

New Construction Brick Defects: What Builders Get Wrong

What I Find Wrong on Two-Year-Old Brick Homes — and
How to Get the Builder to Fix It

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Chapter 1: New Construction Brick Problems

— Why New Houses Have Old Problems

The call comes in about twice a month. A homeowner in a two-year-old house — new development, builder's name still on the entrance sign — walks around the back of the house and sees a stair-step crack running up the brick. Or water stains coming out of the brick under a window. Or chunks of mortar crumbling out of the joints near the ground. They call me because they assumed the same thing you'd assume: it's a new house, the brick shouldn't have problems.

But new construction brick problems are real, and I see them every year in this state. Not because brick is a bad material — brick is one of the best wall claddings ever invented — but because the way brick gets built on new homes is where all the mistakes happen. And the mistakes are almost never in the part you can see. They're in the part you can't see: behind the brick, inside the wall.

Here's what most homeowners don't know: the brick on your house is not the wall. It's the raincoat. Your house is framed out of wood — a lumber skeleton covered in sheathing — and

then a single layer of brick is built about an inch out from that frame. That gap, the cavity, is part of the design. Water gets behind brick. It always has, on every brick house ever built. The wall system is supposed to collect that water and drain it back out. When it's built right, it does this quietly for decades and you never think about it. When it's built wrong — and on a surprising number of new homes, it is — the water has nowhere to go, and it starts destroying things from the inside out.

I've been doing this 50 years. I started laying brick when the bricklayers on new construction were craftsmen who'd been doing it their whole lives. Today, the masonry sub on a production home development is under brutal time pressure, paid by the square foot, laying brick as fast as his crew can move. The detail work — the flashing you can't see, the weep holes at the bottom of the wall, keeping the cavity clean — is exactly the work that gets skipped when somebody's in a hurry. It's invisible when the wall is done. The builder's superintendent doesn't see it. The city inspector, if he even looks, is moving fast too. The homeowner won't know until year two, three, or five, when the symptoms show up.

This book is about those defects. The big four I find on new

construction homes — missing or blocked weep holes, missing flashing, mortar smeared and dropped into the cavity, and wall-tie problems — plus the grading mistakes that make everything worse, the question of which new build brick cracks are normal and which are the builder's problem, and then the part nobody teaches you: how to document it all and get the builder to make it right under the warranty.

One thing up front: I'm a repair contractor, not a lawyer, and not your builder's warranty department. Everything in the warranty chapters is how the system typically works in Texas — the standard 1-2-10 warranty framework that most production builders use — and I'll keep saying "check your own paperwork" because your builder's warranty booklet is the one that counts. My job in this book is to give you the technical ammunition: what's wrong, why it's wrong, and what "right" looks like, so when you sit across from the warranty rep you know more than he expects you to.

Chapter 2: How the Wall Is Supposed to Work — the Drainage Brick Veneer

Before you can spot what's wrong, you need the picture of what's right. So here's how a brick veneer wall on a Texas home is designed to work. This is not opinion; it's the standard detail the Brick Industry Association has published for decades, and it's what the building code expects.

Your exterior wall has layers. From inside to out: interior drywall, wood studs with insulation between them, exterior sheathing (usually oriented strand board these days), a weather-resistant barrier (house wrap or felt), then a roughly one-inch air gap, then the brick. The brick is anchored back to the framing with metal wall ties, and it carries its own weight straight down to a brick ledge on the foundation or to steel lintels over openings.

Now here's the part that matters for this whole book: brick is porous. It soaks up rain like a sponge — not much at a time, but some, every time it rains. Mortar joints absorb water too. On a windy Texas rain, water also gets driven straight through the small cracks and imperfections. So water lands

on the back of that brick all the time. That's not a defect. That's the design assumption.

The design answer is drainage. That one-inch cavity between the brick and the house wrap is a drain plane. Water that gets behind the brick runs down the back face of the brick, hits flashing at the bottom of the wall — and over every opening, every lintel, every shelf angle — and gets kicked back out through weep holes. Weep holes are the little gaps you can see in the vertical mortar joints along the bottom course of brick, spaced along the wall just above the foundation. They're the drains of the whole system.

