

Gutters, Grading, and Your Brickwork: The Water You Don't See

What Your Roofline Is Doing to Your Walls

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Chapter 1: Most Brick Water Damage Starts at the Roofline, Not the Wall

When a homeowner calls me about water-damaged brick — stained walls, crumbling mortar, spalling faces — the first place I look isn't the brick. It's up. At the gutters, the downspouts, the roofline, the grade. Nine times out of ten, the wall is the victim and the roofline is the criminal, and the homeowner has been watching the wrong suspect for years.

Here's why. A brick wall is designed to handle rain — the rain that falls on it, evenly, the way weather works. What a brick wall is not designed to handle is concentrated water: the waterfall pouring off a clogged gutter in one spot, the downspout dumping a roof's worth of runoff at the base of the wall, the splashback hammering the bottom two feet every storm. Your roof collects water from a huge surface area and the gutter system is supposed to carry it away. When that system fails, all that collected water goes somewhere — and "somewhere" is usually your brick.

Think about the math for a second. A 2,000-square-foot roof in a one-inch Texas rainstorm sheds over a thousand gallons

of water. The gutter system's whole job is to take those thousand-plus gallons and put them somewhere harmless. A clogged gutter, a missing downspout, a downspout that ends at the foundation — any one of these takes that thousand gallons and aims it at your masonry. No brick wall was built to drink a roof.

This book is about the water you don't see — the drainage failures above and around your brick that do more damage than the weather ever does on its own. I'll show you how gutters beat up brick, how bad grading soaks it from below, what the damage looks like so you can read your own walls, and the fixes — most of which cost less than the masonry repairs they prevent. A \$200 gutter cleaning that saves a \$3,000 repointing job is the best trade in home maintenance, and most homeowners never make it because nobody told them the trade existed.

Chapter 2: How Gutters Fail — and What the Failure Does to Brick

Gutters fail in a handful of ways, and every one of them has a signature on the brick below. Learn the failures and you can read the wall like a report card.

Clogged gutters — the waterfall. Leaves, shingle grit, the "gutter garden" of seedlings growing in compacted muck — a clogged gutter doesn't drain, it overflows. And it overflows at the lowest point of the clog, which means water pours over the gutter's edge in a concentrated sheet, straight down the brick wall below. That wall section gets more water in one storm than the rest of the house gets in a season. The signature: a vertical stain or deterioration stripe on the brick directly below the overflow point, mortar eroding in that stripe faster than anywhere else on the house. I've seen walls where one eight-foot section needed full repointing while the rest of the house was fine — and the gutter above that section had been clogged for two years.

Sagging or mis-sloped gutters — the chronic drip. Gutters need slope toward the downspout — not much, but some.

When hangers fail and a section sags, water ponds in the sag instead of flowing. It sits, it breeds mosquitoes, and it dribbles over the edge constantly — not the dramatic waterfall of a clog, but a slow, endless wetting of the wall below. The signature: a damp band on the brick under the sag, often with algae or mildew growth — green and black staining that tells you this wall never fully dries.

Undersized gutters — the Texas storm problem. Standard five-inch gutters handle ordinary rain. A Texas gully-washer — two inches in twenty minutes, the kind of storm that makes the news — overwhelms them. Water sheets over the top along the whole run. This isn't a maintenance failure; it's a capacity failure, and the fix is bigger gutters (six-inch) or more downspouts. The signature: uniform overflow staining along the whole elevation after big storms, worse under roof valleys where two roof planes concentrate their runoff into one gutter section.

Leaking joints and end caps — the precision strike. Sectional gutters leak at the joints — it's what they do as sealant ages. Each leaking joint drips in exactly one spot, storm after storm, year after year. The signature: a small, intense deterioration spot on the brick — sometimes just a

few square feet — directly below the leak. Homeowners stare at these spots for years wondering what's wrong with "that one patch of brick." Nothing's wrong with the brick. There's a drip above it.

Missing gutters — the whole wall takes it. Some houses — especially older Texas homes, additions, and porches — have roof sections with no gutters at all. Every storm, the roof edge sheds its water directly onto the wall and the ground below. The signature: the bottom three to four feet of the wall deteriorating faster than the top, heavy splashback staining, and grade erosion at the base. No gutter means the wall is the gutter.

