

# BUYING A HOUSE: FOUR INSIGHTS TO INSPIRE CONFIDENCE

Buying a resale home is a lot of work. You'll often have to wade through dozens of seemingly bad places offered at high prices and still get no closer to a purchase. The process is often tiring, discouraging and you'll typically be making a big decision with limited knowledge. One thing you can do is arm yourself with technical insights that let you discern between deal-breaking problems, and deficiencies you can fix. It's always wise to get the opinion of a registered home inspector before any actual purchase, but before that happens you'll need to separate the good, the bad and the ugly on your own. There are four basic technical issues to consider:

- roof
- basement
- energy efficiency
- windows

*“ If shingles look curly and rough, they are bad. If shingles are flat and clean looking, they're good. This isn't brain surgery. ”*

## HOW'S THE ROOF?

About 75% of roofs in Canada are covered in asphalt shingles, and assessing their condition at it's most basic level is easy. If shingles look curly and rough, they are bad. If shingles are flat and clean looking, they're good. This isn't brain surgery. A new roof for most homes costs between \$5K to \$10K, and every new home will need one from time to time. That's why a bad roof should never be a deal breaker on its own. The question really is do you want to pay for a new roof now?



*Although a bad roof looks ugly, it shouldn't necessarily mean the house is a poor buy. All roofs need to be replaced eventually.  
Photo credit: Steve Maxwell*

## IS THERE A WET BASEMENT?

This is tricky on two counts. First, basement water leaks can be hard to spot during dry weather. Second, fixing a wet basement can easily cost \$10K to \$20K or more, plus a lot of disruption to your yard and life. Also, some basement leaks can never be fixed reliably because of a high water table or other site issues. Do you see brown, dry water marks on wood or stored items in the basement? Are boxes and shelves strategically raised up off the floor? A little suspicion is a good thing when it comes to basements. Don't let hope and



*A well maintained resale home may not necessarily be structurally sound. Always seek the help of a registered home inspector after your initial technical assessment.  
Photo credit: Steve Maxwell*

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smiling assurances calm your suspicions. If a basement looks like it has leaked, it'll almost certainly leak again. And a house with a wet basement has a definite and serious drawback.

**// Don't let hope & smiling assurances calm your suspicions. If a basement looks like it has leaked, it'll almost certainly leak again. //**

### IS THIS HOUSE ENERGY EFFICIENT?



*Buying a resale home can be a lot of work. Understanding the technical basics can speed the process and deliver more peace of mind.*  
Photo credit: Steve Maxwell

This often boils down to the age of the place. Houses built 20 or 30 years ago will cost more to heat and cool than a house built today.

Houses built before Expo '67 are often absolutely primitive behind the scenes energy-wise. I love the charm of many older homes, but recognize that efficiency problems in heritage homes always extend right down to the design level. Even fully retrofitted, expect an old house to consume at least twice as much energy as a leading edge home. There's another issue, too. Brand new houses built to the standards in force in some Canadian provinces right now will use 30% more energy than homes built to standards that kick in next year. If you do decide to buy new, ask and verify



*Reshingling is a normal home maintenance item, so a bad roof shouldn't necessarily turn you off a particular resale home.*

Photo credit: Steve Maxwell



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that the home is built to E80 standards.

### HOW ARE THE HOUSE WINDOWS?

Windows are like roofs. They're a normal wear item in any home. Eventually all windows need to be replaced. Ratty old peeling windows look terrible, but replacement is not that big a deal. They may actually be a good thing if they scare away buyers, letting the price settle lower. New windows for an average home can cost \$10K and up, so figure that in to your offer. And when it comes time to replace windows, check out Window Wise ([www.windowwise.com](http://www.windowwise.com); 800-813-9616). It's a Canadian quality assurance program that offers certification of window installers and technical assessment of window products.

Houses aren't as complicated as they seem. Specific bits of hands-on insight translate into a surprising amount of confidence when it comes time to make an offer. A little technical knowledge goes a long way as a resale buyer.

Steve Maxwell, syndicated home improvement and woodworking columnist, has shared his DIY tips, how-to videos and product reviews since 1988. Follow "Canada's Handiest Man" at [SteveMaxwell.ca](http://SteveMaxwell.ca), Facebook or @Maxwells\_Tips on Twitter.

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