

Brick Veneer vs. Full Brick: What's on Your House and Why It Matters

How to Tell, What Can Go Wrong, and What It Means for
Your Wallet

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Chapter 1: Brick Veneer vs. Full Brick — What You're Actually Looking At

Stand on the curb and look at your house. Brick on the front, brick on the sides, brick all the way around — feels solid as a rock, doesn't it? Here's the thing most Texas homeowners don't know: on the vast majority of homes built in the last fifty years, that brick is one layer thick. It's a skin. Behind it is a wood frame house wearing a brick suit.

I've been in Texas brick fifty years, and I still meet homeowners who are shocked — sometimes mid-repair — to learn their "brick house" is what the trade calls brick veneer. Not full brick. Not structural brick. Veneer: a single layer of brick, hung on the outside of a framed wall with metal ties, doing exactly zero structural work.

This book is about the difference between brick veneer vs. full brick — how to tell which one your house has, why veneer fails in ways full brick never does, and what that means when you need repairs, when you file an insurance claim, and when you sell the place. If you own a brick home in Texas, this is the most practical thing nobody ever told you

about your walls.

Let's get the definitions straight first.

Full brick — also called structural brick, solid brick, or double brick — is a wall made of brick, holding the house up. Two or more layers (wythes) of brick laid together, tied to each other, carrying the weight of the roof and floors above. The brick is the structure. This is how brick houses were built for centuries, and how they were still built in Texas into the mid-1900s. A full-brick wall is typically a foot thick or more at the base. It's heavy, it's massive, and it's honest: what you see is what the house is made of.

Brick veneer is a single layer of brick attached to the outside of a framed wall. The house behind it is wood studs (or sometimes steel), sheathed and wrapped, and the brick hangs on that frame with corrugated metal strips or wire ties. The brick carries nothing but its own weight — it sits on a brick ledge cast into the foundation, and the ties just keep it from tipping away from the house. Between the brick and the sheathing is an air space — typically an inch — that acts as a drainage cavity. Water gets behind brick veneer; the wall is designed for it. The air space lets water drain down to flashing and out through weep holes.

Two completely different animals wearing the same skin. And here's why it matters: everything about maintaining, repairing, insuring, and selling a brick veneer vs. full brick house is different — because the failure modes are different, the repair methods are different, and the stakes are different.

In Texas, if your home was built after about 1970, it's almost certainly veneer. The Dallas–Fort Worth metroplex is veneer country — builders switched over decades ago because veneer is faster, cheaper, and lighter. That doesn't make it bad. A properly built veneer wall performs beautifully for generations. But "properly built" is doing a lot of work in that sentence, and this book will show you where it goes wrong.

Chapter 2: Is My House Brick or Brick

Veneer? How to Tell

The most common question I get that isn't about a price: "Is my house real brick?" Homeowners ask it with a little anxiety, like they're about to find out the house is fake. Let me put that to rest first: veneer isn't fake. It's a legitimate, engineered wall system used on millions of quality homes. The question isn't whether your house is good — it's which system you're dealing with, so you maintain it correctly.

Here are the ways to tell, from the driveway to the inside of the wall.

Look at the brick pattern. This is the classic tell. In structural brickwork, every so often you'll see a brick turned sideways — its short end facing out. Those are header bricks, and they tie the front layer of brick to the layers behind it. Patterns like English bond and Flemish bond alternate headers and stretchers (long-face-out bricks) in regular rhythms. If your wall shows header bricks in a repeating pattern, you're looking at structural brickwork — those headers are doing real structural work, stitching the wythes

together.

If every brick on your wall shows its long face — row after row of stretchers, no headers anywhere — that's the signature of veneer. A single layer of brick has nothing behind it to tie to with headers, so there are none. One caveat: some veneer walls fake a header look with snap headers (half bricks) for appearance, so headers alone aren't proof — but no headers at all is a strong vote for veneer.

Look at the windows. Structural brick walls are heavy, and the weight above a window opening has to go somewhere. On old solid-brick buildings, you'll see brick arches over the windows — the arch carries the load around the opening. Veneer walls don't carry load, so they use steel lintels (angle irons) hidden above the windows instead, and you won't see arches. Arches over every window: probably full brick. Flat openings with no arch: probably veneer.