Fascia rot behind the gutter — the hidden one. When gutters leak backward or overflow behind themselves, the fascia board rots — and the rot lets the gutter pull away, which makes the overflow worse, which rots more fascia. Meanwhile water is running down behind the gutter, into the soffit, and down the wall from the top. The signature: deterioration starting at the very top of the wall, under the eaves, where you'd least expect water damage. If the top of your brick wall is failing and the bottom looks fine, look at the fascia.

Chapter 3: Downspouts — The Concentrated Weapon

If gutters are the collection system, downspouts are the delivery system — and a badly delivered thousand gallons does more damage than a badly collected one. The downspout chapter matters because downspout mistakes are specific, common, and cheap to fix.

The downspout that ends at the foundation. This is the most common downspout sin in Texas. The downspout runs down the wall and ends — with a little elbow, maybe a splash block — right at the base of the house. Every storm dumps the roof's runoff in one spot at the foundation. The ground there saturates. Water splashes back up onto the bottom two feet of brick — the splashback zone — and wicks up into the wall from below. The standard from every drainage professional: downspouts should discharge at least five feet from the foundation, and farther is better. The fix is embarrassingly cheap: a \$15–\$30 downspout extension, the corrugated kind you can buy anywhere, carrying the water out past the splash zone. I've seen \$5,000 worth of brick

damage at the base of walls that a \$20 extension would have prevented.

The missing downspout. A gutter run with no downspout — or with the downspout removed during some long-ago project and never replaced — fills up and overflows at the end. All the water that run was supposed to carry pours off the open end in one place. The signature is the same as the clogged gutter's waterfall, but the fix is a downspout, not a cleaning.

The buried downspout that goes nowhere. Somebody buries the downspout to "get the water away" — and the buried line is crushed, root-clogged, or just ends underground two feet from the house. Now the water backs up, the gutter overflows at the downspout connection, and the buried line saturates the soil right against the foundation. Buried drainage is fine when it's designed right — solid pipe, proper slope, daylighted at a real discharge point — but a buried line nobody's inspected in ten years is a suspicion, not a solution. Test it: run a hose in the top and see where water comes out. If nothing comes out anywhere, you've found a problem.

The downspout aimed at the neighbor's problem — yours.

Downspouts that discharge onto a patio, a walkway, or a slope that runs back toward the house just relocate the water. Water discharged onto a hard surface splashes — onto the brick, onto the trim — and water discharged uphill of the house comes back. The discharge point needs grade falling away from it, not just distance from the wall.

Too few downspouts. A long gutter run with one downspout at the far end can't clear a Texas storm — the water has to travel too far, the gutter overflows in the middle. The rule of thumb is a downspout roughly every 30 to 40 feet of gutter, more under heavy roof valleys. Adding a downspout is a few hundred dollars. The wall damage from not having it is thousands.

Chapter 4: Splashback and Rising Damp —

The Two Ways Ground Water Kills Brick

The old-timers and the building scientists agree on this one: water damages brick from the ground in two distinct ways, and they look different, act different, and need different fixes.

Splashback. Rain hits the ground — or the patio, or the splash block — and bounces back up onto the wall. The bottom one to two feet of brick takes a beating in every storm: not just wetting, but wetting with force, carrying dirt and grit that sandblasts the mortar joints over time. The signature: the bottom courses deteriorating faster than the wall above — mortar eroding, brick faces weathering, a dirt-stained band that never quite cleans off. Splashback is worse where downspouts discharge at the base, where there's no gutter, where patios and walkways sit right against the wall (hard surfaces splash harder than soil), and where mulch is piled against the brick holding moisture against it. The fixes: get the downspout water away, keep a gap between mulch and brick, and make sure the wall's bottom courses aren't living in a splash zone.

Rising damp. Groundwater wicks up into the masonry from below — capillary action pulling moisture up through the brick and mortar, the way a paper towel pulls up spilled coffee. It leaves a telltale mark: a horizontal "tide line" on the wall, with deterioration concentrated below the line. Above the tide line the moisture evaporates; below it, the wall stays damp, and the dissolved salts left behind crystallize and break down the brick and mortar over time. Rising damp means the ground at the base of the wall is too wet — poor grading, downspouts discharging at the foundation, irrigation soaking the perimeter, or a high water table. The fix is never on the wall; it's in the ground. Dry the soil, and the wicking stops. Seal the wall while the soil's wet, and you've trapped the moisture inside — which is why the waterproofing book exists and why this book comes first.

