

Waterproofing Your Brick Home: Sealers, Breathability, and the Truth

Keep the Water Off, Let the Vapor Out

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Chapter 1: Waterproofing a Brick House

Starts With Understanding Brick

Every year somebody tries to sell a Texas homeowner a miracle in a five-gallon bucket — a sealer that will "waterproof" their brick house forever. Some of those sealers are legitimate, useful products. Some of them will destroy the wall they're painted on. The difference between the two is the subject of this book, and it comes down to one fact you need to understand before you buy anything: brick has to breathe.

Brick is porous. That's not a flaw; it's the nature of the material. A fired clay brick is full of microscopic pores and capillaries, and those pores do two jobs over the life of the wall. In a rainstorm, the brick takes on water — the pores fill. After the storm, the brick gives that water back up — the pores empty, the wall dries. Wet, dry, wet, dry, for a hundred years. That cycle is how brick walls have survived centuries. The wall manages water by moving it, not by blocking it.

Waterproofing a brick house, done right, doesn't stop that cycle. It changes the first half of it: a good water repellent keeps liquid water from soaking into the pores during the

rain, while still letting water vapor escape from inside the wall afterward. The wall stays drier during the storm and still dries the way it always has. That's the whole trick, and it's a narrow trick — because a sealer that blocks liquid water coming in but also blocks vapor going out has turned your breathable brick wall into a sealed box with wet brick inside it. And wet brick inside a sealed box is how you get spalling, freeze-thaw damage, and a wall that deteriorates faster sealed than it ever did unsealed.

I've spent fifty years watching Texas brick deal with water, and I'll tell you the truth most sealer salesmen won't: most brick houses don't need sealing at all. The ones that do need it need a specific kind of sealer, applied a specific way, at a specific time in the wall's life. This book will tell you which house is yours, which sealer belongs on it, what it should cost in 2026, and how to spot the products and the pitches that will wreck your wall.

Chapter 2: Where Water Actually Gets Into Your Brick

Before we talk about keeping water out, let's be honest about where it gets in — because sealing the brick faces treats exactly one entry point, and on most houses it's not even the main one.

The mortar joints. On a brick veneer house, the mortar is the weak link by design — softer than the brick, the first thing to deteriorate. Failed, cracked, or recessed mortar joints are the number-one water entry on most Texas brick homes. Water doesn't politely soak through the middle of a brick; it runs into open joints and travels. If your joints are shot, no sealer fixes that — the water goes around the sealer through the joints. Repoint first, seal second. Always.

Above the brick. Water runs downhill, and most of the water that damages brick walls starts at the roofline. Failed flashing, missing drip edges, gutters that overflow or discharge against the wall, a chimney with a cracked crown — these dump concentrated water onto the brick below. Sealing the brick while the gutter pours onto it is mopping

the floor with the faucet running. Fix the water source first.

At penetrations. Windows, doors, hose bibs, electrical penetrations, vents — every hole in the wall is a place where the cladding system is interrupted, and every one needs proper flashing and sealant. Water getting in around a window doesn't care what sealer is on the brick six feet away.

From the ground. Splashback at the base of walls, grade sloping toward the house, mulch piled against the brick, sprinklers spraying the wall daily. The bottom two feet of a brick wall live a harder life than the rest of it, and ground-level water problems are drainage problems, not sealer problems.

Through the brick faces themselves. Yes, this happens — wind-driven rain in a Texas storm can push water into porous brick, especially soft or old brick, especially on walls that take the weather. This is the one entry point a water repellent actually addresses. It's real, but it's last on the list for a reason: on most houses, the joints, the roofline, and the drainage are doing far more damage than the brick faces ever will.

The order of operations for waterproofing a brick house is

therefore: fix the mortar, fix the roofline and drainage, seal the penetrations — and only then ask whether the brick faces themselves need a repellent. A contractor who wants to start with the sealer is starting at the end.

Chapter 3: Should I Seal My Brick House?

When the Answer Is Yes

"Should I seal my brick house" is the question I get most on this subject, and the honest answer is: sometimes. Here's when sealing earns its place.

When repeated wetting overwhelms the wall's drying.

Some walls just take too much water — a wall with no roof overhang that catches every storm, a chimney fully exposed to weather on all sides, a garden wall or retaining wall that stays damp. When the wall can't dry out between wettings faster than it wets, a breathable water repellent cuts the wetting side of the equation and lets the drying catch up. The masonry preservation specialists put it plainly: sealing becomes appropriate when repeated wetting overwhelms the wall's ability to dry between weather events.