Check for weep holes. Walk around the base of your walls and look just above the foundation line, and above windows and doors, for small vertical gaps in the mortar — usually every couple of feet. Those are weep holes, and they exist to drain the cavity behind brick veneer. Solid structural brick walls don't have drainage cavities, so they don't need weeps.

Weep holes are veneer's fingerprint. (They're also one of the most neglected parts of the system — but that's a story for Book 16 in this series.)

Measure the wall thickness. At a door or window opening, measure from the outside face of the brick to the inside face of the interior wall. A veneer wall assembly — brick, air space, sheathing, studs, drywall — typically measures around 9 to 11 inches. A full structural brick wall is a foot or more of solid masonry before you even reach interior finishes. A foot or more of brick at the base: full brick. Less: veneer.

Pop an outlet cover. Turn off the breaker, pull the cover plate off an exterior-wall outlet, and look inside the box. If you see brick directly behind the drywall, that's structural brick. If you see open space, insulation, or wood framing, that's veneer over a framed wall. This is the most definitive test a homeowner can do without opening the wall.

Check the age. In Texas, the switchover happened gradually through the 1960s and 1970s. A 1940s bungalow in Fort Worth might be structural brick. A 1985 two-story in Plano is veneer, full stop. Age isn't proof, but it's a strong hint — and it tells the mason what to expect before he ever touches the wall.

Ask the county. Tax appraisal records and original building permits sometimes note the construction type. It's worth a look if you're buying — "masonry veneer" vs. "masonry" on the appraisal card tells you exactly what you're getting.

Why does knowing matter? Because everything downstream — the repairs, the costs, the risks — branches on this answer. A crack in a full-brick wall and a crack in a veneer wall are two different problems with two different fixes. Read on.

Chapter 3: How Brick Veneer Is Actually Built

To understand why veneer fails the way it does, you need to see it the way a mason sees it — as a system of parts, each one doing a job. When every part does its job, the wall is excellent. When one part is missing or installed wrong, the wall fails in predictable ways. I've spent fifty years fixing the predictable ways.

Here's the wall, outside to inside:

The brick. One wythe — one brick thick, about three and five-eighths inches. Standard modular brick, laid in running bond (all stretchers, staggered joints). It looks like the whole house, but structurally it's a curtain.

The air space. Between the back of the brick and the sheathing, there's a gap — the code calls for an inch, and in practice you want at least that. This gap is the heart of the system. Brick is porous; wind-driven rain pushes water through mortar joints and even through the brick itself. The air space catches that water, lets it run down the back of the brick, and delivers it to the flashing at the bottom, which kicks it out through the weep holes. The air space is also a

capillary break — it stops water from wicking straight from the wet brick into the dry house. And it lets the wall dry out between rains.

The wall ties. Corrugated metal strips or wire ties, nailed or screwed to the studs and embedded in the mortar joints of the brick, every so many inches vertically and horizontally. These are the only thing connecting the brick to the house. They don't carry the brick's weight — the brick sits on its own ledge at the foundation — they just keep the veneer from leaning or bowing away from the frame. Ties have to be corrosion-resistant (galvanized at minimum, stainless in the best work), properly embedded in mortar, and fastened to structure — not just to sheathing. When ties corrode or were never fastened right, the veneer can bulge, lean, or in extreme cases separate from the house.

The sheathing and weather barrier. Behind the air space: plywood or OSB sheathing, wrapped in building paper or house wrap (Tyvek and its cousins). This is the wall's raincoat. Water that makes it across the air space hits this layer and is supposed to drain down it to the flashing. Note the honest limitation the trade talks about openly: building paper and house wrap are water-resistant, not waterproof.

They shed water that's moving down and out; they can't stand up to water that's trapped against them for days.

The flashing. Through-wall flashing at the base of the wall (just above the foundation), above every window and door, and anywhere the veneer stops and something else starts — where a one-story garage roof meets a two-story wall, for example. Flashing is a waterproof membrane — metal, rubberized asphalt, or plastic — that spans from the outside face of the brick, across the air space, and up the sheathing behind. It catches the water running down the cavity and directs it out through the weep holes. Flashing is the single most important water-management component in the wall, and it's buried where you can't see it. When it's missing — and on a depressing number of Texas homes, it is — water running down the cavity has nowhere to go but into the house.

