

Chimney Crown Repair

Cost: The Top of the Stack

Crowns, Caps, and Flashing — What Each Part Does, How
Each One Fails, and What It Costs to Fix in 2026

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Chapter 1: Why the Top of the Stack Ruins Everything Below It

Every chimney has three parts that almost nobody sees and that do almost all the protecting. Sitting at the very top: the crown, the flat-ish slab that covers the whole masonry top. Just above the flue opening: the cap, the metal lid that keeps rain and animals out of the flue. And down at the roofline: the flashing, the bent metal that seals the joint where the chimney passes through the roof.

These three parts have one job between them — keep water out of the chimney. When any one of them fails, water gets in, and water in a chimney doesn't stay at the top. It runs down through the brickwork, freezes in winter, expands, and wedges everything apart a little wider every cycle. A cracked crown on a Tuesday becomes a leaning chimney in five years. That's not an exaggeration. I've watched it happen on chimneys all over North Texas, year after year, to homeowners who never knew the top of their stack was the problem.

So this book is the component-level guide. I'm going to take

the top of your chimney apart piece by piece and show you what each part is supposed to do, how each one fails, what the repair options are, and what chimney crown repair cost looks like in 2026 — along with cap and flashing costs, since these three parts live and die together. If you've already got the broad chimney pricing picture, this is the deep dive on the three parts that matter most.

The honest numbers first, then the details. In 2026, chimney crown repair cost runs \$100 to \$3,000, with most homeowners paying around \$1,550 — because that range covers everything from sealing hairline cracks to a full crown rebuild. Chimney cap replacement runs \$200 to \$850 for the unit plus installation. Chimney flashing repair runs \$300 to \$1,800, from a reseal at the low end to a full replacement at the top. Where your job lands inside those ranges depends on which part is failing, how badly, and how the contractor proposes to fix it. The rest of this book makes sure you understand that proposal before you sign it.

Chapter 2: The Crown — The Slab That Shelters Everything Below

The crown is the concrete or mortar slab that spans the entire top of your chimney, covering everything except the flue opening. It sits on the last course of brick like a hat brim. Its whole job is to shed water — to catch the rain that hits the top of the chimney and throw it clear of the brickwork and the flue below.

A proper crown is thicker than most homeowners imagine: three to four inches of concrete, formed and poured on top of the chimney, not smeared on. It slopes down and away from the flue toward the edges so water runs off instead of pooling. It overhangs the brick face by an inch or more, so water dripping off the edge falls clear of the masonry instead of running back down it. Underneath that overhang is a drip edge — a small groove or notch cut into the underside — that breaks the water's path so it can't cling and crawl back to the brick. And where the crown meets the flue tile, there's an expansion joint — a flexible gap, usually sealed with a high-temperature sealant — because concrete and clay flue tile

expand and contract at different rates. Join them rigidly and the crown cracks at the flue within a few seasons.

That's the anatomy. Every feature exists for a reason, and every feature is there because somebody's chimney failed without it. The slope exists because flat crowns pond water. The overhang exists because flush crowns run water straight down the brick face. The drip edge exists because overhangs without a break still feed water to the brick. The expansion joint exists because Texas summers bake the chimney exterior to 150 degrees and winter nights freeze it, and materials that can't move independently will break each other.

Most Texas masonry chimneys have a crown, but many don't have a good one. What I find on top of most twenty-to-forty-year-old Dallas-area chimneys is not a properly formed crown — it's a thin wash of mortar, maybe an inch thick, smeared across the top by the original bricklayer and never thought about again. It was never a crown. It was a skim coat with ambitions. That distinction matters enough that it gets its own chapter.

Chapter 3: Crown vs. Wash — The Difference That Costs People Money

Here's the distinction that saves homeowners the most money in chimney work, and it's one most bids never mention. A **chimney crown** is a formed, structural slab — three to four inches thick, properly mixed concrete, sloped to drain, with an overhang and a drip edge. A **crown wash** is a thin coat of mortar — usually an inch or two — skimmed over the top of the chimney. Same location, very different part.

In much of the trade, the words get used interchangeably, and some regions call everything up there a "wash." But physically, they behave differently. A true crown is structural. It bridges the top of the chimney as a single piece, resists freeze-thaw cracking because of its mass and proper mix, and with the overhang and drip edge it actually throws water clear. A wash is a coating. It's thin, it cracks as the chimney moves, it has no overhang to speak of, and it needs resealing or redoing far more often. A wash can be installed quickly — sometimes right over the old crown — and it costs

less. But it fails sooner, and the next repair comes sooner too.