So the wall works on a simple principle: deflect what you can, drain what gets in, dry out what remains. Industry folks call it the three D's — deflect, drain, dry out. Every defect in this book breaks one of those D's. A wall with no weep holes can't drain. A wall with no flashing can't collect. A cavity full of mortar droppings can't drain either — the water hits the blockage and sits against your sheathing. The wall looks fine from the curb on day one. It's rotting from the inside by year five.

Understanding this also answers the question I hear most from new-home buyers: "But it passed inspection — how can

it be built wrong?" A municipal inspection on a production home is a quick pass through a checklist on a day when the inspector may have forty other houses. The flashing at the base of the wall is already covered by the time anybody looks. The weep holes are visible — and they're the thing inspectors most often catch — but the mortar in the cavity isn't visible at all without opening the wall. And here's the uncomfortable truth: even code-compliant walls can be built in ways that still fail, because the code sets minimums and production building lives at the minimums. Passing inspection means the house met the minimum on the day someone looked. It doesn't mean the wall drains.

Chapter 3: Defect Number One — Missing or Blocked Weep Holes

If I had to pick the single most common defect I find on new construction brick homes in Texas, it's this: the weep holes are missing, blocked, or caulked shut.

Walk around the bottom of your brick walls and look at the vertical joints in the first course of brick above the foundation. Every few feet, you should see a vertical mortar joint that's open — no mortar in it, just a gap. Those are your weep holes. The building code (the International Residential Code, section R703.7.6) says they go at a maximum of 33 inches on center — every 33 inches or less — they're at least 3/16 of an inch wide, and they sit immediately above the flashing at the base of the wall. The Brick Industry Association recommends tighter spacing, around 24 inches on center, for better drainage. On a well-built wall, you see them everywhere: along the bottom of every wall, above every window and door opening, over every lintel.

On new homes, here's what I actually find:

No weep holes at all. The bricklayer mortared every joint

solid, top to bottom. The wall has no drains. Water that gets behind the brick runs down the back of the brick, hits the flashing at the base of the wall, and pools there — with nowhere to go. It sits against the sheathing, soaking the bottom of the wall assembly, breeding mold, rotting the bottom plate of the framing. This is the most common version of the defect on fast production work, and it's a code violation on its face — the code has required weep holes in masonry veneer for decades.

Weep holes present but blocked. This one is sneakier. The joints are open at the surface — you can see the gaps — but the cavity behind them is plugged with mortar droppings that fell down during construction (more on that in Chapter 5), or the mason packed mortar into the back of the joint when he tooled it. From the outside it looks right. It doesn't drain. I find this with a flashlight and a thin wire on inspection, and it's one of the first things I check.

Weep holes caulked shut. Sometimes the builder's warranty crew, responding to a complaint about "water coming out of the wall" — which is the weeps doing their job — sends a caulk gun guy who seals every weep hole on the house. Or the homeowner's handyman does it thinking the open joints

are a defect. Caulking weeps is like plugging the drains in your shower because you don't like water on the floor. The water still gets in; now it can't get out.

What blocked or missing weeps cost you: the moisture trapped behind the brick doesn't just evaporate harmlessly. It soaks the sheathing and framing, and in Texas heat it can also be driven inward as vapor, condensing inside the wall. The symptoms show up as efflorescence (white salt stains on the brick face), spalling brick at the bottom courses, musty smells near exterior walls, and eventually rot in the bottom plate and the ends of floor joists. I've opened walls on four-year-old homes and found black mold on the sheathing behind a wall whose brick looked perfect from the outside.

The fix depends on the version. Caulked weeps can be dug out. Blocked weeps sometimes can be cleared. But a wall built with no weeps and no flashing behind them — you can't properly retrofit weeps without the flashing to drain to, and you can't add flashing without taking brick down. Anybody who tells you he'll just "drill weep holes" in a wall that never had them is selling you half a repair: a drilled hole with no flashing behind it drains onto your sheathing, not out of the wall. That detail — weeps exist to drain flashing, not to drain

the cavity directly — is the whole reason the repair has to match the construction.

