

The Leaking Chimney — A Chimney Leak Repair Guide: Finding Where Water Gets In and Fixing It Right

The Four Places a Chimney Actually Leaks, How to Tell Which
One Is Yours, and What a Proper Fix Looks Like

by Travis Nech

Champion Brick Repair — championbrickrepair.com

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Chapter 1: Chimney Leak Repair Starts With the Right Question — Why Is My Chimney Leaking?

Every year, usually after the first big fall rain, my phone rings with the same question: "Why is my chimney leaking?" Water in the firebox. A brown stain blooming on the ceiling next to the chimney. Damp drywall, a musty smell, rust forming on the damper. The homeowner wants one answer and one fix. Here's the truth fifty years has taught me: a leaking chimney has four usual suspects, and the fix for one does nothing for the others. Chimney leak repair starts with diagnosis, not with a tube of caulk.

The four places a chimney actually leaks:

1. **The crown** — the concrete slab on top. Cracked crown, water goes straight down into the masonry.
2. **The flashing** — the metal where the chimney meets the roof. Failed flashing, water runs into the attic and walls.
3. **The mortar** — deteriorated joints in the brickwork. Failed mortar, the whole chimney becomes a sponge.

4. **The cap** — the metal lid over the flue. Missing or damaged cap, rain falls straight down the flue into your firebox.

That's the whole list for the vast majority of chimney leaks. Not the shingles (possible, but rarely the real cause when the chimney is the suspect). Not the siding. Not "the chimney just leaks because it's old." One of those four — sometimes two at once — is letting water in, and each one leaves different evidence.

The most important thing to understand before we go further: water doesn't travel straight down. It seeps into any opening and moves downward along whatever path it finds — down the flue, along a rafter, behind brick, through wall cavities — and it shows up wherever gravity and the path deliver it, which is often far from where it got in. A stain on the ceiling six feet from the chimney can be a chimney leak. Water in the firebox can come from the flashing, not the top. This is why guessing is expensive: the symptom points in a direction, but only diagnosis finds the door the water walked through.

This book is the diagnostic manual. We'll read the symptoms, interrogate each suspect, learn how to prove which one is

guilty, and talk about what a proper fix looks like versus the quick fixes that fail. By the end, you'll know what to tell a contractor — or what to demand from one.

Chapter 2: Reading the Symptoms — Where the Water Shows Up

Before you climb anything or call anyone, read the evidence. The location and character of the water tells you which suspect to investigate first. Here's the symptom map I use on every leak call.

Water dripping into the firebox when it rains. The water is coming down the flue. If your chimney is leaking when it rains but stays dry otherwise, that's actually good news diagnostically — it means the entry is rain-driven, not groundwater or condensation, which narrows the suspects to the four in this book. Rain-only leaks point at the top: a missing, damaged, or displaced cap, or a cracked crown letting water into the masonry around the flue. If you hear dripping sounds inside the chimney during rain, same verdict — top entry. Check the cap first (it's visible from the ground with binoculars); check the crown second.

Brown stain on the ceiling near the chimney — but not in the firebox. The water is getting in at the roofline and traveling along framing before it shows. That's flashing, nine

times out of ten. The stain often appears on one side of the chimney breast or a few feet away, wherever the rafter delivered it. Flashing leaks also show up as damp patches on the chimney breast wall itself, or water appearing near the ceiling line in the room below.

Damp brick, white staining (efflorescence), or crumbling mortar on the chimney exterior. Water is moving through the masonry itself — deteriorated mortar joints, porous brick, or both. Efflorescence — that white powdery crust — is the calling card: it means water is carrying soluble salts out of the masonry as it evaporates. The wall is telling you it's been wet inside. This is the slow leak, the one that's been happening for years before anyone noticed.

Rust on the damper, the firebox doors, or the metal flue components. Chronic moisture is coming down the flue — cap or crown issue, usually long-standing. Rust doesn't form from one rainstorm. It forms from seasons of water entry. If the damper is rusted, the leak is old, and the interior damage is further along than the visible symptoms suggest.

Peeling paint or bubbling plaster on walls adjacent to the chimney. Water is traveling inside the wall cavity — could be flashing, could be mortar, could be both. The paint is the last

thing to show it; the framing behind it has been wet longer than the paint has been peeling.