Why does this matter for your money? Because bids get compared as if they were the same job when they aren't. One contractor bids \$1,800 to pour a formed, reinforced crown with overhang and drip edge. Another bids \$650 to "redo the crown" — and what he's really doing is troweling a fresh wash over the old surface. Both bids say "crown work." Only one of them is a crown. The wash will crack again within a few years — especially in a Texas freeze-thaw winter — and you'll be paying for the crown you should have bought the first time, plus whatever water damage the failed wash let through in between.

When you read a crown bid, the question to ask is: "Is this a formed crown or a wash?" The answer should include thickness, slope, overhang, and drip edge. If the bid says "crown repair" and the description is one line, you're probably buying a wash. A real crown rebuild is described in parts, because it has parts.

There's a third category worth knowing about: **crown coatings** — brush-on or trowel-on waterproof crown products made for chimney use. These are legitimate maintenance products for a structurally sound crown with

surface cracking. They are not a rebuild. They sit in the middle of the repair ladder: more than a sealer, less than a rebuild. We'll walk the whole ladder in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: How Crowns Fail — The Four Ways Down

Crowns fail in predictable patterns, and once you know the patterns you can read your own chimney from the ground with binoculars — or better, from a roofer's photo after a storm.

Pattern one: shrinkage and settlement cracks. Even a good concrete crown develops hairline cracks over time. The chimney moves — the flue heats and cools, the house settles, the soil shifts — and the crown, being rigid, cracks at the stress points. Hairlines in the surface are normal aging. The question is always whether they're surface-deep or through the slab. Hairlines on a solid crown: seal them and move on. Cracks you can fit a coin into, or cracks that run from the flue to the edge: that's structural, and sealant is no longer the answer.

Pattern two: freeze-thaw. This is the crown-killer in North Texas. Our winters don't stay cold — they cycle. Water gets into a hairline crack in November, freezes overnight in January, and expands with enormous force. It thaws by

afternoon, seeps deeper, and freezes again the next night. Every cycle wedges the crack wider. A hairline in the fall is a working crack by spring. Dallas gets enough freeze cycles in a bad winter to take a neglected crown apart in a few seasons. The crown is the first victim because it's the most exposed concrete on the house — horizontal, catching rain directly, with nothing sheltering it.

Pattern three: built wrong. The most common version: no overhang, no drip edge, flat as a plate. Water runs off the flat top and straight down the brick face, saturating the top courses. Or the crown was poured tight against the flue tile with no expansion joint — so the first few heat cycles cracked it in a ring around the flue, and water has been running down that ring crack into the chimney ever since. Or it's a wash masquerading as a crown — an inch of mortar that's now a mosaic of cracks. A crown that was never built right doesn't need repair. It needs replacing with one that is.

Pattern four: the crown-to-flue joint. Even on an otherwise sound crown, the joint where the crown meets the flue tile is a chronic weak point. Two different materials, different expansion rates, joined at the hottest part of the chimney. The sealant in that joint ages, hardens, and pulls away. Once

it opens, every rainstorm sends water straight down the outside of the flue liner and into the chimney interior. This one joint causes a remarkable share of "mystery" chimney leaks — the kind where the roof is fine, the flashing is fine, and the ceiling stain keeps coming back.

Here's the cascade, and this is the heart of the book's premise: a cracked crown doesn't just leak. It feeds water into the brickwork below. That water freezes, spalls brick faces, and deteriorates mortar joints — which is how a \$150 sealing job ignored for five years becomes a \$1,500 crown rebuild, and how a \$1,500 crown rebuild ignored for ten years becomes a \$5,000 partial rebuild of the chimney above the roofline. Every expensive chimney job I write starts at the top. The crown is the cheapest protection on the chimney and the most neglected, because nobody sees it from the ground.

Chapter 5: Chimney Crown Repair Cost — The 2026 Repair Ladder

Now the numbers, with the framing you need to place your job on the ladder. Chimney crown repair cost in 2026 spans \$100 to \$3,000, averaging around \$1,550 nationally — and that range makes sense once you see it as four different jobs, not one.

Rung one: sealing hairline cracks — \$150 to \$550. The crown is structurally sound. It's thick, sloped, intact — but the surface has hairline cracks, or the crown-to-flue joint sealant has aged out. The fix is a brush-grade crown sealant — a flexible, waterproof product made for chimney crowns — applied over the surface, plus fresh sealant at the flue joint. This is maintenance, not repair, and it's the best money in chimney care. Done every few years, it keeps a good crown good indefinitely. If a contractor tries to sell you a rebuild for hairline cracks on a sound crown, get a second opinion.