Chapter 4: Defect Number Two — Missing Flashing

If weep holes are the drains, flashing is the gutter that feeds them. Flashing is the waterproof membrane or metal that sits at the base of the wall cavity, angles outward, and directs water to the weep holes. It also belongs over every opening — above windows, above doors, over garage openings, anywhere the cavity is interrupted — and at the top of the wall under the roofline. On a properly built veneer wall, flashing is a continuous system with sealed joints and end dams at every interruption, so water traveling down the cavity hits flashing and gets kicked out instead of continuing into the structure.

On new construction, missing or bad flashing is the defect with the biggest repair bill, because the only true fix is removing brick.

No flashing at the base of the wall. I've seen this on homes where the brick simply starts on the foundation ledge with no through-wall flashing at all. Water runs down the back of the brick and straight onto the foundation ledge and the sill plate.

In a few years, you get rot at the bottom of the wall and nobody knows why, because the brick face looks fine.

No flashing over lintels. Every window and door opening has a steel lintel carrying the brick above it. The lintel has to be flashed — a membrane or metal pan over the lintel that catches cavity water and drains it out through weeps in the course above the lintel. When it's missing, water runs down the cavity, hits the unflashed lintel, and ponds on the steel. The lintel rusts from the top down, it expands as it rusts, and it starts jacking the brick above it apart — rust jacking. Meanwhile water is dumping into the wall at every opening. On a new home, the first sign is usually staining under the windows or a horizontal crack in the mortar right above a window or door.

Flashing with unsealed joints or no end dams. Even when flashing is present, the details matter. Flashing comes in pieces; where the pieces meet, the joints have to be lapped and sealed, not just overlapped. At every interruption — a window, a door, a step in the foundation — the flashing needs end dams, little turned-up ends that keep water from running off the end of the flashing sideways into the wall. Production crews skip end dams constantly. The flashing is

there, it just doesn't work.

Flashing buried in mortar. Sometimes the flashing is installed and then the mason, in a hurry, packs the cavity solid with mortar right at the flashing line. Now the flashing is embedded in a mortar bridge and water can't reach the weeps. Functionally the same as no flashing.

Why does flashing get skipped? Because it's invisible the day the house sells. A homebuyer never sees it. The superintendent sees it only if he walks the wall before the brick goes up over that course — and on a production schedule, the brick goes up fast. Flashing is pure craftsmanship with zero curb appeal, which makes it the first thing cut when a sub is behind schedule.

Here's the hard truth about repair: there is no cheap fix for missing flashing. Sealants and surface treatments can't replace a drainage system inside the wall. The real repair is surgical — remove the brick in the affected area, install proper flashing with sealed laps and end dams, install weeps, rebuild. That's why documenting flashing defects during the warranty period matters so much (Chapter 9): this is a builder's-wall-open repair, and it needs to happen on the builder's dime, not yours.

One more flashing location that gets missed on new homes: where brick meets a sloped roof. That roof-to-wall intersection needs proper flashing and kick-out flashing to throw roof water away from the wall. Without it, every rain dumps roof runoff straight into the top of the brick cavity. If you see staining on the brick where a roof slope dies into a wall, that's your suspect.

Chapter 5: Defect Number Three — Mortar in the Cavity

Here's the defect that makes masons wince, because it's pure workmanship. As the bricklayer works up the wall, mortar squeezes out of the joints on the back side of the brick and falls into the cavity. On a careful job, the mason keeps the cavity clean — he tools the joints, he keeps droppings out, some crews even hang a board in the cavity to catch the fall. On a fast production job, nobody bothers. The mortar piles up at the bottom of the cavity, bridges across the air gap to the sheathing, and hardens into a solid dam right where the flashing and weeps are supposed to work.