Musty smell near the fireplace, especially in summer. Old, recurring moisture. Mold or mildew is growing somewhere in the chimney system or the surrounding framing. The leak may not even be active right now — but it was, repeatedly, and it'll be back with the next rain.

Two symptoms at once. Very common. A failed crown and failed flashing together. Bad mortar plus a missing cap. Chimneys deteriorate as systems — when maintenance has been deferred, multiple parts fail on the same timeline. Don't stop diagnosing at the first suspect. Check all four, every time.

Write down what you see before you call anyone. "Water in the firebox during heavy rain, rust on the damper, white staining on the south face of the chimney" is a diagnostic brief. "My chimney leaks" is a shrug. The brief gets you an accurate diagnosis. The shrug gets you a guess — and guesses get sealed with caulk.

Chapter 3: Suspect #1 — The Crown

The crown is the concrete slab spanning the top of your chimney, under the cap. Its job is to shed water away from the flue and the brickwork below. When it cracks — and every crown cracks eventually — water goes straight down into the masonry, and from there into everything below.

Why crowns crack. Weather, mostly. The crown sits fully exposed, taking sun, rain, and freeze-thaw. Water gets into a hairline crack, freezes, expands, and wedges the crack wider. In North Texas, the cycle repeats dozens of times each winter — not deep freezes, but constant freeze-thaw cycling that destroys concrete from the inside. Thermal movement adds to it: the flue expands and contracts with heat at a different rate than the crown, and if there's no expansion joint between them, the joint breaks and water walks in. Some crowns were also just built wrong — flat instead of sloped, no overhang, no drip edge — which means water sits on them instead of shedding, and sitting water finds every weakness.

How to tell it's the crown. The symptoms from Chapter 2: water in the firebox during rain, dripping sounds in the flue,

rust on the damper. From the ground with binoculars, look for visible cracks in the crown, pieces missing at the edges, or a crown that looks flat and tired. A crown with no overhang past the brick face — water running straight off the crown down the brick — is a crown that's been soaking its own chimney for years. If the crown looks like a thin smear of mortar instead of a proper slab, it was never a real crown to begin with. A lot of builder-grade chimneys have exactly that: a mortar wash, not a crown. It cracks in the first few years and leaks quietly for a decade.

What a proper fix looks like. It depends on the crown's condition, and this is where honesty matters:

- **Hairline cracks, structurally sound crown:** clean it, seal the cracks, and coat it with a brush-grade crown sealant. This is maintenance — \$150 to \$550 — and it's the right fix for a crown that's fundamentally sound. It buys years.
- **Deteriorated but salvageable crown:** crack repair, resurfacing, patching — \$350 to \$2,300 depending on extent. For crowns that are worn but still structurally there.
- **Failed crown — large cracks, missing chunks,**

lifting off the brick, no drip edge: rebuild it. The old crown comes off, a new one is formed and poured with proper slope, a minimum one-inch overhang past the brick, a drip edge underneath that breaks the water's path, and an expansion joint at the flue. \$1,000 to \$3,000. Patching a failed crown is the tube-of-caulk approach at a higher price — it buys a little time and not much else.

The caulk-tube version. Smearing silicone or roofing tar over crown cracks. It'll hold for a season, maybe two, then the Texas sun breaks it down and the water goes right back in — often worse, because now it's trapped under a failed sealant layer. Sealant has its place: as a topcoat over a sound crown, applied correctly. As a substitute for a rebuild on a failed crown, it's a delay, not a repair. If a bid proposes "sealing the crown" for a crown with missing chunks, that bid is selling you next year's leak at this year's price.

Chapter 4: Suspect #2 — The Flashing

Flashing is the metal that seals the joint where the chimney passes through the roof. It's the number-one leak location on most chimneys — and the most misdiagnosed, because the water shows up far from where it gets in.

Why flashing fails. It's a joint between two things that move differently: the chimney (rigid, heavy, barely moves) and the roof (flexes with temperature, settles, gets replaced). Every thermal cycle works the joint. Sealant dries out and splits. Metal corrodes — especially in the galvanized flashing most builders install. Hail dents it and pops the seal lines. And roof replacements are the silent killer: the roof gets torn off and replaced, the step flashing gets disturbed or skipped, the counter-flashing never gets reset into the mortar joints, and the new roof leaks at the chimney from day one. If your chimney started leaking after a roof replacement, start here and don't bother with the other suspects until you've ruled this one out.

