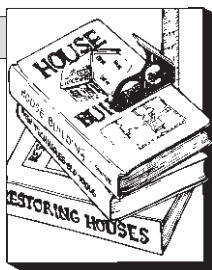


Inspection Books Vary

The Home Inspection Manual by Alfred H. Daniel, Storey Communications, Schoolhouse Road, Pownal, VT 05261; 1987, 150 pages; \$9.95, paperback. **Residential Building Systems Inspection**, APT International, P.O. Box 8178, Fredericksburg, VA 22404; 1986, 150 pages; \$10, paperback.



Here are two introductory books for home inspectors, both at the same price. *The Home Inspection Manual* by Alfred Daniel is written primarily for prospective homeowners who want to avoid the cost of hiring a home inspector prior to making an offer to purchase. *Residential Building Systems Inspection* is a reprint of HUD *Rehabilitation Guideline II*. It's a bargain. Mr. Daniel's book isn't.

Residential Building Systems Inspection is extremely well organized, pithy, and informative. It's broken into two parts. One part covers interior and exterior architectural inspection; another covers systems inspection. An architectural inspection includes the site (drainage, outbuildings, landscaping), building exterior (foundation, cladding, windows and doors, roofs—by pitch and material—gutters, and chimneys), and interiors from basement to attic. Major systems considered are structural (wood, masonry, steel, and concrete), electrical, plumbing, and HVAC.

Each chapter consists of concise paragraphs which explain exactly what symptoms to look for in each area. Diagnostic tests (some of them pretty high tech) are frequently included and set-off in italics. Small, grainy photos illustrate typical problems found in the field. A sample checklist, tool list, and reference bibliography end the book.

My only real complaint is the binding. The book won't open flat, and as a result it's sometimes hard to read.

The book won't make an inspector out of you, but you'll have a systematic approach and a basic working knowledge of possible building defects after reading it.

The Home Inspection Manual is not as well organized as *Residential Building Systems Inspection*, and it is subject to

omissions and vagueness. Also, in my opinion, it includes misleading or irrelevant information, along with useful tips. Many drawings illustrate the systems or components under discussion, but there are no photos of actual field conditions.

On the plus side, the book includes instructions on procedures such as how to test a float ball in a floor drain, or the author's advice to take a cheap respirator with you into the attic. Mr. Daniel as well includes a checklist. The minuses tend to outweigh these pluses, however.

For instance, in discussing floors, the author correctly notes that squeaky floors are common. He attributes these to either an absence of subflooring or bridging. The only cure for squeaks, says Daniel, is to replace the floor, no matter what the "old-timers" say. There certainly are other causes and cheaper repair procedures, and I was mystified by the author's approach on this issue. He also neglects to mention sagging or sloping floors as a problem, and doesn't include the simple test of rolling a marble across the floor among his diagnostic advice. He does, however, say that floors constructed of diagonal tongue and groove *poplar* subflooring with felt under the hardwood finish floor will give you "a really warm feeling of stability," as Mr. Daniel expresses it.

In the attic he recommends looking for evidence of leaks, but entirely ignores the question of condensation. For the electrical systems, he seriously suggests changing all duplex outlets to three-prong grounded type, and says you should count the lightbulbs in fixtures in case the owner takes them all upon moving.

Mr. Daniel also says that fireplace dampers allow fumes, sparks, and smoke

to escape (which I suppose they do when they're open). Later he recommends that you *replace* wood siding showing paint damage, unless "painting is your thing." (Wouldn't you have to paint new siding?) He also seems to believe that frostproof sillcocks don't freeze because they have a "reservoir tube" that insulates the water pipe, while his illustration correctly indicates that the extended stem simply shuts off the water within the building.

You don't really need this kind of advice along with the useful stuff that the book offers. Start with the HUD reprint instead.

Diversifying Into the Home Inspection Business

The Business of Home Inspection/Survey Book by Michael P. Lennon. HomePro Systems, 6715 Lowell Ave., Suite #2, McLean, VA 22101; 1987, 145 pages; \$37.50, 8 1/2 x 11, perfect bound.

So you've been a builder or remodeler for years and you're thinking of diversifying into inspection services—but just how do you get started? What do you need to enter the field? How will you get business? Or deal with complaints? These and many other questions are addressed by home inspector Michael Lennon in *The Business of Home Inspection/Survey Book*.

Mr. Lennon writes to share his experience in the field and to address various problems he finds in the industry. As a result the book has something of a "dual personality," but it is still a useful resource for aspiring home inspectors.

The author, whose company (HomePro) sells a packaged survey system to licensees, begins by noting the extremely low failure rate among home inspection companies, and a high potential for feeling good as you

advise clients on the merits of buying properties. Mr. Lennon then notes what he considers to be problems facing the industry, such as the difficulty newcomers have breaking into the "old guard" of home inspectors. He also notes the lack of technical consensus (on issues such as aluminum wiring), licensing, burnout, etc. One suspects the author has a grievance (or several) against the American Society of Home Inspectors, but it is never clearly spelled out, and few definitive answers are provided to the questions raised. Overall these remarks seem to be addressed at the existing industry rather than to novice inspectors. The balance of the book is for the latter group.