The combination. On most Texas houses with drainage problems, you get both: splashback hammering from above, rising damp wicking from below, meeting in the bottom two feet of wall. That bottom section is the hardest-working masonry on the house after the chimney, and it's the section most homeowners never look at closely. Crouch down and look at the bottom two feet of your brick walls. That strip tells the truth about your drainage.

Chapter 5: Grading — The Six Inches That Protect Everything

Grading is the shape of the ground around your house, and it's the most boring, most important drainage subject there is. Here's the whole thing:

The rule. The ground should slope away from your foundation — the building code benchmark is six inches of fall in the first ten feet, about a half inch per foot. That's the minimum. More is fine; less is a problem; sloping toward the house — negative grading — is a slow disaster. The house should be the high point. Water should leave, not arrive.

How grading goes wrong. It goes wrong slowly, which is why nobody notices. Backfill soil around a new foundation settles over the first few years — the ground that was graded correctly on move-in day develops a low trough against the house by year five. Landscaping beds get built up with mulch year after year until the bed is higher than the surrounding grade and slopes back toward the wall. Flower beds with raised edging trap water against the house like a bathtub. Patios and walkways settle or get installed sloping toward the

house. Sprinkler systems soak the perimeter daily. Each one is small. Together they reverse the grade.

Reading your grade. You don't need a surveyor. After a good rain, walk the perimeter and look at where water stands. Standing water against the house is the diagnosis — no instruments needed. For the precise check: a ten-foot 2x4, a level, and a tape measure. Set one end at the foundation, level the board, measure the drop at the far end. Less than six inches in ten feet — or worse, the far end higher than the house end — and you've got grading work to do.

The Texas clay factor. Our black clay makes grading problems worse in both directions. When it's dry, it shrinks and cracks — opening gaps against the foundation that swallow the next rain whole. When it's wet, it swells and holds water against the wall instead of letting it drain through. Proper grade matters more in clay soil, not less, because the soil itself won't help you — it either cracks open or seals shut. Consistent moisture is the goal with clay, and grade that sheds storms while the soil stays evenly damp is the target.

The fix. Regrading is dirt work — literally. Adding soil against the house to rebuild the slope, compacting it, making

sure it falls away. For most houses it's a few yards of soil and a day's work — the cost guides put simple yard regrading at \$500 to \$5,000 depending on how much earth needs moving. Use clean fill dirt, not topsoil or mulch, against the foundation — topsoil holds water, mulch holds water and termites. Slope it, compact it, and keep mulch beds six inches below the brick line and sloping away.

Chapter 6: What It Does to the Brick — Reading the Damage

By now you know where the water comes from. Here's what it does when it gets there — the damage patterns, so you can walk your own house and read what's happening.

Mortar erosion. The first thing to go. Constant water — the waterfall stripe, the splashback zone, the drip line — washes the mortar joints out faster than weather alone ever would. The joints recess, then crumble, then fall out in chunks. Water-driven mortar failure is faster and more localized than age-driven failure: age wears the whole house evenly, water carves stripes and patches. If one section of wall needs repointing and the rest doesn't, water did it — find the source above or below that section.

Staining. Water carries dirt, and dirty water leaves marks. The brown and black streaks running down brick below gutters, the green algae bands under chronic drips, the white efflorescence blooming where water moves through the wall — every stain is a water path made visible. Stains don't lie about direction: they run downhill from the source. Follow

any stain upward and you'll find where the water's getting in.

Spalling. The end stage. Brick faces flake, peel, and pop off — freeze-thaw working on saturated brick, or salt crystallization from rising damp breaking the faces apart from inside. Spalling at the base of walls points to ground water — splashback, rising damp, downspouts at the foundation. Spalling in a stripe below a gutter points to the overflow. Spalling is the wall telling you the water problem is old — this damage takes seasons, and by the time faces are coming off, the water's been winning for years.