How to tell it's the flashing. The symptoms: ceiling stains near the chimney but not in the firebox, damp patches on the

chimney breast wall, water appearing near the ceiling line in the room below the roof penetration. From the ground, look at the base of the chimney where it meets the roof — rust staining running down, visible gaps, sealant that's cracked and peeling, flashing that looks lifted or displaced. After heavy rain, check the attic if you can get up there safely: water staining on the underside of the roof deck around the chimney is flashing's signature. It doesn't take much of a gap — a pinhole or a lifted edge the width of a credit card can admit a surprising amount of water in a driving rain.

What a proper fix looks like. Real flashing repair is two parts: step flashing (L-shaped metal woven into each shingle course up the chimney sides) and counter-flashing (metal set into a reglet groove cut into the chimney's mortar joints, folded down over the step flashing). A proper chimney flashing repair — \$300 to \$1,800 depending on whether it's a reseal or a full replacement — addresses both parts. Water running down the roof hits the step flashing and gets kicked out; water running down the chimney hits the counter-flashing and gets kicked over the step flashing. It's a system, and it only works as a system. Full replacement means cutting the reglet, setting new counter-flashing, weaving new step flashing into the shingles, and sealing it as a system, not

as a smear.

The caulk-tube version. Roofing tar or silicone smeared along the joint where the chimney meets the roof. This is the single most common "chimney leak repair" in America and the single most common reason the leak comes back. Sealant-only flashing repair fails because sealant isn't flashing — it has no mechanical path for water, it breaks down in UV, and it traps water behind it when it fails. A sealant smear over failed flashing is a one-season patch that makes the real repair harder, because now the mason has to cut through the mess to get to the joint. If a bid says "reseal flashing" and nothing else, ask what's underneath the sealant and how long the sealant lasts. Then ask for the full-replacement price. Compare honestly.

Roofer or mason? Whoever does it must understand both sides of the joint — the shingle coursing and the mortar reglet. The bid that puts step flashing and counter-flashing on the same piece of paper, from the same contractor, is the bid that can't blame the other trade when it leaks. If the work splits across two contractors, make sure the split is at a clean line and somebody owns the joint itself.

Chapter 5: Suspect #3 — The Mortar

Brick and mortar are porous. That's not a defect — it's the nature of masonry. But when mortar joints deteriorate — crumbling, cracked, receding, falling out — the chimney stops being a wall that happens to absorb a little water and becomes a sponge. Water soaks through the joints, saturates the brick, and migrates inward. This is the slow leak: no dramatic drip, just years of quiet saturation doing structural damage out of sight.

Why mortar fails on chimneys first. The chimney takes the worst weather on the house with zero shelter. Full sun bakes it, driving rain soaks it, freeze-thaw wedges it, and flue heat cycles it — every day, every season. Mortar has a 20-to-30-year service life under normal conditions; on a chimney, "normal conditions" don't apply. A chimney built in 1995 with original mortar is living on borrowed time in 2026. The south and west faces go first (sun and prevailing weather), which is why one side of a chimney can be failing while the other looks fine.

How to tell it's the mortar. The symptoms: efflorescence

(white staining) on the chimney exterior, crumbling or receding joints you can see from the ground, mortar sand collecting at the base of the chimney, damp brick that stays dark long after rain stops. The key test: drag a key across a mortar joint. If it leaves a groove, the mortar has failed. If the joint is soft, powdery, or missing in places, water has an open door. Inside, look for crumbling mortar in the firebox, peeling paint on nearby walls, or a general dampness around the chimney breast that never fully dries.

What a proper fix looks like. Repointing: cutting out the failed mortar to proper depth and packing in new mortar matched to the original in strength, color, and composition. On a chimney, that runs \$500 to \$2,500 depending on how much joint is failed and how high the work is. The critical rule — the one that separates a repair from a future problem — is that the new mortar must never be harder than the brick. Hard Portland-heavy mortar against older or softer brick causes the brick faces to spall off within a few years. The mortar is supposed to be the sacrificial element. A mason who can't tell you what mortar type he's using and why is guessing with your chimney.