Rung two: crown coating — \$350 to \$800 or so. The crown is sound underneath but the surface is rough, checked, or has widespread minor cracking that sealant alone won't bridge. A

trowel-grade crown coating — a thicker, cementitious waterproof product — goes on as a new wearing surface over the old crown. Think of it as resurfacing rather than rebuilding. It buys years, not decades. Honest contractors present this as what it is: a mid-life extension for a crown that isn't ready for replacement. It is not a fix for a structurally failed crown — coating over a crown that's breaking apart is paint on a rotten board.

Rung three: crown repair and resurfacing — \$350 to \$2,300. The crown is deteriorated but still structurally sound enough to save: spalled spots, deeper cracks, missing chunks at the edges. The mason patches the damage, resurfaces, and seals. This is real repair work — cutting out the bad, building it back, and protecting it. Whether repair beats rebuild at this rung is a judgment call, and it's the judgment call most worth a second opinion. The rule: if the crown still has its structural integrity — it's one piece, sitting flat, bonded to the chimney — repair is honest. If it's lifting, rocking, or broken through, you're at rung four.

Rung four: full crown rebuild — \$1,000 to \$3,000. The old crown comes off and a new one is formed and poured. Some chimney companies price this by formula — the crown's

length times its width plus a base fee, higher for hard roof access — because a crown on a small single-flue chimney and one on a wide multi-flue stack are very different jobs. Whatever the pricing method, the bid should say it's a rebuild and describe what the new crown includes.

What moves a job up the ladder isn't just the crown's condition — it's access. A crown on a single-story chimney with a walkable roof is one price. The same crown two stories up on a steep pitch costs more because the mason is working in the hardest spot on the house, with scaffolding or a lift in the bid. That's legitimate. What's not legitimate is a rebuild bid for a crown that only needed sealing. The ladder exists so you can place the bid on it and ask: does my crown's condition match this rung?

Chapter 6: What a Proper Crown Rebuild Actually Looks Like

If your crown is at rung four, here's what the rebuild should include — the anatomy from Chapter 2, now as a bid-reading checklist. Every item below is something a proper crown has and a cheap one skips.

Demolition and prep. The old crown comes off completely — or, on some jobs, gets demolished down to sound material. The top course of brick gets cleaned and inspected. If the top bricks are spalled or loose, they get replaced now, because pouring a new crown on failing brick is building on a bad foundation.

Forming. The new crown is formed, not smeared. Forms create the thickness (three to four inches minimum), the slope (pitched away from the flue so water runs off, not pools), and the overhang (an inch or more past the brick face all the way around). This is the step that separates a crown from a wash. No forms, no crown.

Reinforcement. A proper poured crown has reinforcement — wire mesh or rebar in the slab — so that when the

chimney moves, the crown holds together instead of cracking through. This is standard in a real rebuild and absent in a wash. Ask whether the bid includes it.

The drip edge. Underneath the overhang, a groove or notch is formed into the concrete — the kerf. Water running off the crown's top surface reaches the edge, hits the groove, and drips free instead of curling back under and running down the brick face. It's a small detail with an outsized job. A crown with an overhang but no drip edge still feeds water to the brickwork. Look for the words "drip edge" in the bid.

The expansion joint. Where the new crown meets the flue tile, the mason leaves a gap and fills it with flexible, high-temperature sealant — not mortar, not concrete. The flue and the crown move independently. Rigid material in that joint cracks; flexible sealant flexes. This is the joint from Chapter 4's pattern four, done right from the start.

The mix. Crown concrete should be a proper exterior mix — and on freeze-thaw exposure, air-entrained concrete resists the cycle far better than a dense mortar smear. You don't need to spec the mix yourself, but a mason who talks about the mix is a mason who's thinking about the crown lasting.

Curing. Fresh concrete needs to cure, not just dry. In Texas heat, that means keeping it moist and shaded so it cures through instead of flash-drying at the surface. A crown poured at noon in August and left to bake is a cracked crown by October. The good masons schedule the pour for the morning and protect it. Ask how he cures it — the answer tells you whether he thinks about the week after the job, not just the day of.