The weep holes. Small gaps in the mortar at the base of the wall and above openings, every 24 inches or so. They're the exit doors for the drainage system. Clogged, mortared shut, or never installed — the number of veneer walls I've seen with weeps sealed up by a well-meaning painter or a sloppy mason would make you weep yourself — and the cavity

becomes a bathtub.

The brick ledge. The foundation is poured with a ledge — a shelf — that the brick sits on. The brick's weight goes straight down into the foundation. This matters because it means the veneer moves independently of the frame: the wood frame and the brick expand, contract, and settle at different rates, and the ties flex to accommodate it. It also means veneer cracks from settlement look different from frame cracks — and misreading them is a classic expensive mistake.

That's the system. Brick, air, ties, wrap, flashing, weeps, ledge. Seven parts. When a veneer wall has water problems, the cause is always one of these seven — and usually it's the ones you can't see: the flashing that was never installed, the air space bridged with mortar droppings, the weeps that got sealed shut.

Chapter 4: How Full Brick Is Built — and Why It Still Stands

Now the other animal. Full brick — structural brick — is the old way, and in the places it was done right, it's still standing a century later with less maintenance than a twenty-year-old veneer wall. There's a lesson in that.

A structural brick wall is two, three, or four wythes of brick laid up together — typically 8 to 12 inches of solid masonry at the upper floors, thicker at the base. The wythes are bonded to each other: with header bricks bridging across (every sixth course or so in common bond), with metal ties in later work, or in the oldest walls, with nothing but mortar and gravity and the mason's skill. The wall carries the floors and the roof. The brick is the frame, the skin, and the structure all at once.

This mass is the wall's superpower and its weakness. The superpower: thermal mass. A foot of brick absorbs heat slowly during a Texas afternoon and releases it slowly at night — the house stays cooler in the day and warmer at night, smoothing out the temperature swings. Old brick commercial buildings in Texas stay noticeably cooler inside

on summer afternoons, and it's the mass doing it.

The weakness: solid masonry is a sponge with no raincoat. There's no cavity, no drainage plane, no weep holes. Water that gets into a solid brick wall moves through it by capillary action and has to dry back out the way it came. In a driving rain, a solid wall absorbs water deep into its mass. In normal weather, it dries. The system works — it worked for centuries — as long as the mortar is maintained and the wall can breathe.

And that's the maintenance story for full brick: it's almost entirely about the mortar. Repoint on schedule — every 25 to 30 years, cut out the failed joints and put in compatible mortar — and a structural brick wall will outlive everyone reading this book. The brick itself, if it's decent quality and the mortar is softer than the brick (the sacrificial rule from my tuckpointing book), lasts indefinitely.

What kills structural brick walls:

Hard mortar against soft brick. The old walls were laid in soft lime mortar. When some later mason repoints with hard Portland cement mortar, the mortar wins every argument with the wall — and the brick faces spall off trying to move

against mortar that won't give. I've seen century-old brick ruined in a decade by one bad repointing. On a historic full-brick wall, the mortar must be softer than the brick. Always.

Water trapped by modern coatings. Painting a solid brick wall with non-breathable paint, or sealing it with a waterproof coating, traps moisture inside the mass. The wall can't dry, the trapped water freezes, and the faces blow off. Solid brick must breathe. If your old brick building has been painted, the paint choice matters more than the color.

Structural movement. Foundation settlement, removed interior walls, added loads — a structural brick wall that's asked to do something it wasn't designed for will tell you with cracks. Stair-step cracks following mortar joints, cracks wider at the top than the bottom, doors and windows going out of square — these are structural symptoms, and they need a structural answer, not a tuckpointing one.

Neglected parapets and crowns. On old commercial buildings and some homes, the top of the wall — parapets, chimney crowns — takes the worst weather. Water entering the top of a solid wall saturates the mass from above. Maintaining caps, crowns, and coping is maintaining the whole wall.

The honest comparison: a well-maintained full-brick wall is the lowest-maintenance wall ever built — repoint every few decades and leave it alone. A poorly maintained one is the most expensive wall to fix, because there's no cavity to drain and no wrap to protect — the wall is the wall, and when it's saturated, the fix is drying it out and keeping water off it, which is slow work.