After repointing: waterproofing — done right. Once the

mortar is sound, a breathable, penetrating water repellent (silane/siloxane type) is legitimate protection — \$150 to \$820 or more depending on the chimney size. It reduces absorption while letting vapor escape. What it is NOT is a substitute for repointing. Painting a waterproofer over failed mortar is like putting a raincoat on a screen door — the water still gets through the holes, and now you've spent the waterproofing money too. Fix the mortar first. Then, and only then, talk about repellent. And never let anyone apply a film-forming sealer — the kind that leaves a glossy skin — to a chimney. It traps moisture inside, and trapped moisture plus a Texas freeze-thaw cycle pops brick faces off. That's not protection. That's damage with a receipt.

The caulk-tube version. There isn't a great caulk-tube version for failed mortar, which is why this suspect gets misdiagnosed the most. What happens instead: the leak gets blamed on the flashing (sealant smear, fails), then on the crown (sealant coat, fails), and the mortar keeps drinking water through two rounds of wrong fixes. If your chimney has been "repaired" twice and still leaks, look at the mortar. It's been the problem the whole time.

Chapter 6: Suspect #4 — The Cap

The chimney cap is the metal lid covering the flue opening at the very top. When it's missing, damaged, or displaced, rain falls straight down the flue — no mystery, no travel path, just water pouring into your fireplace every time it rains.

Why caps fail. They're metal, fully exposed, at the highest point of the house. Galvanized caps rust through. Wind displaces poorly secured caps. Hail dents them. And some chimneys simply never had one — the builder skipped it, or a previous owner removed it and never replaced it. An uncapped flue is also an open invitation to animals: raccoons, squirrels, and chimney swifts all love an open chimney, and a nesting animal can block the flue partially or completely.

How to tell it's the cap. The symptoms are the most direct of all four suspects: water visibly entering the firebox during rain, dripping sounds from the flue, debris (leaves, twigs, nesting material) in the firebox. From the ground with binoculars: is the cap there? Is it straight? Is it rusted through? A cap that's tilted, displaced, or visibly corroded is a cap that's not doing its job. If there's no cap at all — just an

open flue — you've found your leak, and the fix is the simplest in this book.

What a proper fix looks like. Cap replacement: \$200 to \$850 for the unit and installation, depending on size and material. The material matters more than the price: stainless steel lasts decades in Texas weather; galvanized rusts out in years. Copper is the premium permanent option. The bid should name the material. And the cap should fit — a cap that's the wrong size, poorly secured, or missing its spark-arrest screen is a future service call. While the cap is off, by the way, is the moment to look down the flue: a \$80–\$200 inspection with a camera catches liner damage, blockages, and animal nests before they become their own chapters.

Prefab chimneys: the chase cover. If your chimney is a framed, sided chase rather than full masonry, your "cap" is really a chase cover — the metal lid over the whole top of the chase. Galvanized chase covers rust through, usually starting at the edges and seams. A rusted-through chase cover leaks exactly like a failed crown, and the fix is the same conversation: stainless steel replacement, properly sized with an overhang and drip edge. If your sided chimney is leaking at the top, check the chase cover before you check anything

else.

The caulk-tube version. There isn't one for a missing cap — you can't caulk an open hole shut and still use the fireplace. The caulk-tube failure here is different: it's the homeowner who installs the cheapest galvanized cap and calls it done. Three years later it's rusted through and the leak is back, and the "cheap" cap cost twice. Buy the stainless cap once.

Chapter 7: Proving It — How to Confirm Which Suspect Is Guilty

Diagnosis by symptom gets you to the likely suspect. Proof gets you to the right repair. Here's how leaks get confirmed — what you can do, and what a professional does.

The rain watch. The simplest diagnostic tool is patience. During the next good rain, watch the chimney — safely, from inside and from the ground. Note exactly where water appears, when it starts (immediately with the rain, or hours later?), and how it behaves. Water that appears in the firebox within minutes of rain starting is top entry (cap or crown). Water that shows up hours later, or the day after, traveled through masonry (mortar) or along framing (flashing). Timing is evidence. Write it down.

The controlled water test. Professionals confirm leak sources by introducing water in a controlled way — wetting one suspect area at a time (with a hose, low pressure, starting low on the chimney and working up) while someone inside watches for the first sign of water. The area being wetted when water appears is the entry point. This is real

diagnostics, not folk wisdom — but it has rules: test one area at a time, give each area time, start low and work up (so you don't confuse runoff from above with entry at the test point). Done right, it eliminates guessing. Done wrong — blasting the whole chimney at once — it tells you nothing. If a contractor proposes a water test, ask him to describe the sequence. "Start low, work up, one area at a time" is the right answer.