Three build types you'll hear about. A **cast-in-place** crown is formed and poured right on top of the chimney — the standard for most rebuilds, and the right choice for larger or irregular chimneys. A **precast** crown is cast off-site and set on top — clean and consistent, but practical mainly for smaller chimneys (roughly 16 by 16 inches and under), since the weight makes precast impractical on big stacks. A **floating** crown is a cast crown built with a deliberate gap — the slab sits an inch and a half to two inches above the chimney top on supports, with the overhang doing the shedding. It costs a bit more and takes longer to install, but the separation means the crown and chimney move independently, and floating crowns typically last significantly longer. If a contractor proposes one of these, now you know what he's describing and why.

Cure time matters for your schedule, too: a fresh crown shouldn't take a beating from a pressure washer or a hard freeze in its first days. Plan the job for decent weather — spring and fall are the sweet spots in Texas — and don't let anyone talk you into a December pour without a cold-weather plan.

Chapter 7: Caps — The Lid on the Flue

Above the crown, at the very top of the flue, sits the cap — the metal lid that covers the flue opening. Where the crown protects the masonry, the cap protects the flue itself: it keeps rain from pouring straight down the flue, keeps animals and debris out, and usually carries a mesh screen that acts as a spark arrestor. An uncapped flue is an open pipe into your house for every rainstorm — and in Texas, an open invitation to chimney swifts, squirrels, and raccoons.

The 2026 numbers: replacing a chimney cap runs **\$200 to \$850** for the unit plus installation, with repair of an existing cap at **\$100 to \$800** depending on size and material. Flue-cap installations — the smaller caps that cover just the flue — run **\$75 to \$500** including materials and labor. The spread is mostly material and size: a basic galvanized cap on a single flue is the low end; a large stainless cap on a multi-flue chimney is the high end. As with the crown, access moves the number — the cap is at the very top of the very tall thing, and somebody has to get up there safely.

The two families. A **flue cap** (sometimes called a single-flue

cap) covers just the flue opening — it clamps, slips, or bolts onto the flue tile itself. It's the right choice for a single-flue chimney: simple, effective, and the least expensive. A **chimney cap** in the full-coverage sense (sometimes called a multi-flue or top-mount cap) covers the entire chimney top — crown and all flues — mounting to the crown or the chimney top with a skirt that sheds water over the whole assembly. On a multi-flue chimney, full coverage is the better answer: it protects the crown surface too, and one well-made unit does the job of several flue caps. The trade-off is cost — bigger unit, more material, more money — and the fact that it has to be sized to your chimney's actual top dimensions, not pulled off a shelf.

Measuring matters. Flue caps are sized to the flue tile — the inside or outside dimensions of the tile sticking up through the crown. Full-coverage caps are sized to the chimney top. A cap that's close but not right either won't seat (and will leak or blow off) or will sit crooked and look it. This is one of those parts where "universal" mostly means "fits nothing well." A good installer measures before ordering. If a bid lists a cap with no dimensions, ask what it's sized to.

Screens and spark arrestors. Most caps include mesh

screening around the sides — typically 3/4-inch or 5/8-inch mesh. The screen does two jobs: it keeps animals and large debris out of the flue, and it catches sparks and embers rising with the exhaust. Smaller mesh keeps out smaller animals but restricts draft slightly; the standard sizes are the standard for a reason. If your cap's screen is rusted through or missing, the cap is failing at half its job even if the lid looks fine.

Cap dampers. Worth knowing about: a top-sealing damper is a cap with a damper built in — a cable runs down the flue to a handle at the fireplace, and you open and close the flue from the top instead of with the old throat damper down in the firebox. They seal tighter than throat dampers (less conditioned air escaping up the chimney year-round) and they double as the cap. They cost more than a plain cap — the mechanism and cable add to the unit — but for a fireplace you actually use, the energy savings are real. If your throat damper is rusted open or missing, a top-sealing damper solves two problems at once.

Chapter 8: Cap Materials — Buy It Once

Caps are one of those parts where the material decision is really a how-many-times-do-you-want-to-buy-this decision. The 2026 retail picture tells the story: a basic galvanized single-flue cap runs roughly \$55 to \$85 off the shelf; the stainless equivalent runs roughly \$80 to \$150; multi-flue stainless units run \$190 to \$630 depending on size, with taller units and hinged mounting flanges (for uneven crowns) at the top of that range. Copper sits above all of them — the premium option, priced like it.

Galvanized steel is the builder-grade default — it's what most Texas chimneys got when they were built, and it's what the cheapest replacement bids install. It works, for a while. In Texas weather — sun, rain, freeze-thaw, and the corrosive exhaust condensates from the flue — galvanized caps rust. Not eventually in the abstract; in years. The powder-coated black ones look sharp on day one and start showing rust at the edges and fasteners within a few seasons. A galvanized cap is a part with a replacement date built in.