The industry even has a name for the worst version of it: mortar bridging. The droppings form a bridge across the cavity, touching the unprotected sheathing, and now water that should drain down the back of the brick wicks sideways through the mortar bridge straight into the wall sheathing. Even when the wall has perfect flashing and perfect weeps, a mortar-clogged cavity defeats them — the water can't reach the flashing because there's a dam of hardened mortar in the

way.

I've opened two-year-old walls and found the bottom six inches of the cavity packed solid with mortar, trash, and construction debris — food wrappers, cut-off pieces of house wrap, soda cans. It sounds unbelievable until you've seen it. The cavity is a hidden space, and on a rushed job site it becomes a trash chute.

There's a related version of this defect: the mason fills the cavity intentionally. Some production crews, trying to make the wall feel solid or to cheat the tie spacing, pack mortar into the cavity behind the brick. This is wrong in every way — it eliminates the drainage plane entirely, it creates a rigid connection between the brick and the frame so the two can't move independently (and they need to), and it gives water a direct highway into the sheathing.

What you can see from outside: usually nothing, until the damage is done. That's what makes this defect so nasty — the brick face looks perfect. The clues are indirect: efflorescence low on the wall, weeps that are present but never seem to drain, damp spots on interior drywall near the base of exterior walls. The confirmation is invasive — a borescope through a weep hole or a mortar joint, or removing a brick.

On a warranty claim, a borescope inspection by a qualified mason is worth every penny, because a photo of a mortar-packed cavity is the kind of evidence that ends arguments.

The trade has products meant to prevent this — cavity drainage mats, mortar-collection devices that sit at the base of the cavity and keep droppings off the flashing — and they're cheap insurance during construction. Almost no production builder uses them, because they cost a few dollars a wall and slow the crew down by minutes. After the wall is built, the only fix is opening it up.

Chapter 6: Defect Number Four — Wall Ties: Missing, Miss-Spaced, Never Attached

The brick on your house doesn't stand up by itself. It's a single layer of brick — a veneer — and it stays on the house because metal wall ties anchor it back to the wood framing. The ties are the only thing keeping that brick from peeling away from the house. Lose the ties, lose the wall.

On new construction, tie problems come in three flavors:

Too few ties. The code and the standards call for ties at regular intervals across the wall — the common rule of thumb in residential work is roughly one tie per so many square feet of wall, spaced evenly both directions. On a fast job, the mason stretches the spacing. Fewer ties per wall means each tie carries more load, and it means the brick has more unsupported span to flex in the wind. You can't see this from outside. An inspector can't see it either, once the brick is up. It's a defect that hides until a wind event or years of thermal cycling start working the wall loose.

Ties never attached. This is the one that makes my blood pressure go up. The tie is embedded in the mortar joint —

that part got done — but the other end was never nailed to the stud. It's just sitting there in the cavity, attached to the brick and to nothing. The brick looks anchored. It isn't. I find these when walls start to bulge or when we open a wall for another repair and the ties fall out in my hand.

Wrong ties or corroded ties. The metal accessories in a cavity wall should be corrosion-resistant — galvanized at minimum, stainless in the ideal. On a budget job, plain steel ties go in, and in a wall that stays damp because of the drainage defects in the last three chapters, plain steel corrodes fast. A corroded tie doesn't just stop holding — as it rusts it expands, and it can jack the mortar joint apart from inside.

The symptom that brings tie problems to light is usually bulging — a section of brick wall that bellies outward. Sometimes it's subtle, a gentle wave you only see sighting down the wall. Sometimes it's obvious. Bulging on a new home is never "settling" and never normal. It's a structural problem with the veneer attachment, and it's the one defect in this book that can become a safety issue — a veneer wall that loses its ties can peel off the house in a windstorm.

A note on what ties can't do: they can't fix a drainage

problem, and drainage can't fix a tie problem. I mention this because I sometimes see a wall with both — the cavity is full of mortar and the ties are sparse — and the homeowner wants one repair to fix everything. These are separate defects with separate repairs. Document them separately (Chapter 9), claim them separately.