Mr. Lennon next turns his attention to the types of people who get into the business (the Technician, Manager, and Entrepreneur), and gives look-before-you-leap advice. He then describes how to get into the business, and he looks at how to judge the potential volume of business in your area and what seasons are busiest. He covers marketing your service to realtors, whose vested interest is in sales, and using the "value added" approach with clients. He cautions that no inspection will catch all problems (you are trying only to weed out major flaws), and that home inspectors are not selling insurance. He notes that "prep" of buildings before sale can camouflage many defects. He also shares his fee structure with readers and provides budget guidelines (most goes to administrative overhead, least to equipment).

Several report formats (including narrative, checklist, pre-packaged, and combined approaches) are available. Mr. Lennon comments fairly on the pros and cons of each and wisely cautions against providing repair "cost approximations" or life expectancy figures to clients. A good contract and image are also important, and Mr. Lennon delves into each. He also discusses what gear you'll need, how to hire other inspectors (including the critical difference between an employee and an "independent contractor"), how to write a policy manual (several detailed pages), and how to answer the phone. Pages and pages of typical client/agent questions are offered—which is one weakness of the book. While all of the issues presented are worthy of thought, Mr. Lennon provides few answers drawn from his own experience, which would have been a valuable addition. I also found myself feeling rather overwhelmed by the sheer number of questions that seemingly must be answered prior to taking the leap into business.

Final chapters briefly discuss taxes, estate planning, stress, legal liability issues, settlement alternatives (when the inevitable claims appear after purchase), warranties, and the many drawbacks of Errors & Omissions insurance.

As the title says, this is a book about the *business* of home inspection, not about doing inspections. The perfect bound format and large type are an asset. However a few flaws exist which could easily have been corrected by better editing, such as saying "expeditious" when apparently meaning "expeditions," or sentences like "People who walk out of courtrooms shaking their heads and cursing the 'justice' system are ignorance." Nonetheless, this volume leads me to conclude that other HomePro titles might be worth a look.—Paul Hanke

Free & Cheap

Distinctive Exteriors: For carpenters interested in adding inexpensive wood detailing to house exteriors, *Victorian Fretwork: Over 100 Ready-To-Use Patterns and Decorative Ideas* is available from Storey/Garden Way Publishing. This 128-page book provides easy-to-trace drawings of classic scrollwork patterns for columns, porch fencing, gables, screen doors, shutters, and picket fences. Most of the drawings can be sized to fit specifications. To order, send \$20.70 (for hardcover) or \$12.70 (softcover) to Garden Way Publishing, Storey Communications, Dept. CCG, Schoolhouse Road, Pownal, VT 05261; 800/827-8673.

Rehab Standards: Also available from the National Park Service is a 60-page booklet called *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation with Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. This booklet helps "certified building" owners meet federal tax credit requirements and is useful for anyone wanting to rehabilitate with sensitivity to historic materials and features. Accompanying guidelines recommend responsible methods and approaches, and list treatments that should be avoided. To order, send \$2 to Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402-9325.

Doable Renewables: A free, 36-page booklet from the American Association of Retired Persons, *The DoAble, Renewable Home: Making Your Home Fit Your Needs*, outlines home modifications that help older persons with physical limitations live independently in their own homes. The booklet is written on a basic level and describes barrier-free design concepts, products, and resources to adapt existing homes. Special attention is paid to stairs and ramps, bathrooms, and kitchens. Write to AARP, 1909 K Street NW, Washington, DC 20049; 202/872-4700.

Over the Foam: *Guidelines for Installing and Finishing Wood Siding Over Rigid Foam Sheathing* is available from the Western Wood Products Association. This free six-page guide includes recommendations for sheathing, siding selection, nails, and nail placement when installing wood siding over foam sheathing. Write: Western Wood Products Association, Yeon Building, 522 SW Fifth Avenue, Portland, OR 97204-2122; 503/224-3930.

Safety First: An 80-page pocket guide titled *The Right-to-Know Pocket Guide for Construction Workers*, from Genium Publishing Corp.,

is designed to teach construction workers the safe use of hazardous materials in the workplace. Included are 11 basic material handling rules and an explanation of material safety data sheets (MSDS) use. A chart of 50 commonly used construction materials summarizes key toxicological and hazard information. The guide is available in minimum quantities of ten for \$3.98 each from Genium Publishing Corp., Room 223, 1145 Catalyn Street, Schenectady, NY 12303-1836; 518/377-8854.

Cellulose vs. Fiberglass: R-Values and More: A Discussion of True Insulation Energy Efficiency and How to Achieve It is a free, 11-page booklet from Applegate Insulation Manufacturing. The booklet compares the effectiveness of cellulose versus fiberglass insulation in several areas: R-values, radiant and convective heat transfer, elimination of gaps and voids in sidewalls, sound-proofing, flame-spread ratings, and health safety. The booklet also explains the three methods of heat transfer and why each is important. To order, write Applegate Insulation Manufacturing, Inc., P.O. Box 292, Okemos, MI 48805; 800/343-4769.

—Lauren Chapman