Stainless steel is the buy-it-once answer for most

homeowners. It costs roughly double the galvanized unit and lasts decades instead of years. The math is simple: buying the cheap cap twice — plus two installation trips to the top of your chimney — costs more than buying the stainless cap once. When a bid says "new chimney cap" without naming the material, this is the question to ask, because the material is most of the difference between a \$200 cap job and a \$500 one.

Copper is the premium: beautiful, essentially permanent, and priced accordingly. On a high-end home or a historic chimney, it's the right call aesthetically and functionally — copper doesn't rust, it patinas. On a standard brick-veneer chimney, it's jewelry — lovely, but stainless does the same job for less.

Aluminum shows up occasionally — light, rust-proof, but softer and less durable in hail country. In North Texas, where hail is a when-not-if proposition, I'd take stainless over aluminum every time.

The material rule for the whole top of the stack: **match the part's lifespan to the chimney's**. A thirty-year chimney with a five-year cap is a mismatch you'll pay to correct. Stainless on the cap, a proper crown underneath it, and you've got a

top-of-stack assembly that ages together instead of failing in sequence.

One more material note: fasteners and mounting hardware matter as much as the cap body. A stainless cap hung with plain steel screws gives you rust streaks down the chimney within a year — the screws corrode and bleed. Stainless hardware with a stainless cap. It's a small line item and a common skip.

Chapter 9: Chase Covers — The Prefab

Chimney's Crown

A lot of Texas homes — especially anything built from the 1980s on — don't have a masonry chimney top at all. They have a framed chase: a wood box, sided to match the house, running up through the roof, with the metal flue pipe inside. On top of that box sits a **chase cover** (sometimes called a chase pan): a flat metal pan that covers the whole top of the chase, with a hole for the flue pipe and usually a flue cap on top of that.

The chase cover is that chimney's crown. Same job — shed water off the top — different part. And it fails the same way cheap crowns fail: the builder-grade galvanized chase cover rusts. Not slowly. In Texas weather, a thin galvanized chase cover can rust through in under a decade, and when it does, water pours directly into the framed chase — soaking the wood framing, the siding, and everything below. A rusted-through chase cover is a \$500 problem today and a \$5,000 framing-and-siding problem next year. I've seen chases that looked fine from the ground with the top six inches of

framing rotted to mulch.

What to look for. From the ground with binoculars: rust staining on the chase cover, water stains on the siding just below the top of the chase, or a cover that looks dished or sagging (water ponding in the middle means it's failing). If your "chimney" is a sided box, your crown chapter is really a chase-cover chapter — and the inspection is the same discipline: look at the top, because the top is where water gets in.

The fix. A stainless steel chase cover replacement is the permanent answer — same buy-it-once logic as the cap chapter. The replacement gets measured to the chase's actual top dimensions, formed with a slight pitch so water runs off instead of ponding, and fitted with a proper collar where the flue pipe passes through. Cost-wise, think multi-flue cap money and up — it's a fabricated part, not a shelf item, and somebody has to get up there. What you don't want is another thin galvanized pan. That's just scheduling the same repair for a few years out.

The flue cap still matters. On a prefab chase, the flue pipe pokes through the chase cover and gets its own cap — usually a round flue cap sized to the pipe. Same material logic

applies. And the same animal logic: an uncapped prefab flue is just as inviting to a raccoon as a masonry one.

If you're buying a home with a framed chase, put the chase cover on your inspection punch list. Home inspectors look at it, but they look from the ground or the roof edge — ask specifically about the cover's condition and material. A galvanized cover past its prime is a negotiating point, because you know what the stainless replacement costs and the seller should too.

Chapter 10: Flashing — Where the Chimney Meets the Roof

Down at the roofline, where the chimney passes through the roof, sits the flashing — the bent metal that seals the joint between two completely different structures. The chimney is rigid masonry. The roof moves, flexes, and sheds water in sheets. The joint between them is the number-one leak location on most chimneys, and it's the repair most often done wrong — because it sits exactly on the border between the roofer's trade and the mason's trade, and each one has historically assumed the other handled it.