Efflorescence. The white mineral bloom — salts carried out of the masonry by moving water. A little on a new wall is normal. Heavy, recurring efflorescence at the base of walls means water is moving through the masonry steadily — the ground's too wet, the drainage is wrong, or both. It's the early warning that precedes spalling: the salts are the messenger, and the message is "water is traveling through this wall."

Foundation-adjacent damage. Water at the base of brick walls doesn't just hurt the brick — it hurts what's under it. Saturated clay soil expands, and expanding soil moves foundations, and moving foundations crack brick walls. The stair-step crack through mortar joints above a chronically

wet foundation corner isn't a brick problem — it's a drainage problem that became a foundation problem that became a brick problem. This is the expensive chain reaction, and it starts with a downspout.

The repair reality. Water-damaged masonry gets repaired the same way all masonry gets repaired — repointing (\$5 to \$25 a square foot depending on scope), brick replacement where faces are gone, cleaning where staining is cosmetic. But repairing water-damaged brick without fixing the water is the most expensive mistake in this book: the new mortar erodes just like the old mortar did, because the waterfall is still there. Every masonry repair on water-damaged brick starts with the drainage fix. Wall second, water first — always.

Chapter 7: Texas Storms, Texas Clay, Texas Sprinklers

Texas gives the gutter-and-grade story some local chapters.

The storm season. North Texas spring storms don't rain — they dump. Two inches in thirty minutes overwhelms systems sized for ordinary weather. This is when undersized gutters show themselves, when the one-downspout run overflows in the middle, when the grade that handled drizzle becomes a moat. After every major storm, do the walk: gutters still hung, downspouts still connected, no new overflow stripes on the brick, no standing water against the house. The storm is the inspection — free, thorough, and brutally honest.

The clay cycle. Our expansive clay is the reason drainage matters more here than in sandy-soil country. Dry clay shrinks away from the foundation — I've seen gaps you could put your hand in — and the next storm pours water straight down those gaps to the footing. Wet clay swells and pushes. The wet-dry cycling moves foundations, and moving foundations crack the brick above. Consistent soil moisture is

the goal, and that means: grade that sheds storms, gutters that don't dump at the foundation, and in drought, soaker hoses run at a distance to keep the soil from shrinking away — not sprinklers blasting the wall, but controlled moisture in the soil away from the house. It sounds contradictory — water the soil but not the wall — but that's clay country: manage the moisture, don't just add or remove it.

Sprinklers. The sprinkler head spraying the brick wall every morning is the most common self-inflicted brick damage in Texas suburbs. It's not a storm — it's worse than a storm, because it's daily, year-round, aimed at one spot. The wall never dries. Mortar erodes in that spot years ahead of the rest of the house. Algae grows. In winter, the daily wetting sets up freeze-thaw on a schedule. Redirect the head — ten minutes, free — and the damage stops getting worse the same day. If you're seeing a mysterious bad patch of brick on an otherwise fine wall, look for the sprinkler aimed at it before you look at anything else.

Hail. Texas hail beats up gutters — dents that change the slope, seams knocked open, hangers loosened. After a hailstorm, the roof gets all the attention (and the insurance claim), but the gutters took the same beating. A gutter that

survived hail visually can still be mis-sloped enough to pond water. Check the gutters when you check the roof.

The freeze. North Texas freezes hard enough to matter. Water-saturated brick at the base of a wall — from splashback, from a downspout at the foundation, from grade sloping in — going into a hard freeze is the spalling setup. The winter prep isn't complicated: gutters clean so winter rains drain, downspouts extended, grade shedding. The wall goes into winter dry, and dry brick doesn't spall.

Chapter 8: The 2026 Costs — Drainage Fixes vs. Masonry Repairs

This is the chapter that makes the economic case, because the premise of this book is a money claim: the drainage fixes cost less than the masonry repairs they prevent. Here are the 2026 numbers.

Gutter cleaning. Professional cleaning runs roughly **\$0.95 to \$1.25 per linear foot** for a single-story home — \$150 to \$250 for a typical house — and \$1.50 to \$2.25 per foot for two-story. Twice a year in tree country, once a year minimum everywhere. Compare that to a repointing job: even a small one starts in the hundreds, and the wall section under a chronically clogged gutter can need thousands in masonry work. The cleaning is the cheapest insurance in the book.