Chapter 7: The Grade Problem — Brick

Buried in Dirt

This one isn't behind the wall — it's at the bottom of it, in plain sight, and it's the defect I can diagnose from the curb.

Brick veneer should never touch soil. The bottom of the brick needs clearance above finished grade — the standard is typically around six inches of exposed foundation between the dirt and the start of the brick — so that soil moisture can't wick up into the wall, so that the weep holes (remember Chapter 3) aren't buried, and so that termites can't build their mud tubes up into the structure unseen behind the dirt line.

On new construction, the landscaper comes in after the brick is done, spreads mulch and soil, builds up the beds around the house, and buries the bottom two or three courses of brick. Now the weep holes are underground. The drainage system drains into dirt. Soil moisture wicks straight into the brick and mortar. And the termite inspector can't see the foundation line.

I see this on a huge percentage of new homes. It's the easiest defect to spot and the easiest to fix — pull the soil and mulch

back until you have proper clearance and the weeps are exposed. But it matters for your warranty claim too, because builders love to blame moisture problems on "landscaping and grading by the homeowner." If the builder's own landscaper buried the brick before closing, say so, with photos. And check your warranty booklet: most builder warranties put grading and drainage maintenance on the homeowner after closing, which means the builder will argue the buried brick is your problem. The counter is documentation — photos at closing showing the condition the builder delivered.

While you're looking at grade, check the slope. Soil should fall away from the foundation — the common guidance is roughly six inches of fall in the first ten feet. Flat grading or grading that slopes toward the house ponds water against the foundation and the bottom of the brick wall, and no drainage wall system is designed to sit in standing water. On new developments, final grading often settles in the first year, and the pretty slope from closing day becomes a birdbath by year two. That's a maintenance item, but on a two-year-old home with water problems, it's part of the story.

Chapter 8: New Build Brick Cracks — What's Normal and What's the Builder's Problem

Sooner or later, every new-home owner finds a crack in the brick. Here's how to read it.

What's usually normal. Hairline cracks in mortar joints — thin, following the mortar, not the brick — in the first year or two are common. New homes move. The lumber framing shrinks and settles as it dries, the foundation adjusts to its load, and Texas clay soil swells and shrinks with the seasons. A hairline mortar crack that doesn't grow, doesn't offset (one side isn't higher than the other), and doesn't let water in is usually the house finding its equilibrium. Small cracks at the corners of windows and doors — the classic stress points — are also common early. Watch them, photograph them, but don't panic.

What isn't normal. Stair-step cracks that run through multiple courses and keep growing. Cracks that go through the brick units themselves, not just the mortar — that means real force, because brick is stronger than mortar and the crack went through the strong part. Cracks with offset —

where one side of the crack is pushed in or out relative to the other. Horizontal cracks along a lintel line (remember the rust-jacking in Chapter 4). Cracks wide enough to fit a nickel, or any crack that's visibly wider this month than last month.

The expansion joint question. Long brick walls need room to move. Brick grows — slightly, over years — as it absorbs moisture from the air, and it expands and contracts with temperature. On a long run of brick with no relief, that movement has nowhere to go, and the wall cracks to make its own joint. Proper construction includes vertical expansion joints at intervals along long walls — soft joints filled with flexible sealant, not mortar. Many production homes skip them on shorter runs where they're arguably needed, and the result is a vertical crack that opens up a few years in, right where the joint should have been. If your crack is vertical, straight, and in the middle of a long wall run, ask whether an expansion joint was supposed to be there.

Cracks versus the warranty. Here's the practical part. Under the standard 1-2-10 warranty framework, workmanship defects — which is what most brick defects are — fall in the one-year workmanship window. But cracks that indicate structural movement can fall under the longer

structural coverage. The distinction matters enormously: a mortar crack from normal curing is a one-year item; a stair-step crack from foundation movement that keeps growing may be a structural item with a much longer clock. Document every crack with dated photos and a coin for scale, measure the width, and note whether it's growing. That record is what turns "it's just settling" into a claim.