The attic inspection. If you can access your attic safely, look at the underside of the roof deck around the chimney during or right after rain. Water staining, damp sheathing, or active dripping on the chimney-side of the penetration is flashing evidence. Staining higher up, away from the penetration, points elsewhere. Bring a flashlight and a phone camera. Photos of active water paths are worth more than any description.

The wind-driven rain exception. Some chimneys only leak in wind-driven rain — dry in a vertical downpour, wet when the wind blows the rain sideways. That's a real diagnostic clue, not a fluke. Wind-driven rain hits the vertical faces of the chimney that normal rain never touches, which points at the mortar joints and the brick faces rather than the crown or cap. If your leak needs wind to appear, the suspect is the

masonry itself — failed mortar, porous brick, or both — and the fix is repointing plus repellent, not a new cap. Note the wind direction when it leaks, too: the face the wind hits is the face that's failing.

The professional inspection. A chimney professional brings three things you don't have: safe roof access, a camera for the flue, and pattern recognition from hundreds of chimneys. The inspection — \$80 to \$200 — should cover all four suspects: crown condition, cap condition and fit, flashing detail, mortar condition, plus a flue camera run. The deliverable is a written diagnosis naming the entry point (or points) and the recommended repair for each. If the "inspection" is a glance from the driveway and a quote for the most expensive repair, you didn't get an inspection. You got a sales call.

When it's more than one. The honest outcome of a good inspection is sometimes "two of them." A fifteen-year-neglected chimney often has a cracked crown AND failed flashing, or bad mortar AND a missing cap. Don't let a single-fix bid talk you out of a real diagnosis. Fixing one of two leaks leaves you with a chimney that still leaks — and a homeowner who now believes chimney repair doesn't work.

It works. It just has to be the right repair, for every entry point, once.

Chapter 8: The Tube of Caulk — Quick Fixes That Fail

Every failed chimney leak repair I've ever been called to fix started with a quick fix. Here's the rogues' gallery — what they are, why they fail, and what they cost you in the end.

The flashing smear. Roofing tar or silicone along the chimney-to-roof joint. Fails in one to three seasons as UV breaks down the sealant and thermal movement opens the joint. Worse, it traps water behind the failed sealant and makes the eventual proper repair harder — the mason has to cut through the mess. Cost of the smear: a few hundred. Cost of the delay: the leak continued the whole time, and interior damage compounded.

The crown paint-over. Elastomeric paint or thick sealant over a structurally failed crown. Looks great for a year. Then the cracks underneath keep moving, the coating splits, and water goes in — now trapped under a failed coating that hides the damage from inspection. The paint-over turns a visible problem into an invisible one. That's not a repair. That's concealment.

The waterproofing shortcut. Sealer applied over failed mortar, over a cracked crown, over bad flashing — sold as "waterproofing the chimney." Waterproofing is a topcoat for sound masonry. Applied over failed masonry, it's money spent to delay the real repair while the damage continues underneath. The rule: waterproofing is the last step, never the first.

The cap-only fix. New cap installed on a chimney that's actually leaking through the flashing. The firebox stays dry for a while (less direct rain down the flue), the homeowner thinks it's fixed, and the flashing leak keeps soaking the attic for another two years. This is misdiagnosis with a receipt — the cap may have needed replacing anyway, but it wasn't the leak.

The inside fix. Sealant, paint, or patching applied to the interior — the firebox, the chimney breast drywall — to stop water that's coming from outside. This never works. Water under pressure (even just gravity and capillary action) will go around, under, or through any interior patch. Leaks get fixed at the entry point, on the outside, or they don't get fixed. Every dollar spent on the inside before the outside is sealed is a dollar spent twice.

The real cost of quick fixes. It's not the money spent on the tube — it's the time. Every season a leak continues is another season of saturated masonry, another freeze-thaw cycle wedging cracks wider, another year of interior damage compounding. A \$300 quick fix that delays a \$1,200 proper repair by three years doesn't cost \$300. It costs \$300 plus three years of damage. The cheapest chimney leak repair is the right one, done once, as early as possible.