The 2026 numbers: chimney flashing repair runs **\$300 to \$1,800**. Minor resealing — fresh sealant on flashing that's fundamentally sound — sits at the bottom of that range, sometimes as low as \$150 to \$400. Full flashing replacement runs **\$500 to \$1,500** for a standard residential chimney in galvanized steel, with larger chimneys, difficult access, or premium materials pushing **\$1,200 to \$2,500**. Counter-flashing replacement alone — the mason's half of the system — typically runs **\$300 to \$600** on a standard chimney. Labor

is 60 to 70 percent of a flashing job; the metal itself is modest even in copper.

The system, in parts. Proper chimney flashing is an assembly, and understanding the assembly is how you read a flashing bid:

- **Step flashing** runs up the sides of the chimney — individual L-shaped pieces of metal, each one woven into a shingle course so that each piece overlaps the one below, like shingles themselves. Water running down the roof hits each step and gets kicked outward, away from the chimney. This is the roofer's half of the system, and it's installed as the roof goes on (or re-installed when the chimney gets reflashed).
- **Counter-flashing** is the mason's half. It's metal set into the chimney itself — into a reglet, a groove cut into a mortar joint — and folded down over the top edge of the step flashing. Water running down the chimney face hits the counter-flashing and gets kicked out over the step flashing. The two parts overlap but aren't fastened to each other, so the chimney and the roof can move independently without tearing the seal.
- **Apron flashing** covers the downhill side of the

chimney — one wide piece at the base where the roof meets the chimney face on the low side, directing water around and past.

- **Back flashing (and the cricket)** covers the uphill side. On a wide chimney — generally over 30 inches wide on the uphill face — code and good practice call for a **cricket**: a small peaked structure built on the uphill side that splits the water flow around the chimney instead of letting it pond against the masonry. A cricket adds **\$800 to \$1,500** to a flashing job in galvanized steel, and it's not optional on a wide chimney — it's the difference between flashing that works and a permanent pond against your brickwork.

Step vs. continuous. You'll see two approaches priced: step flashing (**\$400 to \$600** in 2026 data) uses pre-formed L-pieces woven course by course — the standard, and what most roofers know. Continuous flashing (**\$800 to \$1,000**) is formed from long strips of metal bent to conform to the chimney and roof — more labor, more skill, and better long-term leak protection because there are fewer seams. Either can be done right. What can't be done right is the shortcut: a single piece of flat metal face-mounted to the chimney with a bead of caulk. That's not flashing. That's a leak with a timeline.

The sealant trap. The cheapest "flashing repair" bid is almost always a tube of roofing sealant smeared where the chimney meets the roof. On fundamentally sound flashing with a small gap, sealant is legitimate maintenance. As a repair for failed flashing, it's a bandage with a one-to-three-season lifespan — the sealant skins, cracks, and the leak returns, usually worse because now there's hardened goo in the way of the real fix. Proper flashing repair means metal in the joint: step flashing woven into the shingles, counter-flashing set into a reglet cut in the mortar. If a bid says "reseal flashing" and nothing else, ask what's underneath the sealant and how long the sealant lasts. The honest answer includes a number of years and a description of the metal.

Chapter 11: Flashing Materials and the Roofer-Mason Border

Flashing metal is a material choice with the same buy-it-once logic as caps. **Galvanized steel** is the standard — affordable, workable, and good for decades when properly installed. It's what most 2026 flashing bids assume. **Aluminum** is lighter and won't rust, but it's softer — hail dents it, and in hail country that matters. **Copper** is the premium: essentially permanent, beautiful as it patinas, and roughly double the galvanized cost on a full reflash — the jump from a \$500–\$1,000 galvanized job to \$1,000–\$2,500 in copper is almost all material and the extra care copper demands. On a forever home with a prominent chimney, copper flashing is the last flashing you'll buy. On a standard chimney, galvanized done right is the honest value.

Whatever the metal, two details separate good flashing from future leaks. First, the **reglet**: counter-flashing must be set into a groove cut into the chimney's mortar joint — not surface-mounted with caulk. Surface-mounted counter-flashing peels. It's the single most common flashing defect I

see, and it's always presented as a completed job until the first hard rain. Second, **dissimilar metals**: aluminum flashing against a copper cap, or steel fasteners in copper flashing, sets up galvanic corrosion — the metals eat each other. The assembly should be one metal family, fasteners included.

