable
- the paint finishes are of a quality standard
- all hardware is fitted, including doors
- all plumbing and electrical services have been completed and are functioning correctly
- the building works are complete in accordance with the contract documents.

For your own peace of mind and as a protection against possible misunderstandings with your builder, take the initiative to check your new house at these crucial stages. Knowing your dream home is coming together as it should, will make the building process a truly enjoyable experience. And having an independent property inspector on your side to ease stress levels, could be the best insurance you have.

Call SPI Property Inspections today on 1300 721 032. We would be happy to work with you through the process.

