

I Heart My Attic

Has It Been A While Since You Spent Some Quality Time With Your Attic?

Frequently, upon encountering an attic hatch sealed with paint, an inspector will immediately sense he's about to enter virgin territory. When later asked about the attic, homeowners may respond with, "Never had any reason to go up there..." or, "Didn't think it was safe."

While the second response may be true for the inexperienced, we do recommend

homeowners become aware and comfortable with what goes on in their attics. Just like so many of the components of one's house, the attic plays a strategic role in the home's overall condition in terms of structural stability, energy efficiency, and fire safety.

The attic will always reveal a great deal about the house. It's usually one of the last places to

be repaired or renovated during the life of the home. But quite interestingly, the history of the house, while not obvious at other locations, can frequently be understood when viewing the attic.



Here are some things every homeowner should get to know about his or her attic:

Is my attic adequately insulated? Your home's geographic location will determine the proper amount of insulation. You might also need an energy audit. Check out <http://www.energystar.gov> to learn more about do-it-yourself as well as professional energy audits.

Is my attic properly ventilated? Moisture is common in attics and needs to be exhausted to the atmosphere. Otherwise, you are at risk for a whole host of problems ranging from delaminating roof sheathing, water streaks on interior walls, and rotting of wood framing. Moisture and attic temperature have a corollary relationship as well. Generally speaking, your attic temperature should be no more than 10-15F degrees higher than the outside air temperature. Your home's location, square footage of the attic, and the slope of the roof all dictate the amount of ventilation required.

Has the metal chimney flue or furnace vent been relocated? Inspect this area for proper clearance between the flue or vent and adjacent wood framing. Typically, a two-inch minimum is required. Anything less is a fire safety issue and exposes the wood to spontaneous combustion.

Are there any issues with structural members? Inspecting your rafters and trusses for cracked, broken, and sagging sections is part of every attic visit. Should you see something you think is out of place, take a picture and discuss it with a professional.

Is the roof decking plywood or OSB? What is its condition? Is it warped, water stained, or deteriorated? Does it appear to have been painted over or is it discolored? Many insurance companies will not replace roofs for interior fires, instead authorizing payment only for repainting smoke damaged framing and decking.

Do I know the location of electrical junction boxes, outlets, or switches in my attic? Are they installed properly, with covers? What is the type of wiring present? For older homes, do you know if you have multiple types of wiring. Some aged wiring, like Knob and Tube, is a fire safety issue and should be removed, not just replaced.

Are there kitchen or bath exhaust fans terminating in the attic? These are unwanted sources of moisture and need to be redirected all the way to the exterior.

Have I checked for a radon vent pipe? Builders these days are installing passive radon vent pipes during construction. One of these installed in your home may save you precious dollars if a radon mitigation system ever needs to be installed.

Lastly, have I noticed signs of pests or vermin? Squirrels, raccoons, birds, bats, skunks, and mice are all very common in attics across the United States. Never attempt to remove or eradicate a live animal without professional help. They can be very dangerous when cornered.