Gutter repair. Rehanging a sagging section: \$150 to \$350. Resealing joints: \$100 to \$200. Replacing a downspout: \$150 to \$300. These are handyman-scale numbers — the kind of money that disappears into a weekend. The brick damage from not doing them is contractor-scale.

New gutters. Seamless aluminum — the standard — runs **\$8**

to \$28 per linear foot installed, with the common K-style profile at \$9 to \$30. A typical house with 150–200 linear feet lands in the low thousands. That's real money, but it's once-per-decades money — and it's less than rebuilding the wall sections that twenty years of bad gutters will destroy.

Gutter guards. \$7 to \$20 per linear foot installed. The math: guards versus twice-a-year cleaning breaks even in roughly ten years for most houses. In heavy tree coverage they're worth evaluating; in light coverage they're optional. Note the caveat from the gutter pros: guards reduce cleaning, they don't eliminate maintenance — fine silt still accumulates, and they don't fix slope or capacity problems.

Downspout extensions. \$15 to \$30 for the corrugated DIY kind, \$4 to \$16 per linear foot installed for proper extensions. This is the highest-value fix in the entire book: twenty dollars to stop a thousand gallons per storm from soaking the foundation.

Regrading. \$500 to \$5,000 depending on how much earth moves. Simple slope correction with a few yards of fill dirt is the low end; major recontouring is the high end.

French drains and yard drainage. A yard French drain runs

\$10 to \$35 per linear foot installed — a 50-foot run lands \$500 to \$1,800, a 100-foot run \$1,000 to \$3,500. Swales (shaped earth channels) run \$5 to \$15 per foot. Catch basins \$50 to \$200 per unit. These are the fixes for yards that won't shed water with grade alone.

The comparison. A full drainage overhaul — new gutters, extended downspouts, regraded perimeter, a French drain on the bad side — can run into the mid four figures on a tough lot. A single wall section rebuilt from water damage — brick replacement, repointing, addressing what the water did to the structure behind — starts in the same range and goes up from there, and that's before the foundation work if the water moved the house. The drainage money is prevention priced; the masonry money is cure priced. Prevention wins every time — and unlike most prevention, you can see exactly what you're preventing by looking at the neighbor's wall who didn't do it.

Chapter 9: The Fixes in Order — Cheapest First

Don't overhaul the drainage all at once. Work the list in order — each step is cheaper than the next, and most houses never need the expensive steps.

1. Clean the gutters. Today, or this weekend. The single highest-return maintenance act on a brick house. While you're up there — or while the pro is — check the slope, the hangers, the joints, the downspout connections. A cleaning with an inspection is worth twice a cleaning alone.

2. Extend the downspouts. Every downspout that ends at the foundation gets an extension carrying water at least five feet out, downhill, onto grade that falls away. Twenty dollars, twenty minutes, done. This one fix eliminates more brick water damage than any other single act.

3. Redirect the sprinklers. Walk the perimeter while the system runs. Every head spraying brick, every head soaking the foundation perimeter — adjust it. Free. Immediate.

4. Fix the grade. The 2x4-and-level check from Chapter 5.

Low spots against the house get fill dirt — clean fill, compacted, sloping away. Mulch beds get pulled back from the brick and re-sloped. This is a weekend with a wheelbarrow for most houses, not a contractor job.

5. Repair the gutters. Rehang the sagging section. Reseal the leaking joints. Replace the missing downspout. Add the second downspout on the long run. Small repairs, done once, hold for years.

6. Upgrade capacity where storms overwhelm. If the gutters overtop in every big storm despite being clean and correctly sloped, they're undersized for Texas weather. Six-inch gutters, additional downspouts, or both. This is the step for houses that do everything right and still get waterfalls in April.

7. Install yard drainage. For the lot that won't shed water — flat grade, clay that ponds, a low side that collects the neighborhood's runoff. French drain, swale, catch basin — matched to the problem, not the catalog. This is contractor work, and it's the last resort, not the first — most drainage problems die at steps one through four.

Work the list top-down. Check each step's result in the next

rain before moving to the next step. The goal isn't a perfect drainage system; it's a house where water leaves instead of arriving. You'll know you've won when the brick stays dry in a storm and the ground at the foundation doesn't pond.