In Texas, you mostly meet full brick on pre-1960 homes, old commercial buildings, and the occasional custom build where somebody wanted the real thing and paid for it. If that's your house, you're the steward of a wall that was built to last centuries. Maintain the mortar, keep water off the top, let it breathe, and it will.

Chapter 5: Why Veneer Fails Differently — the Brick Veneer Problems I See Every Week

Here's where the two systems diverge, and where Texas homeowners get expensive surprises. Full brick fails slowly and visibly — mortar erodes, you repoint, life goes on. Veneer fails hidden — behind the brick, where you can't see it, in the parts of the system that were installed wrong on day one. By the time you see the symptom inside the house, the damage has been growing for years.

These are the brick veneer problems I see week in and week out across North Texas:

Mortar droppings bridging the air space. When the mason lays the brick, mortar squeezes out the back of the joint and falls into the cavity. On a careful job, the mason keeps the cavity clean — some use a board to catch droppings as they go. On a fast production job, the droppings pile up at the base of the wall and on top of the wall ties. A mortar bridge across the air space is a wick: water running down the back of the brick hits the bridge and gets conducted straight across to the sheathing. One bridge in the wrong place defeats the entire

drainage design. I open veneer walls and find the cavity bridged solid with droppings more often than I'd like to admit.

Missing or failed flashing. The flashing is buried, so nobody checks it, so on production homes it gets skipped, installed backward, installed with the wrong material, or punctured by the next trade. Aluminum flashing in contact with mortar corrodes. Felt paper flashing rots. Pieces that should overlap six inches butt-joint instead. Every missing or failed flashing is a place where cavity water goes into the house instead of out the weeps. The Brick Industry Association has published the correct details for decades — the information has always been there. The installation hasn't always followed.

Blocked or missing weep holes. Weeps get mortared shut by the mason (oops), sealed by the painter (oops), plugged by mud daubers and spiders (nature), or buried by landscaping and mulch (homeowner). A veneer wall with no working weeps is a wall with no drainage — the cavity fills, the water sits against the sheathing, and the sheathing rots. I tell every homeowner: walk your weeps once a year. Stick a wire in them. Make sure they're open. It's a five-minute job that prevents a five-figure repair.

Corroded or missing wall ties. The ties are thin metal in a wet environment. Cheap non-galvanized ties corrode; properly galvanized ones last decades; stainless lasts longest. But ties also get installed wrong — nailed to sheathing instead of studs, spaced too far apart, or simply skipped to save time on a production schedule. A veneer wall with failed ties bulges outward — you'll see a belly in the wall, or a section that's leaning away from the house. In the worst cases I've seen, entire veneer panels have peeled away. Ties are the wall's seatbelt. You don't think about them until you need them.

Water trapped by the wrong wrap. Older veneer walls used asphalt felt as the weather barrier — good stuff, forgiving, drains well. Some modern walls use house wraps installed wrong — upside-down, untaped seams, or the wrong product for the assembly. And a special Texas problem: well-sealed modern houses with air conditioning create a vapor drive that pushes interior moisture outward into the cavity, where it condenses on the back of the sun-heated brick. The cavity was designed to drain rainwater, not to handle a steady diet of condensation. When the wrap can't pass vapor and the cavity can't dry, you get mold and rot in a wall that never leaked a drop of rain.

Cracks that aren't what they look like. On a veneer wall, a stair-step crack in the brick doesn't necessarily mean the foundation is moving — it can mean the brick ledge settled differentially from the main foundation, or the veneer is moving independently of the frame (which it's designed to do, within limits). I've seen homeowners sold \$20,000 foundation jobs for veneer cracks that were a \$2,000 brick repair. And I've seen the reverse — real foundation movement dismissed as "just veneer." Reading veneer cracks correctly is a specialist skill. Get a mason's eyes on it before you buy a foundation job.

Efflorescence and spalling from trapped water. White salt deposits on the brick face mean water is moving through the wall and evaporating at the surface — normal in small amounts, a warning in large ones. Spalling — brick faces flaking off — on a veneer wall usually means the brick is staying wet: failed drainage, missing flashing, or sprinklers blasting the wall daily. The brick isn't defective; it's drowning.

