



Your Best & Safest Choice

Newer home or older home?

The main advantage to a newer home is that there is less damage, both from Mother and Father Nature and from previous occupants. You typically get to create your own damage or watch it happen naturally, and some of that damage retains sentimental value over the years. The main disadvantage to a newer home is that you do not know what kind of damage Mother and Father Nature are going to inflict upon it. What you see may not be what you get years down the road.

The main advantage to an older home is that Mother and Father Nature have already inflicted the majority of their damage upon your house. What you see is what you get.. Additional damage probably won't occur unless unusual rainfall or seismic activity occurs or unless you alter the landscaping or remodel the structure itself. Unfortunately, you typically don't get to create your own damage or watch it happen naturally, and there are no fond memories associated with the damage that is there.

Because of the amount of rainfall in our climate, we typically define a newer home as one that is less than ten years old because it typically will take about that many years to get enough rainfall to firmly settle the ground where your house was built. An older home, of course, is defined as one that is more than ten years old.

When a house is being built, the ground is graded and tentatively landscaped. Regular rainfall throughout the year would help our houses settle gradually. Unfortunately for us here in St. Louis, we tend to get most of our rain in December and January. This means that if you move into your house in February, you may not see any settlement activity (typically known as common wall and ceiling cracks) until the first major rainfall comes the following December, or even later during prolonged periods of drought (St. Louis often endures multi-year droughts). Then, all of a sudden, boom! Settlement damage after the first rains. You might even consider it major settlement damage, even though it is common settlement damage, simply because it happened to your house. Your beautiful new home is now a wreck and collapsing around you as you sleep. This is not necessarily so.

If the house is a newer home, less than ten years old, you might notice hairline cracks develop at both interior and exterior locations, particularly at door and window corners, and typically in a diagonal manner. Usually these are common stucco and drywall cracks. Sometimes these cracks will follow the drywall seams, forming perfectly straight lines and 90° corners. When they follow drywall seams, they can appear anywhere, depending on the quality of the materials and workmanship: how well the drywall sections were fitted together, whether or not seam tape was used, the quality of the seam tape, the type of nails or screws used to secure the drywall, the number of screws or nails used to secure the drywall, and the quality and thickness of the ceiling or wall texture. Since I didn't have the opportunity to watch the construction as it was occurring, I cannot comment on the quality of the materials and workmanship, which certainly prevents me from predicting the future. Ceiling and wall texturing, as well as painting, also prevent me from inspecting workmanship to determine why drywall seam cracks appear. Also read about [common cracks and major cracks](#).

If the house is more than ten years old, most settlement activity probably, but not necessarily, has already occurred simply because it probably has been through a few years of good rainfall and maybe even an El Niño season or two. This presumes many things in the older home, though, such as the house having been well-maintained by previous homeowners; fully functional gutters and downspouts in place; grading and drainage directing water away from the foundation; vegetation which has not been allowed to grow on the roof or siding, or too close to the foundation; and any leaks in the roof, plumbing, or drainage

systems, as well as any damage from those leaks, having been repaired immediately to prevent additional damage, which sometimes might be concealed in the walls or ceiling.

Those are a lot of presumptions, and typically not all of them are valid for any property. Any type of renovation or remodeling of any section of an older home is going to uncover problems or defects which are not noted in your property inspection report, typically because they could not be seen or detected, especially in a furnished home. Knowing this, you should budget appropriately for unexpected and unforeseen circumstances if you are going to do any remodeling.

Too many people buy an older home while wrongly believing that it should meet all the building and construction standards of a newer home. Nothing could be further from the truth, and simply buying a property from someone else does not mean that everything in that property has to be brought up to current [building codes](#). So if you want the best of what current building practices can offer you, you will need to either buy a home newly constructed under current building codes, or you will need to gut and renovate your older home using the current building codes. However, much of what I do as a home inspector is based on the various codes since they promote minimum building standards as they pertain to safety and ease of maintenance (remember, however, that I am not a [code inspector](#)). Consequently, many of the items in your property inspection report will recommend various upgrades, such as installing [GFCI safety outlets](#) in various areas. Many Realtors will summarily dismiss many of my recommendations using such statements as “They didn’t have those when the house was built.” While that may be true, there’s usually some very good reasons why they are required under current building practices, usually reasons related to significant property damage, personal injury, and sometimes even deaths. I really would hate to read about your house burning down, or injuries and deaths at your home because someone convinced you not to follow my recommendations simply because “They didn’t have those when the house was built.” So even if you decide not to ask the seller to repair, replace, or upgrade something, at least take the initiative to have it done as soon as possible after you close escrow.

If you have any questions about anything, simply [contact me](#).