Chapter 10: Walk Your Own House — The Drainage Inspection

Fifteen minutes, after a rain if you can manage it. Here's the walk.

Start at the roofline. Gutters: clean, hung straight, sloping to downspouts, no overflow stripes on the brick below. Downspouts: connected top to bottom, discharging five-plus feet from the house onto falling grade. Look for the signatures from Chapter 2 — the waterfall stripe, the drip spot, the algae band under the sag.

Walk the perimeter at ground level. Crouch at the base of the walls. The bottom two feet: staining, eroded mortar, spalling, efflorescence, mulch against the brick. Standing water — anywhere against the house is a fail. The grade check: does the ground fall away, or does it cup toward the wall?

Check the discharge points. Where does each downspout's water actually go? Follow it. If it ponds, if it runs back toward the house, if it disappears into a buried line nobody's tested — note it.

Run the sprinklers. Watch where the water lands. Brick should stay dry. The foundation perimeter should not be getting soaked daily.

Look up at the wall tops. Under the eaves, the top courses of brick — any deterioration starting at the top means water from above: fascia, gutter back-overflow, roof edge. Top-down damage is always a roofline problem.

Write it down. Which walls, what you saw, where. Sketch the house roughly and mark the wet spots, the stains, the bad grade. When the gutter man or the mason or the drainage contractor arrives, hand him the sketch. A homeowner with a marked-up sketch gets an honest bid — the contractor knows you're watching the water, not just the price.

The seasonal version. Do the full walk every spring before storm season and every fall after it. Gutters get cleaned on the same schedule. The houses with the healthiest brick in Texas aren't the ones with the best brick — they're the ones whose owners walk the perimeter twice a year.

Chapter 11: Hiring the Drainage Work —

Who Does What

Drainage work crosses trade lines, and hiring the right trade for each piece matters.

Gutter cleaning and minor repair: gutter companies, handymen. Get the flow test — a real service runs water through the system and confirms the downspouts drain. If the bid doesn't include checking the downspouts, it's half a service.

New gutters and guards: gutter companies — seamless aluminum is fabricated on-site, so you're hiring the fabricator-installer, not buying a product off a shelf. Get the size right for Texas storms (ask about six-inch), the downspout count right for your roof (every 30–40 feet, more under valleys), and the discharge plan in writing — where every downspout's water goes.

Grading and yard drainage: landscapers for simple regrading, drainage contractors for French drains and designed systems. The drainage contractor should talk about where the water goes — the outlet — before talking about the

trench. A French drain with no outlet is a buried bathtub. Ask: where does it daylight? What's the slope? Who calls the utility locator before digging?

The masonry repair: masons — and only after the drainage is fixed. Tell the mason what the water source was and that it's fixed. A good mason will verify — he'll look at the gutter above the repair area before he quotes, because he's warranting work that fails if the water's still coming. If he doesn't look up, find one who does.

The order of hiring. Drainage first, masonry second. Always. The gutter man before the mason. The grader before the bricklayer. Any mason who offers to repoint your water-damaged wall without asking about the water source is selling you a repair with a built-in expiration date.

What to ask any of them. Where's the water coming from? Where's it going after your work? What happens in a two-inch-in-thirty-minutes storm? Can I see a job you did three years ago? The three-year-old job is the portfolio that matters — drainage either works in storms or it doesn't, and three years includes storms.

Chapter 12: Where the Roof Meets the Wall — Kickout Flashing and Valley Wash

There's a water source this book hasn't named yet, and it's responsible for some of the worst localized brick damage I see: the place where a sloped roof dies into a vertical wall. Every house with a second story, a dormer, or an addition has these junctions, and the detail that protects them has a name most homeowners have never heard — kickout flashing.

The problem. A roof valley or a sloped roof plane collects water and runs it downhill — straight into the wall where the roof meets it. Without a diverter, hundreds of gallons per storm pour off the roof edge directly onto the brick below that junction, or worse, behind the cladding at the junction. The signature: a vertical deterioration stripe on the brick starting exactly where the roof meets the wall — stained, eroded mortar, sometimes spalling — while the rest of the wall looks fine.