Notice the pattern: nearly every veneer failure is a water-management failure, and nearly every water-management failure traces back to installation — the flashing, the cavity,

the weeps, the ties. The brick itself is almost never the problem. Veneer doesn't fail because brick is bad. It fails because the system behind the brick was compromised, usually on day one, by somebody in a hurry.

The Texas production-home factor. I want to be plain about this, because most of my customers live in production-built subdivisions. A production mason laying veneer on his twentieth house that month is paid by speed, and the parts of the system you can't see — the flashing laps, the cavity cleanliness, the tie spacing — are exactly the parts that suffer when the clock is running. I'm not saying every production home is bad; most of them are fine, and plenty of production masons take pride in the hidden work. But the odds of a compromised detail are higher on a fast schedule, which is why the annual wall walk matters more, not less, on a newer home. The defects are already in the wall if they're going to be — your job is to catch their symptoms early, while they're still cheap.

Lintels: the steel you forget. One more veneer component deserves its own mention: the steel lintel over every window, door, and garage opening. It's the angle iron carrying the brick above the opening, and it lives half-buried in the wall

where you can't see it. When the flashing above it fails or was never installed, water sits on that steel. Steel rusts, rust expands — to several times the steel's original thickness — and that expansion jacks the brickwork above it upward, cracking mortar joints in a telltale horizontal line above the opening. If you see a horizontal crack running above a window or garage door, don't just caulk it. That's often a rusting lintel talking, and it's a repair with its own book in this series. The lintel is part of the veneer system, and it fails like one: hidden, water-driven, and progressive.

Chapter 6: What It Means for Repairs

So you've figured out which wall you have, and something needs fixing. Here's how the repair paths differ — and why getting the diagnosis right before the work starts saves thousands.

Repointing veneer vs. repointing full brick. The tuckpointing process is the same on both — cut, clean, pack, tool, cure — but the stakes differ. On a full-brick wall, the mortar joints are structural: they're part of what holds the wall together, and the mortar must be compatible with old, often soft brick. On a veneer wall, the joints are weatherproofing: they keep water out of the cavity, and the brick is modern hard brick that takes standard Type N mortar happily. Veneer repointing is more forgiving of materials and more critical for water management. Full-brick repointing is more demanding of materials and more critical structurally. A mason who knows which wall he's working on adjusts accordingly. One who doesn't — who points a 1920s structural wall with hard modern mortar — can do real damage.

When veneer needs more than repointing. Sometimes the problem isn't the joints — it's behind them. Bulging veneer needs ties: the repair is removing brick in sections, installing new corrosion-resistant ties to the studs, and rebuilding. Failed flashing needs the brick removed at the flashing line, new flashing installed, and the brick relaid. A bridged cavity needs the base of the wall opened, the droppings cleaned out, and weeps restored. These are bigger jobs than repointing — you're dismantling and rebuilding sections of the wall — and they cost accordingly. The honest mason tells you when the joints are a symptom and the disease is behind the brick.

The cost picture. Per the national 2026 data, new brick veneer runs roughly \$9 to \$28 per square foot installed, averaging around \$15. Repair costs scale with access and scope the same way: a straightforward veneer repoint lands in the same range as any repointing job, while partial veneer rebuilds — remove, tie, relay — run higher because you're paying for careful demolition plus masonry. The number that matters isn't the per-foot rate, though — it's the diagnosis. A \$1,500 repointing job on a wall that needs \$8,000 of tie and flashing work is money thrown away. Pay for the diagnosis first. A mason who opens a small inspection area — removes a few bricks at the base to look at the cavity, the flashing, and

the ties — before writing the big bid is a mason who's going to get the fix right.

What you should never do to veneer. Don't seal the weep holes — ever, for any reason. Don't let a painter caulk them shut. Don't pile mulch against them. Don't install a sprinkler head that blasts the wall. Don't attach heavy things to the veneer itself — the brick isn't structural, and a heavy gate or awning hung on veneer alone will pull the ties or crack the wall; through-bolt to the framing behind. And don't let anyone "waterproof" the brick with a non-breathable sealer without understanding the wall — trapping moisture in the cavity side is worse than the rain you were worried about.