Chapter 9: Documenting It Like a Pro — the Paper Trail That Wins Claims

Everything in this chapter is about one idea: the builder's warranty department denies vague complaints and pays documented ones. I've watched homeowners lose winnable claims because they called and said "my brick has problems," and I've watched homeowners win because they showed up with a folder. Be the folder.

Start at closing, or start today. If you're reading this before closing on a new home, photograph everything: every elevation of brick, the weep holes along the base, the grade clearance, the lintels over every opening. If you're already living there, do it today. Dated photos are your baseline. Email them to yourself so the date is provable.

The defect log. For every defect, one entry: date found, location (which wall, how far from which corner — be specific), description, and photos. For cracks: photograph with a coin or ruler for scale, measure the width, and re-photograph monthly. "Stair-step crack, east wall, 8 feet from northeast corner, 1/16 inch wide on March 3, 1/8 inch wide on

April 3" is a claim. "There's a crack in the brick" is a phone call that goes nowhere.

The professional evaluation. For anything beyond cosmetic — suspected missing flashing, blocked weeps, tie problems, growing cracks — get a qualified mason or inspector to look at it and put findings in writing. This is what a [brick defect evaluation](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) is: an independent set of eyes that knows what the wall should look like behind the face, with photos and a written report. A borescope photo of a mortar-packed cavity or a written finding of "no weep holes present along 40 linear feet of east elevation" changes the conversation with a warranty rep completely. It also protects you if the dispute goes further — an expert's written report is evidence; your verbal description is a story.

The warranty booklet. Read it. All of it. Know your coverage windows — the one-year workmanship period, the two-year systems period, the ten-year structural period — and know the claims procedure: who to notify, in writing, by when. Most builder warranties require written notice. A phone call to the warranty line is not written notice. Send the email, keep the copy.

The timeline letter. When you file, write one letter (email is fine) that lays out the whole thing: the defects, the dates found, the photos attached, the professional evaluation

attached, the specific warranty coverage you're claiming under, and a reasonable deadline for response. Keep the tone professional and factual. You're not threatening; you're documenting. Threats come later, from lawyers, if it gets there — and with a file like this, it usually doesn't.

What not to do. Don't let the builder's crew do exploratory demolition without your own expert present or at least your own photos of what they open. Don't accept "that's normal" verbally — ask for it in writing, with the reason. And don't start the repair yourself before the claim is resolved, because the moment you fix it, you've destroyed the evidence and the builder's obligation gets murky. Document first, claim second, repair third.

Chapter 10: Getting the Builder to Make It Right — the 1-2-10 Game in Texas

Here's how the warranty game actually works in Texas, and why timing is everything.

Texas doesn't have a state agency policing new-home warranties anymore — the old Texas Residential Construction Commission is gone. What you have instead is your builder's warranty, which for most production builders follows the industry-standard 1-2-10 framework: one year for workmanship and materials, two years for the delivery systems (plumbing, electrical, HVAC), ten years for major structural components. Many builders back the structural portion with a third-party warranty company. Your closing packet has the booklet. That booklet is the whole ballgame.

The one-year workmanship window is where most brick defects live. Missing weep holes, missing flashing, mortar in the cavity, bad ties, buried brick — these are workmanship and materials defects. The clock is one year from closing. That's a short fuse, and it's why Chapter 9 says start documenting at closing. Most homeowners don't notice brick

defects in year one because the symptoms haven't appeared yet. The wall looks fine. The rot is starting where you can't see it.

This is the cruelest part of the system: the defects are built on day one, the evidence is hidden behind the brick, and the workmanship clock runs out before the symptoms show. Which is why the pre-expiration inspection matters so much. In month ten or eleven, get the house inspected — not just a general home inspection, but somebody who knows masonry — and file every defect in writing before the year is up. A defect filed in month eleven is a warranty claim. The same defect discovered in month thirteen is your problem.

The ten-year structural window is narrower than it sounds. It covers major structural components — foundation systems, load-bearing walls, beams, lintels, and the like. A bulging veneer wall from failed ties, or cracking from foundation movement, can qualify. Efflorescence and clogged weeps don't. The structural warranty also typically requires the defect to meet a defined performance standard — actual failure, not just imperfection. Read the definitions in your booklet; they're specific.