Chapter 9: What the Water Already Did — Chimney Water Damage

A chimney leak is never just a leak. By the time you see water, the water has been working for a while. Understanding chimney water damage — what it does, where it hides, and what it costs — is what turns "I'll get to it next spring" into "I'm calling this week."

What water does to masonry. Saturated brick and mortar go through freeze-thaw cycles that wedge cracks wider every winter. Brick faces spall off. Mortar turns to sand. Steel components — flue liners, dampers, firebox hardware — rust. The chimney doesn't just leak; it structurally degrades, and the degradation accelerates: each cycle opens more paths for the next cycle's water. A chimney that's been leaking for five years isn't five times as damaged as one that's leaked for one year. It's worse than that. Damage compounds.

What water does to the house around the chimney. This is the expensive part. Water traveling down through and around the chimney soaks roof decking, rots rafters and framing, saturates insulation (which then stops insulating),

ruins drywall and plaster, peels paint, and grows mold in wall cavities and attics. A flashing leak that's been running for three years can mean reframing part of a roof valley, replacing decking, remediating mold, and re-drywalling a room — thousands of dollars of carpentry and interior work on top of the few-hundred-dollar flashing repair that would have prevented all of it. The chimney leak is the cheap part. The water damage is the expensive part. Every month of delay moves money from the first category to the second.

What water does to the flue system. Chronic moisture rusts dampers until they freeze shut or crumble. It deteriorates clay flue liners — moisture plus heat cycling plus time cracks tiles that would otherwise last decades. It corrodes the metal components of prefab systems. A rusted-out damper in a masonry fireplace is a few hundred dollars; a liner destroyed by years of moisture is a \$1,500–\$7,000 replacement. The flue is the part of the chimney you can't see, which makes it the part where damage goes the longest unnoticed.

The mold question. Where there's chronic moisture in wall cavities and attics, there's mold. Not every chimney leak grows mold, but the ones that run for years through enclosed spaces do. Mold remediation is its own trade with its own

pricing, and it's never cheap. If your chimney leak comes with a musty smell that doesn't go away in dry weather, the conversation has expanded beyond masonry. Get the leak fixed first — remediation before the entry point is sealed is money spent twice — but don't pretend the smell is just "old house."

The honest math of delay. A crown sealing caught early: \$150–\$550. The same crown ignored for five years, now needing a full rebuild, plus spalled brick replacement, plus interior drywall repair from the years of leakage: \$3,000–\$6,000. A flashing reseal caught early versus a full flashing replacement plus rotted decking plus mold remediation: hundreds versus thousands. I don't say this to scare anyone. I say it because it's the actual arithmetic of every leaking chimney I've ever worked on. Water is patient. It does its work whether you're watching or not. The only variable is whether you pay for the repair or for the damage.

Chapter 10: What a Proper Fix Costs — The Leak Repair Price List

Diagnosis tells you which suspect. This chapter tells you what the conviction costs. These are 2026 ranges for each leak source's proper fix — not the caulk-tube version, the real one.

| Leak source | Proper fix | 2026 range |

| --- | --- | --- |

| Cracked crown (sound) | Clean, seal cracks, crown sealant coat | \$150–\$550 |

| Failed crown | Full crown rebuild (slope, overhang, drip edge, expansion joint) | \$1,000–\$3,000 |

| Flashing (minor) | Reseal sound flashing | \$300–\$500 |

| Flashing (failed) | Full replacement: step + counter-flashing | \$800–\$1,800 |

| Mortar (deteriorated) | Repointing / tuckpointing | \$500–\$2,500 |

| Mortar (after repair) | Breathable water repellent | \$150–

\$820+ |

| Cap (damaged/missing) | Cap replacement (stainless recommended) | \$200–\$850 |

| Chase cover (rusted) | Stainless chase cover replacement | \$500–\$1,100 |

| Flue liner (damaged) | Liner replacement | \$1,500–\$7,000 |

| Diagnosis | Professional inspection with flue camera | \$80–\$200 |

How to use this table. Get the diagnosis first, then check the table. If a bid for a crown rebuild comes in at \$900, it's below the honest range — ask what's being skipped. If a flashing reseal is quoted at \$1,500, ask why it's not a full replacement at that price. The table doesn't replace the bid. It keeps the bid honest.

