

Inspecting Luxury Homes *There is a Difference!*

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Some may believe that if a licensed inspector knows how to inspect an average, typical home that the inspector is capable of inspecting any type, size or age of property. This can be a costly misconception. In the inspection world, there are differences in the way a property is inspected. Size, age, and complexity impact how a home is inspected. Luxury homes are typically 5,000 square feet or larger and many exceed 10,000 square

feet. To illustrate why it is so important to hire an experienced professional team, here is a summary of the differences between inspecting an average home versus a luxury home.

A Systematic Inspection Process is Essential:

Inspectors should be trained to follow an overall process when inspecting a home and a specific process for inspecting individual components & systems (water heater, A/C condenser, etc.). This formal and structured process ensures a thorough inspection is completed with reduced liability to the inspector and agents involved with the transaction. Although a formal, systematic inspection process is important for smaller homes, it is essential for larger homes where there are multiple A/Cs, electrical panels, large roof surface, etc. Large homes can pose a serious challenge to an inspector who is not experienced with large homes due to their overwhelming size and complexity. A systematic inspection process breaks down a large home into manageable pieces so that all the systems and components included in the scope of the inspection are located, inspected and their conditions determined.

Electrical Systems are more complex:

A typical home has a 200 amp electrical service with at most 1 to 3 electrical panels and 40 circuits. A luxury home can have between 400 and 2000 amp service, with more than 20 electrical panels and 200 electrical circuits. While the wiring requirements are similar between the small & large homes, the challenge is locating all the electrical panels & circuits, and then identifying the adverse conditions. Electricians typically will layout the electrical system and panels in similar ways. An experienced and knowledgeable inspector understands how large homes are wired and can quickly determine how many panels are installed, where they are located and their condition. The result is less wasted time, leaving more time to inspect.

Heating & Cooling Systems:

A typical home has 1 to 3 cooling & heating systems, while a large luxury home can have between 4 and 25 cooling & heat systems. These homes can have multi-zone volume control damper systems, which are typically used in commercial buildings, not residential homes. Due to the complex and mechanical system designs unique to large homes, experience is imperative in understanding these systems and how to inspect them. Locating all the mechanical components, determining what areas of the home they cool/heat and their condition can be a real challenge. In fact, on a recent inspection, because the home had 12 cooling & heating systems, the A/C service contractor had prepared a color coded floor plan showing all the various zones and mechanical equipment in the home. We were very thankful to have this information because it significantly reduced the time required to familiarize and locate the equipment. Otherwise, experience is the only method to

efficiently figure out the mechanical systems and identify any adverse conditions.

Pool/Spa Inspection:

A typical pool & spa combination has 1 to 3 pumps, 1 filter, and 1 heater. Luxury homes can have a main house pool & spa, guest pool & spa, multiple water features, and a lazy river to connect everything together! Consequently, there can be more than 20 pumps, 4 filters & 4 heaters to make everything work. In addition, these complicated pool & spa systems require a remote control that is not typically found on smaller homes. Again, experience and technical expertise are required to understand how to operate the pool & spa equipment, what to look for and identify the adverse conditions.

Termite Inspections:

All AJF home inspectors are also licensed for termite inspections. Combining the home inspection with the termite inspection ensures a thorough termite inspection on large luxury homes. The luxury home inspection can take all day to complete and is a visual inspection of the accessible portions of the exterior and interior walls and ceilings. The home inspection is a natural fit with the termite inspection since we are already looking at all the areas that a termite inspector would look. Essentially, we kill two birds with one stone.

Team Approach to Inspecting:

We have found that one inspector can inspect homes up to 7,000 square feet in one day which can be mentally and physically challenging. Wearing a pedometer, we have counted more than 20,000 steps on a large luxury home. Because we have a team of experienced inspectors, we can assign two or three inspectors to homes larger than 8,000 square feet to ensure that the inspection can be completed in one day. The team approach reduces the physical and mental stress on each inspector and reduces liability for both the inspector and agent. The team approach also imposes less inconvenience on the seller because the inspection can be completed in less time.

Confidentiality and Discretion:

Confidentiality, discretion and extra "TLC" with high-end buyers and sellers are also very important and cannot be overlooked. Working with many celebrities and top executives from around the world as well as handling confidential property sales has demonstrated how essential an understanding of the needs and requirements of affluent clients are. Their demands and knowledge level can intimidate and increase liability of an inexperienced inspector.

Luxury homes have customized, unique systems and components and many more of them than an average home. Having a highly qualified, experienced team of inspectors conduct a thorough and comprehensive inspection in a reasonable time frame for your prominent clients makes good business sense.

To learn more about the luxury market and high-end buyers and sellers we look to see you at the luxury homes seminar on October 18th from 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at the Arizona School of Real Estate & Business.

Sharon and Paul are owners of AJF Engineering, which has been servicing the Valley since 1996, specializing in the luxury home market. Sharon and Paul can be reached at 480-661-8888 or office@ajfengineering.com.