Who does the work. This is the border dispute. The roofer owns the step flashing — it's woven into his shingles. The mason owns the counter-flashing — it's set into his mortar joints. On a new roof, the roofer installs step flashing and the mason (or the roofer, if he knows reglets) sets counter-flashing. On a repair, whoever takes the job needs to understand both halves. My rule: hire the one who'll put both the step flashing and the counter-flashing in writing on the same bid. If the bid splits responsibility — "we do the step, somebody else does the counter" — the leak will live in the split. And if your roof was replaced after a hailstorm and the chimney flashing wasn't touched, assume the flashing is your leak until proven otherwise. More Dallas chimney leaks trace back to a post-hail roof replacement that skipped the flashing than to any other single cause.

The insurance question. Flashing damage from a sudden

event — wind, hail, falling debris — is generally covered by homeowners insurance; gradual deterioration and deferred maintenance are not. That distinction is why documentation matters: time-stamped photos of the flashing after a storm, before the repair. If the flashing failed because a hailstone dented it in April, that's a claim. If it failed because nobody looked at it for fifteen years, that's maintenance. Know which one yours is before you call the adjuster — and before a contractor tells you it's the other one.

Chapter 12: Reading a Top-of-the-Stack Bid

By now you can read the three parts. Here's how to read the bid that prices them — because top-of-the-stack work has its own bid pathologies, and they're different from the rest of the chimney.

The bundle test. The three parts live within feet of each other, and the setup cost — ladder, scaffolding, or lift, plus the mason's trip — is largely fixed whether he touches one part or all three. A bid that addresses the crown, the cap, and the flashing in one mobilization is almost always cheaper than three separate visits, and it's the sign of a contractor thinking about your chimney as a system. When the mason is up there for a crown rebuild, the incremental cost of replacing a rusted cap and resealing the flashing is small. The most expensive top-of-the-stack is the one the mason visits three times. If a bid prices only the crown and never mentions the cap or flashing, ask why — either they're fine (and he should say so) or he didn't look.

The parts list. Each part should be named with its scope: not "fix chimney top" but "remove and replace concrete crown,

formed, 3-inch minimum, sloped, 1-inch overhang with drip edge, expansion joint at flue" — not "new cap" but "new stainless steel multi-flue chimney cap, [dimensions], mounted to crown" — not "fix flashing" but "remove and replace step and counter-flashing, [metal], counter-flashing set in reglet." Vague line items are where scope-shrinking hides. If you can't tell what a line item buys, the bid isn't finished.

The material names. Crown: formed concrete or wash? Cap: galvanized, stainless, or copper — and what gauge? Flashing: galvanized, aluminum, or copper — and is the counter-flashing set in a reglet or surface-mounted? Every material question in this book is a bid question. A bid that names materials is a bid you can compare. A bid that doesn't is a bid you can't — which is sometimes the point.

The access line. Top-of-the-stack work is high work by definition. The bid should say how the mason gets up there safely — ladder, scaffolding, lift — and what it costs. A bid with no access plan for a two-story chimney is either about to grow mid-job or about to put a man somewhere unsafe. Neither is your problem to solve, but both are your problem to spot.

The warranty in writing. Crown rebuilds, cap installations,

and flashing replacements should each carry a written workmanship warranty — the reputable range is typically one to five years depending on the work. A crown rebuild with a one-year warranty and a crown rebuild with a five-year warranty are different products at what might look like similar prices. Verbal warranties evaporate with the first rainstorm. Get it on the contract.

The second-opinion rule. For any top-of-the-stack bid over \$2,000, get a second bid. Not because the first mason is dishonest — because the repair-vs.-rebuild judgment on a crown has real discretion in it, and two experienced masons can honestly disagree. The second opinion either confirms the first (now you sign with confidence) or gives you a genuinely different scope to choose between. Either way, you win.

Chapter 13: The Five-Minute Check — Twice a Year, From the Ground

You don't need to get on the roof. Twice a year — fall, before the freeze-thaw season, and spring, after the hail season — spend five minutes with binoculars looking at the top of your chimney. Here's the checklist:

The crown. Can you see cracks? On a concrete crown, you're looking for lines radiating from the flue or running edge to edge. Can you see the overhang — does the crown extend past the brick face, or is it flush? Is anything spalled or missing at the edges? White staining on the brick just below the crown line means water is getting past the crown and carrying salts out of the masonry.

The cap. Is it still there? Caps blow off in high wind more often than people think — and an uncapped flue can go unnoticed for months because nobody looks up. Is it sitting straight or tilted? Tilted means the mounting failed or the crown underneath shifted. Is the screen intact? Rust staining running down from the cap means the cap — or its fasteners — is corroding.