What you should never do to full brick. Don't repoint with mortar harder than the brick. Don't paint it with non-breathable paint. Don't parge-coat it (smear stucco over it) to "seal" it — you've just trapped every drop of water inside the mass. Don't let anyone pressure-wash it at close range — you'll erode the mortar joints and scar the brick faces. Old walls want gentle treatment: soft mortar, breathable coatings or none, water kept off the top, and patience.

The inspection rhythm. For veneer: walk the walls every spring. Look for cracked or missing mortar, bulges, leaning

sections, efflorescence, weeps that are blocked, flashing that's visible and corroded, and any place where the brick meets something else (roof lines, windows, doors) — those intersections are where water gets in. For full brick: same walk, plus sighting down the wall for bows and checking the top of parapets and chimneys. An hour a year with your eyes open catches problems when they're small. Every expensive masonry repair I do started as a cheap one somebody didn't see in time.

The estimate should name the wall. When you get a masonry bid, it should say which system it's for and what it found: wall type, mortar condition, weep and flashing status, tie condition if it was checked. A bid that just says "tuckpoint brick — \$X" without naming the wall type is a bid written by someone who didn't look, or didn't know what he was looking at. The diagnosis is part of what you're paying for. Insist on it.

Chapter 7: Insurance, Resale, and the Money Questions

The wall type follows you into paperwork — insurance applications, home inspections, appraisals, and the buyer's questions. Here's what to know.

Insurance. When your homeowner's policy asks about construction type, "masonry veneer" and "masonry" (meaning structural) are different answers, and the difference can move your premium. Structurally, insurers generally view full masonry favorably — it's fire-resistant and storm-resistant, and some carriers discount for it. Veneer gets most of the same credit for the exterior, since the brick face resists fire and impact the same way — but the frame behind it is still wood, and the policy prices the structure, not the skin. The honest answer on the application is the correct one: if it's veneer, say veneer. Misstating construction type on an application is the kind of thing that gives a carrier an excuse to argue at claim time, and you don't want that fight.

Where wall type really matters in insurance is water claims. A veneer wall with missing flashing that rots the sheathing

over ten years is, in the carrier's eyes, a maintenance and construction-defect issue — not a sudden covered event. Slow leaks lose to insurance almost every time, regardless of wall type. Document your maintenance — the annual wall walk, the weep checks, the repointing receipts. A paper trail of care is the difference between a paid claim and a denied one when something sudden does happen.

Resale and appraisals. Appraisers and buyers both ask the question, and "brick" on the listing means veneer 95% of the time in Texas — everyone in the market knows it. What moves value isn't the wall type; it's the wall's condition. A veneer home with tight joints, open weeps, no bulges, and documented maintenance appraises and sells better than a full-brick home with spalling faces and failed mortar. That said, genuine full brick on an older home is a selling point worth naming in the listing — "structural brick construction" stands out in a sea of veneer, and buyers who know the difference will pay for it.

The inspection. If you're buying, the home inspector's report will note the wall type and flag the visible issues — cracked mortar, bulges, efflorescence, blocked weeps. What the general inspector usually can't do is see behind the brick. On

any brick home more than 20 years old — veneer or full — I recommend a mason's eyes on the wall before you close, not after. A one-hour masonry inspection by a working mason costs little and has saved my customers from five-figure surprises more times than I can count. Ask specifically: are the weeps open, is there flashing visible at the base, any bulging, what's the mortar condition, and on older homes, has it been repointed with compatible mortar? Get the answers in writing.

Full brick house pros and cons — the honest ledger. Pros: unmatched durability when maintained; thermal mass that smooths Texas temperature swings; excellent fire resistance; the wall is the structure — no hidden frame to rot; historic character that holds value. Cons: expensive to build and expensive to repair; repairs are specialist work (soft mortar matching, structural knowledge); no cavity means water management is entirely about the mortar and the top of the wall; energy performance without added insulation is poor by modern standards — that mass works both ways, and an uninsulated solid wall leaks heat in winter. For most Texas buyers, veneer is the practical choice and full brick is the character choice. Neither is wrong. Know which one you're buying.

Chapter 8: Your Annual Wall Walk — the Checklist

Everything in this book converges on one habit: looking at your walls once a year with knowing eyes. Here's the checklist. Print it, stick it in the spring-cleaning folder, and walk it every year.

The ground-level circuit. Walk the full perimeter, close enough to touch the wall.