The fix. Kickout flashing — a small angled piece of flashing at the bottom of the roof-wall junction that "kicks" the water out

into the gutter instead of letting it run down the wall. It's a ten-dollar piece of metal and an hour's labor during roofing or gutter work, and its absence destroys walls over decades. If you have a roof-to-wall junction with no kickout and a stain stripe below it, you've found your culprit. This is roofer or gutter-company work, not mason work — fix the water, then repair the brick.

Valley wash. Roof valleys concentrate the runoff of two roof planes into one channel. Where a valley discharges — onto a lower roof, into a gutter section, or off a roof edge with no gutter — the concentrated flow overwhelms whatever's below it. A valley dumping into a five-inch gutter section is the capacity failure from Chapter 2 wearing a different hat. The fixes: a splash diverter in the valley, a larger gutter at the discharge point, or an additional downspout right there. The water's telling you exactly where it wants to go — give it a bigger pipe.

Why this chapter exists. Because the kickout flashing is the most commonly missing ten-dollar part in residential construction, and the damage it causes gets misdiagnosed as "bad brick" for years. If your house has a stain stripe starting at a roof-wall junction, don't seal it, don't paint it — kick the

water out first.

Chapter 13: Three Houses, Three Water Stories

I've watched this play out hundreds of times. Here are three composite stories — the details blended, the lessons exact.

The waterfall house. Brick ranch, 1990s, DFW. One eight-foot section of the side wall needed full repointing — joints washed out, brick faces weathering — while the rest of the house was sound. The homeowner had gotten three masonry bids, all priced the repointing, none mentioned the gutter. I looked up: directly above the bad section, the gutter was packed solid with oak leaves, and the overflow stripe on the brick lined up exactly with the damaged section. Fix: gutter cleaning (\$200), repointing the section. The three masonry bids would have fixed the symptom; the \$200 cleaning fixed the cause. Five years later that wall looks the same as the day it was repointed.

The negative-grade corner. Two-story, corner lot, clay soil. The northeast corner showed stair-step cracking through the mortar joints and spalling at the base — the classic combination. Two foundation companies had bid piers. I

walked the grade: the corner sat in a shallow bowl — years of mulch buildup in the bed, a downspout discharging at the foundation, and the original backfill settled into a trough. Every storm ponded water against that corner; the clay swelled, the corner lifted slightly, the brick cracked. Fix: downspout extension (\$20), regraded the bed with fill dirt sloping away (a weekend), redirected one sprinkler head. The movement stopped — because the water stopped. The piers would have held up a house that was still getting soaked. Sometimes the foundation problem is a drainage problem wearing a costume.

The sprinkler wall. Suburban two-story, otherwise pristine brick. One patch — maybe six feet square — on the back wall: eroded mortar, algae staining, brick faces going soft. The homeowner was baffled; the rest of the house was perfect. I asked him to run the sprinklers. One rotor head, misadjusted, threw a stream directly at that patch every morning at 5 AM, 365 days a year. That six square feet of wall had received more water than the rest of the house combined. Fix: adjusted the head in ten minutes. The patch got repointed once the wall dried out. Total cost of the cause: zero dollars and ten minutes. Total cost of ignoring it: a wall section rebuilt every decade.

Three houses, three different water sources, one lesson: the wall is the victim, the water is the criminal, and the criminal is almost always cheap to catch.

A Final Word Before the Next Rain

Your brick walls are good walls. Brick has handled Texas weather for well over a century, and the walls on your house will handle it for a century more — if the water goes where it's supposed to go. The gutter, the downspout, the six inches of grade: these are the unglamorous guardians of your masonry, and they're the cheapest protection your house has.

The most expensive brick repair is the one that gets done twice — once before the drainage was fixed, and once after. The cheapest is the one that never happens because a \$200 gutter cleaning and a \$20 downspout extension did the work instead.

Next rain, stand at your window and watch where the water goes. Your walls have been telling you all along. Now you speak the language.

If the water's already done its damage and you need the masonry side made right, that's [brick water damage repair](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) — and if the water's been

working on the foundation too, start with [foundation drainage] (<https://metrofoundationrepair.com>) before the mason ever shows up.

For the rest of what your walls are trying to tell you, my [free brick repair books](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>) are all in the same straight talk.

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/>).