How the claim usually goes. You file in writing. The

warranty rep schedules an inspection — their inspector, their framing. You attend with your documentation and, ideally, your own expert's report. They'll try to classify everything as maintenance, normal settling, or homeowner-caused (the buried-brick grading argument from Chapter 7 is a favorite). Your documentation answers each one: the dated photos show the condition at closing, the expert report names the defect in trade terms, the timeline shows you filed inside the window. Be firm, be factual, be persistent. Warranty departments are built to outlast casual complainers. They're not built to outlast folders.

When they say no. Get the denial in writing, with the specific reason and the specific warranty section cited. Then you have options, in escalating order: the warranty company's dispute resolution process (most third-party warranties include mediation), a complaint to the Texas Attorney General's consumer protection division for deceptive practices if the facts support it, and a construction-defect attorney. Texas has specific notice requirements before you can sue a builder over construction defects — there's a statutory process with timelines — so talk to a lawyer before you start tearing walls open or filing anything. I'm a mason, not a lawyer, and this is the chapter where that disclaimer matters most: the legal

process is real, it has deadlines, and getting counsel early is cheaper than getting it late.

The outcome you want. For drainage defects — weeps, flashing, cavity — the right repair is opening the wall and building it correctly: proper flashing with sealed laps and end dams, clear cavity, weeps at the right spacing. Not caulk. Not surface sealant. Not "we'll keep an eye on it." For tie defects, proper re-anchoring. For cracks, the cause fixed first, then the cosmetic repair — filling a crack without fixing the movement that caused it is just scheduling the next crack. Get the scope of the agreed repair in writing before work starts, and photograph the open wall during the repair. Those photos are your proof it was done right, and they're worth more than any promise.

Chapter 11: Living With the Wall After the Fight

Say the builder fixed it — or say the warranty window closed and you fixed it yourself with a good mason. Either way, you now own a brick wall, and brick walls need a little attention to stay healthy. Not much. Brick is low-maintenance, not no-maintenance.

Keep the weeps open. Walk the base of your walls once a year. Make sure the weep holes are clear — not caulked, not packed with mulch, not buried by a new layer of soil. If you see efflorescence (white powdery stains) on the brick, that's water moving through the wall carrying salts out. A little is cosmetic. A lot, or in the same spot repeatedly, means water is getting in somewhere it shouldn't — time to look harder.

Keep the grade right. Every couple of years, check that soil and mulch haven't crept back up over the brick. Landscapers love to top-dress beds, and every top-dress buries the wall a little deeper. Pull it back. Keep water flowing away from the house.

Watch the sealant joints. Expansion joints and the caulked

joints around windows and doors are maintenance items — the sealant lasts years, not decades. When it cracks and pulls away, water gets a direct path into the cavity. Re-caulking those joints is cheap homeowner maintenance that prevents expensive wall repairs.

Don't paint the brick to hide problems. I know there's a whole book in this series about painting brick, but it bears repeating here: paint on brick traps moisture behind the coating. If your wall has drainage defects, painting it makes everything worse — the water still gets in, and now it can't get out through the face either. Fix the wall first. Then decide about paint.

Keep your file. Everything you documented in Chapter 9 — keep it. When you sell the house, that file is worth money: "builder-corrected drainage defects, 2027, with photos of the open wall and the proper flashing installation" is a disclosure that builds buyer confidence instead of raising questions. And if a related problem ever surfaces later, you're not starting from zero.

Here's the bottom line of this whole book: new doesn't mean right. The brick on a new home is only as good as the wall behind it, and the wall behind it is only as good as the details

nobody sees — the flashing, the weeps, the clean cavity, the ties. Those details are the builder's job, the warranty is your leverage, and documentation is how you use it. Walk your walls, photograph everything, file in writing, and don't accept "that's normal" from anybody who can't explain why in terms you understand. You've got a good wall system on your house. Make the builder deliver all of it.

About the Author

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