- Mortar joints: cracked, crumbling, or missing anywhere? Mark the spots.
- Brick faces: flaking, spalling, or discolored? Note where.
- Weep holes: find every one at the base of the wall and above windows and doors. Are they open? Probe with a wire. Clear mulch, soil, and paint.
- The base of the wall: is the brick clearance above grade intact? Soil and mulch should sit several inches below the first brick course, not piled against it.
- Bulges and leans: sight down each wall face. Any belly, bow, or section leaning out? Mark it and call a mason

— don't wait.

- Efflorescence: white powdery streaks. Light dusting is normal; heavy streaking means water is moving through — find the source above.
- Intersections: where brick meets roof, windows, doors, and other materials. Look for failed sealant, gaps, and staining — these are the water entry points.

The upper walls. From the ground with binoculars, or from a safe vantage:

- Chimney mortar and crown: cracked joints, deteriorated crown, leaning stack.
- Gable ends and high walls: same joint check as ground level.
- Anything growing: vines, moss, and plants on brick hold moisture against the wall. Clear them.

Inside the house. The wall tells on itself indoors:

- Water stains on interior walls below windows or at the base of exterior walls.
- Musty smells near exterior walls — the nose knows before the eyes do.
- Paint bubbling or drywall softening on exterior walls.

Know your wall type. If you haven't done the tests in Chapter 2, do them this year. Write it down: veneer or full brick, approximate age, last repointing date if known. Tape it inside a kitchen cabinet. The next owner will thank you, and so will every contractor who ever works on the place.

When to call a mason. Bulging or leaning brick — promptly. Stair-step cracks wider than a hairline — promptly. Water inside the house — promptly. Everything else — cracked joints, blocked weeps, efflorescence, aging mortar — on a schedule, before it becomes one of the prompt things. Masonry problems are like toothaches: they never get cheaper with waiting.

Chapter 9: The Bottom Line

Brick veneer vs. full brick isn't a contest with a winner. It's two different engineering answers to the same question — how do you wrap a house in brick — and each one demands its own kind of care.

Veneer is the modern answer: a beautiful, affordable brick skin over a framed house, with a hidden drainage system doing quiet work behind it. Its bargain with you is this: keep the drainage working — weeps open, flashing intact, cavity clear — and it will serve for generations. Break that bargain, and water goes where it shouldn't, silently, for years.

Full brick is the old answer: the wall is the house, mass and strength and honesty, asking only that you maintain its mortar, keep water off its top, and never trap it behind something that can't breathe. Its bargain is simpler and its forgiveness is longer — but its repairs, when they come, are specialist work.

Either way, the wall repays attention. An hour a year, the checklist in Chapter 8, a mason's eyes before you buy and before small problems grow — that's the whole maintenance

program. Brick is the most forgiving building material ever made, right up until the day it isn't. The difference between those two days is whether somebody was watching.

One more thing, and it's the reason I wrote this book the way I did. Most of the brick education out there is written for builders and architects — technical notes, code language, details that assume you already know the vocabulary. Homeowners get the sales brochure version: "brick is maintenance-free!" Brick is low-maintenance, not no-maintenance, and the maintenance it needs depends entirely on which brick system you own. A veneer owner who tends the drainage system and a full-brick owner who tends the mortar will both get a century out of their walls. An owner who doesn't know which one he has is guessing — and guessing is how small problems become the kind with commas in the price.

So find out. Do the outlet-cover test this weekend. Walk the weeps. Write the wall type on a card and tape it in the cabinet. It takes twenty minutes, and it's the single highest-value twenty minutes of homeownership you'll spend this year.

Now you know what you're looking at. Go look at it.

About the Author

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in Texas brick, masonry, and foundation work. He owns [Champion Brick Repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — (817) 900-6324 — [Metro Foundation Repair](<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) — (817) 670-4474 — and the [LintelLOCK](<https://lintlerepair.com>) lintel system — (469) 730-0650. All his books are free at [Travis Nech's Free Book Library](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>).

Questions about your brick walls? For [brick veneer repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) done by a mason who knows which wall he's working on, visit Champion Brick Repair. More free guides at [free brick repair books](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>). The [Brick Industry Association on veneer](<https://www.gobrick.com>) publishes the technical details behind the wall systems described in this book.