

ONE HUNDRED YEARS...

and counting—are century homes structurally sound?

They are the staple of heritage districts across our province: Stately brick homes with more character than your crazy uncle Joe. But are they a good investment? Or are they a money pit? To get a unique angle for the answer to that question, OUR HOMES assigned a Real Estate agent to interview a home inspector who has crawled through the deepest, darkest basements and crawlspaces of southern Georgian Bay's oldest homes.

ANGILINE DUBIEN, a sales representative with CENTURY 21 Offord Realty, asks some pointed questions to **ANDY CHRISTIE**, a registered home inspector with Safe Homes Canada, and a Century Homes specialist.



Angiline: For the sake of our readers, Andy, who is buying Century Homes these days?

Andy: All kinds of folks love Century Homes, as you know. For the most part, the buyers are people who have a connection to, or affinity with, art and history, and maybe genuineness, if that's the right word. Lately, I have worked for many young couples who are eager to roll up their sleeves and take on the work required at a Century Home that has not been updated. So having a bunch of knowledge about—or experience with—Century Homes is not a requirement when buying one. You just need vision and enthusiasm.

Angiline: Are they money pits?

Andy: Absolutely not. Most of the really old houses that were not well-constructed have fallen down by now. Those that remain are, for the most part, solid, stable—and in many cases—magnificent structures. Most Century Home inspections are a celebration of structure.

Angiline: What is it about Century Homes that makes the structures worth celebrating?

Andy: While most Century Homes' foundation walls are worth celebrating, the old, hard, hardy wood that was used to frame the homes, including at the floors, walls and roofs, is usually incredibly sound and resistant to moisture decay. That hardy wood is truly worth celebrating. I inspected a 150ish year-old house on Pine street a couple of years ago that had a really wet and nasty crawlspace under it. The crawlspace may well have been wet for the entire 150 years since construction. The floors were supported by logs which acted as both beams and joists. Although a thin layer of softened (moisture-decayed) wood was evident at the outsides of the logs, they were firm inside that outer layer. The floors were completely

stable. Similarly, the wood around the outsides of windows usually remains firm, sometimes in spite of decades of neglect.

Angiline: People say it's normal to have a wet basement in a Century Home. Is that true?

Andy: Basements are often wet at Century Homes for the same reasons they are wet at newer homes: First, water is not being captured and controlled effectively, and, second, we allow it to infiltrate through specific, easy-to-seal entry points, at the foundation level. Even at Century Homes, when we fix the leaky eaves troughs, extend down pipes well away from the house, seal joints around basement windows and seal other obvious gaps, openings, and normal settlement and stress cracks, the water infiltration problem often goes away. If you dump sump pit water against the outside face of the foundation wall, it's probably going to make its way back into the basement, no matter how old or new the house is.

Angiline: When do you 'fail' Century Homes usually? At the time of inspection?

Andy: Pretty much never. It's not our job to decide whether to buy or not buy. Our goal, as you know, is to assess everything and, most importantly perhaps, identify probable costs a buyer will be faced with. We try to share information relating to solutions as well, if they are not beyond our expertise. Only a few times, through thousands of inspections, we have inspected old houses where almost every stick of wood was rotten. That's rare.

Angiline: What destroys a Century Home?

Andy: While high relative humidity in a basement or, more likely, in a crawlspace can cause significant damage over many years, acute

continued on page 65

PAINTING BY KELLI-ANN PYE-BESHARA, PHOTO OF PAINTING BY BESH PHOTOS

Buying or Selling...Add to your Value with AIR MILES®



Blaine Bell Sales Representative
CENTURY 21®

for details call 445-5640

or 446-7272 direct

blainebell@rogers.com



Offord Realty Ltd.
72 HURONTARIO ST
COLLINGWOOD, ON

Your local Expert for City-side, Water-side, Country-side or Mountain-side Real Estate

DESIGNS By Andrea
Interior Designer
Andrea Ramacieri
192 Timmons St.
Collingwood, Ontario
L9Y 3Z2
(705) 444-0839

Construction & Maintenance

COUNTRY ROCK
LANDSCAPING
The friendly face of Landscaping

Chris Potts 705-444-7073

WE SPEND A LOT OF TIME & MONEY GETTING OUR MAGAZINE IN FRONT OF THE RIGHT MARKET & GIVING IT STAYING POWER.

Apparently, it's working. **ourhomes**
Not just advertising. *Marketing*. 705.445.3392

continued from page 60

water infiltration over the top of a foundation wall is more often the cause of critical failure of structural wood. Some old homes were built too low, where the top of the foundation wall is too close to the ground (exterior grade). If water is allowed to infiltrate through the bottom of the wall assembly, and flows against the outside of the floor structure for a lengthy time period, a few nasty things happen. The sill beams or sill plates will likely rot. The perimeter section of the floor assembly will suffer moisture decay. The bottom of the wall structure may suffer as well. Further, all that water infiltration will raise the relative humidity and put the entire floor assembly at risk.

Angiline: What are the issues at a Century Home that cause the most problems during the inspection?

Andy: The structural issues can usually be overcome. The stuff that makes buyers really nervous are things like asbestos insulation, knob-and-tube wiring, and other health-related issues. But there

are always solutions; we just try to work through them. It's really important that buyers talk to their insurance representative when buying; some aspects of these homes can elevate premiums.

Angiline: O.K. Andy, enough technical stuff! What else do you love about Century Homes?

Andy: When I started inspecting them more than a decade ago, I was not fond of old houses, especially since I have to crawl through a lot of dusty or mucky crawlspaces. But over the years I have come to love them. I really like the shapes of the rooms. They are square, more functional than the rectangular rooms you'll find at many newer homes. And I love those special touches like hidden stairs or secret cubby holes in wainscoting or out-of-the-way wine cellars. These homes have character, and if you make an informed buying decision you can wind up with a beautiful work of historic craftsmanship. **OH**