The bundle discount is real. When the inspection finds two entry points — say, a cracked crown and failed flashing — one contractor doing both in a single mobilization is meaningfully cheaper than two separate jobs. Scaffolding, setup, and the trip itself are fixed costs; spreading them across two repairs instead of one is pure savings. This is also

why the "while you're up there" conversation from the inspection matters: every related repair bundled now is a return visit you don't pay for later.

What about the interior damage? The table covers the chimney. Interior repairs — drywall, paint, decking, framing, mold remediation — are separate trades with separate pricing, and they only get quoted after the leak is stopped. Any contractor who wants to fix your drywall before fixing your chimney is doing the job backwards. Outside first. Inside second. Always.

Chapter 11: Keeping It Dry — The Maintenance Plan

A chimney that doesn't leak isn't lucky. It's maintained. Here's the plan that keeps the four suspects from becoming four repairs.

Annual inspection: \$80–\$200. Once a year, fall is ideal in Texas — after hail season, before freeze-thaw season. Crown, cap, flashing, mortar, flue camera. The inspection that finds a \$150 crown-sealing need just saved you a \$1,500 crown rebuild. This is the highest-return money in chimney ownership.

The homeowner's five-minute check, twice a year. Binoculars, from the ground: cap present and straight? Crown visibly cracked? Flashing line intact? Mortar falling out? White staining spreading? Any "yes" moves the professional inspection up. You don't need to diagnose — you need to notice. Noticing early is the whole game.

Crown sealing every few years: \$150–\$550. When the inspection shows hairline cracks on a sound crown, seal it. Don't wait for the hairlines to become highways.

Water repellent after repointing: \$150–\$820+. Breathable, penetrating, on sound masonry. Applied after the mortar is fixed, never instead of fixing it.

Gutters and drainage. Keep water away from the chimney base. A downspout dumping against the chimney, a gutter overflowing onto the flashing line every rain — these are hundred-dollar fixes that prevent thousand-dollar leaks. Walk the water path around your chimney in a hard rain once a year. Where the water goes wrong is where your next leak starts.

After every hailstorm. The chimney gets the same post-hail check as the roof. Crown chips, cap dents, flashing displacement, fresh spalling. Document with dated photos. If the roof is being replaced after hail, the chimney flashing is replaced with it — in the same scope, before the roofers leave.

Keep a chimney file. It sounds fussy, but a simple folder — inspection reports, dated photos, receipts for every repair — pays for itself the first time you file an insurance claim or sell the house. Chimney water damage claims live or die on documentation: "the crown was sealed in 2024, the flashing replaced in 2025, here's the inspector's report" turns a

disputed claim into a paid one. And when you sell, that folder is proof to the buyer that the chimney was maintained, not just patched. Ten minutes of filing a year. Worth it.

Add it up: a few hundred dollars a year against the price list in Chapter 10. Chimneys don't start leaking suddenly. They start leaking gradually, visibly, and cheaply — and become expensive only when nobody's looking. Be the person who's looking.

Chapter 12: The 50-Year Summary — What I'd Tell My Own Neighbor

Here's the whole book in one paragraph.

Your chimney leaks from one of four places: the crown, the flashing, the mortar, or the cap. Where the water shows up tells you which one — firebox water means the top, ceiling stains near the chimney mean the flashing, white staining and crumbling joints mean the mortar, and visible dripping down the flue means the cap. Prove it before you fix it: watch it rain, check the attic, get a professional inspection with a flue camera. Fix it right, not fast — a proper crown rebuild, real step-and-counter flashing, true repointing, a stainless cap — because every tube-of-caulk shortcut just rents you the leak for another season while the water damage compounds. And maintain it: a few hundred a year in inspection and sealing beats every number in the price list.

Fifty years of Texas chimneys, and the pattern never changes: the leak was visible for years before it was expensive. The crown was cracking. The flashing was lifting. The mortar was powdering. Somebody just wasn't looking. Now you're

looking. That's the whole book — and it's enough.

If this saved you from one bad repair, pass it to the neighbor. That's what it's for. And if your chimney's lintels are part of the story — the steel above the nearby windows and doors fails on the same timeline — the permanent, engineered answer is worth knowing about:

[chimney and lintel repair](https://lintlerepair.com) is what the LintelLOCK system was built for, and straightforward [chimney leak repair](https://championbrickrepair.com) is what we do every week in Dallas.

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/).