The flashing. Look at the roofline where the chimney meets the roof. Is the metal lying flat or lifting? Are there gaps where the counter-flashing meets the brick? Is there a thick bead of old sealant — and is it cracked? Staining on the brick above the flashing line, or on the roof deck visible in the attic near the chimney, points at the flashing.

The chase (if yours is framed). Rust on the chase cover. Staining on the siding below the top. Any sag or dish in the cover's surface.

Any "yes" on this checklist gets a professional look — not panic, just a look. The five-minute check doesn't replace the annual professional inspection (a camera down the flue, hands on the crown, eyes on the flashing up close — typically \$80 to \$200). It tells you when to call for one early. The homeowner who checks twice a year catches the \$150 sealing while it's still a \$150 sealing. The homeowner who doesn't meets the mason at the \$1,500 rebuild — or the \$5,000 partial rebuild that the failed crown caused downstream.

If you're in the Dallas–Fort Worth area and the check turns up something, that's what we do — [chimney crown and cap repair] (<https://championbrickrepair.com>) is core masonry work, and a top-of-the-stack evaluation is a straightforward visit. And if the chimney's

issues turn out to involve the steel as well as the masonry — lintels
near the chimney fail too — [chimney and lintel
repair](<https://lintlerepair.com>) is the engineered side of the same
trade.

Chapter 14: Questions Homeowners Ask Me

How long should a chimney crown last? A properly built concrete crown — formed, reinforced, sloped, with overhang and drip edge — should last decades, essentially the life of the chimney, with periodic sealing of hairlines and the flue joint. A wash lasts years, not decades — five to ten in Texas weather is a fair expectation, less if it's thin. When a contractor quotes you a "crown" price, the lifespan he's implicitly promising tells you which one he's selling. Ask him directly: "How long should this last?" The answer distinguishes the crown from the wash.

Can I seal the crown myself? For hairline cracks on a sound crown, a homeowner can apply brush-grade crown sealant — it's a paint-like product, and the application is straightforward. The catch is the diagnosis: you have to be sure the crown is sound underneath, and that means getting up there and knowing what sound looks like. If you're comfortable on a roof and the crown is genuinely just hairlined, DIY sealing is reasonable maintenance. If there are working cracks, spalling, or any doubt — or if the roof is steep — hire it. Falling off a roof costs more than any crown.

Does the cap really matter if I never use the fireplace?

More, not less. An unused flue with no cap is a rainwater pipe into your chimney — and nobody's running a fire to dry it out. Unused chimneys with missing caps are some of the worst water-damage cases I see, because the damage accumulates silently for years. Cap it whether you burn or not.

Will a new cap stop my chimney leak? Only if the cap is the leak. Chimney leaks come from the crown, the cap, the flashing, or the masonry — and water is a world-class liar about where it entered. A new cap on a chimney with a cracked crown changes nothing. Diagnose first, buy parts second. That's the whole thesis of this book in one sentence.

Should the crown be waterproofed? A sound crown benefits from periodic sealing — that's rung one of the ladder. What you don't want is a film-forming sealer that traps moisture: crown products should be vapor-permeable (breathable), letting trapped moisture escape while keeping liquid water out. Same rule as brick sealers everywhere: breathable or nothing.

My contractor wants to pour the crown in December. Is that okay? Concrete needs to cure above freezing. A

December pour in North Texas can work if the forecast cooperates and the mason protects the work — tenting, blankets, the usual cold-weather practice. What you don't want is a pour the day before a hard freeze with no protection plan. Ask what his cold-weather plan is. If he doesn't have one, wait for spring. The crown waited this long; it can wait three months.

What's the one thing I should do this year? The five-minute check from Chapter 13, this fall. It's free, it takes five minutes, and it's how every cheap fix in this book gets caught while it's still cheap. The most expensive crown repair is the one nobody looked at.

A Final Word From the Top

The top of your chimney is a small piece of your house doing a large job. Three parts — crown, cap, flashing — standing between every rainstorm and the masonry below. They don't ask for much: a look twice a year, a sealing every few years, and honest repair when the inspection says so.

What they punish is neglect. Not dramatically, not all at once — gradually, invisibly, from the top down. The cracked crown feeds the spalled brick. The missing cap feeds the

ruined flue. The lifted flashing feeds the stained ceiling two rooms away. Every expensive chimney job starts with a cheap part that nobody looked at.

So look at it. Five minutes, twice a year. And when something up there needs doing, do it with the right part — a formed crown, not a wash; stainless, not galvanized; metal in the joint, not caulk on the surface. The top of the stack is the cheapest place on the chimney to spend money and the most expensive place to save 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/>).