

Spring Spruce-Ups & Home Improvements

Older Home Problems

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The gracious "old ladies" of the housing market — genuine Victorian and colonial homes — are laden with charm but also have their frailties.

If you've got your heart set on buying an old house, at least do it with your eyes open about upgrading and upkeep costs, advises Kenneth Austin, chairman of the Housemaster home inspection chain.

Many of these old houses are really better built than modern homes, he allows, but most come with a particular set of preexisting conditions that a buyer needs to be aware of and prepared to deal with.

These can include outdated materials and methods that no longer meet building codes; foundation problems; insulation that's inadequate or made of materials no longer allowed; and windows and framing that need upgrading.

"To many people, older homes seem more substantial, because of the detail and traditional styling," Austin says. "For those people, a fanlight window or ornate cornice are worth the extra effort and maintenance required."

Not all contractors and

workman are familiar with the peculiarities of older homes, he says, "so it may require more effort to find outside help to do the work for you, even after you identify what the problem is."

He cites some of the more common problems often found in older homes:

— Slate or tile roofs, which though long-lasting require routine maintenance and repair. They are more costly to replace than wood or asphalt shingle roofs.

— Lack of solid roof sheathing, necessary for proper backing and nailing of asphalt shingles added after the original slate, tile or wood roof is removed or surfaced over.

— Deterioration of chimney masonry. Many older homes have brick chimneys without flue liners, which can deteriorate.

— Inadequate ground clearance. Wood framing can deteriorate due to moisture and termites.

— Lack of flue liners, proper smoke shelves and hearth framing for fireplaces.

— Plaster ceilings and walls. Ceilings may sag due to loosening plaster, or wood laths may sag between ceiling joists,

giving a rippled effect.

— Difficult-to-repair windows. Trim often must be removed to fix sash cords.

— Insulation, seldom installed originally, may be hazardous urea formaldehyde foam.

— Porosity of old stone and sometimes brick foundations as the mortar deteriorates, allowing water penetration.

— Wood "locust" posts to support the main beam instead of lally columns used today under the main girder. Moisture or termites can damage the bottom of the old posts and lead to settlement.

— More wood components susceptible to termite damage — siding, supports, framing, etc. Carpenter ants also are common threats.

— Absbestos-containing insulation around heating pipes, a health hazard if flaking or damaged.

— Low water pressure and volume in hot water systems.

— Brass or galvanized water piping which has corroded, leading to low water pressure and deterioration.

— Shower stalls with lead or copper pans beneath, prone to leakage because of aging or

house settlement.

— Inadequate wiring, often less than the minimum 100 amp., 120-240 volt electrical service recommended today.

— Knob-and-tube wiring, not as safe as newer three-wire systems.

Austin says a thorough pre-purchase inspection will provide a written report detailing the condition of major elements and cost estimates on certain repair items. That will give the buyer a realistic idea of how much it will cost to maintain and upgrade the older house.

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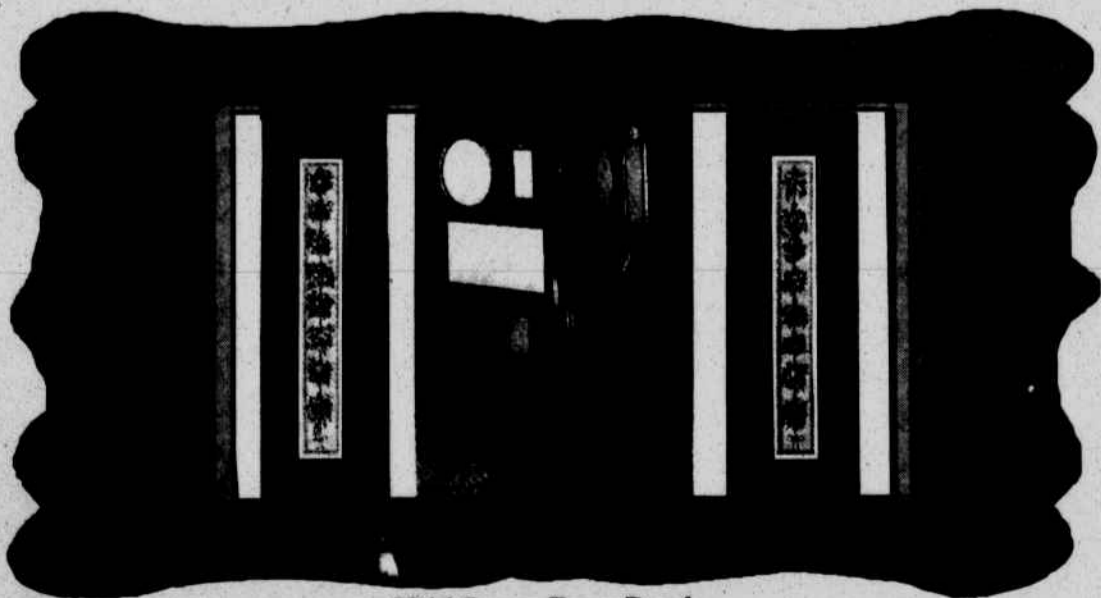
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