When efflorescence won't quit. White mineral staining that keeps coming back after you've fixed the drainage means water is still moving through the wall carrying salts. A penetrating repellent reduces the water absorption that drives the salt migration. It won't fix the water source —

nothing replaces fixing the source — but it reduces the symptom while you work the real problem.

When interior moisture traces to absorption through the brick. Damp spots on interior walls that line up with exterior brick, moisture meter readings that spike after rain on the windward side — when you've ruled out the roof, the plumbing, and the flashing, and the evidence points to water soaking through the masonry itself, a repellent is a reasonable step.

On chimneys. Chimneys are the hardest-working masonry on the house — full exposure, thermal cycling, wind-driven rain from every direction. A breathable repellent on a sound chimney is one of the highest-value sealing jobs in residential masonry. The chimney takes the worst beating and benefits the most.

On soft or historic brick that's sound but thirsty. Old, soft brick absorbs water fast. When the brick is sound — faces intact, mortar good — but drinks water in every storm, a penetrating repellent slows the intake without changing the brick's ability to dry. This is the preservation-approved use: protect the historic fabric without sealing it in plastic.

Notice what's not on the list: "because the salesman said every house needs it." Most brick houses in Texas — sound mortar, good drainage, working gutters — manage water fine without any sealer. The wall has been doing its wet-dry cycle since it was built. If it isn't showing distress, the best sealer is the one you don't apply. Sealing a healthy wall buys you nothing and introduces a maintenance cycle — repellents wear off and need reapplication — that didn't exist before.

Chapter 4: When Sealing Is the Wrong Call

Now the other list — the situations where sealing is wrong, useless, or actively destructive. This chapter saves more walls than the last one.

When the mortar is failing. A water repellent will not bridge failed joints, and it must not go on before repointing. Here's a critical technical fact from the brick manufacturers: tuckpointing mortar will not bond properly to a treated wall. If you seal first and repoint later, the new mortar won't stick right. The sequence is fixed: repoint first, then seal. A contractor who wants to seal your wall with crumbling joints is selling you a bucket, not a solution.

When water is coming from somewhere else. Sealing the brick faces does nothing about water from a failed chimney crown, overflowing gutters, bad window flashing, or grade sloping toward the house. Worse, it can hide the evidence — staining patterns that would have told you where the water was coming from get suppressed while the water keeps coming. Diagnose first, seal last.

When the wall is already wet inside. A repellent keeps

water out; it doesn't get water out. Sealing a wall that's holding moisture — from a recent leak, from ground saturation, from years of trapped water — locks that moisture in. The wall must be dry before treatment. After any water event, the priorities are extracting the water and drying the wall, not sealing it. Trapping fresh moisture behind a quick fix is how a one-time water event turns into years of damage.

When the brick is spalling or deteriorated. Sealer doesn't glue failing brick faces back on. Deteriorated brick needs masonry repair — repointing, brick replacement, addressing the water source — and only sound, stable masonry should ever be sealed. Sealing over damage preserves the damage.

When somebody proposes sealing from the inside. Interior sealers on a brick wall don't stop exterior water entry — the water still gets into the wall from outside, and now it can't dry to the inside either. Effective protection starts on the exterior, where the water enters. An interior sealer on a wet wall is a moisture trap with a paint job.

On a healthy wall with no symptoms. I'll say it again because the salesmen won't: a sound brick wall with good mortar and good drainage doesn't need sealer. You're adding

cost, adding a reapplication cycle, and adding risk for zero benefit. The best-maintained brick walls in Texas are the ones nobody ever "waterproofed."

Chapter 5: The Sealer Families — What You're Actually Buying

Walk into a masonry supply or scroll the sealer aisle online and you'll drown in labels. Here's the honest taxonomy — every brick sealer on the market belongs to one of these families, and the family matters more than the brand.

Penetrating silane and siloxane water repellents — the right family. These are the products the brick industry, the preservationists, and the transportation departments specify. They soak into the brick's pores — penetrating millimeters deep — and line the pores with a water-repelling chemistry. Liquid water beads up and rolls off instead of soaking in. But the pores stay open, which means water vapor still passes through — the wall breathes. No film forms on the surface. The brick looks exactly the same — no shine, no darkening, no change in appearance. Performance runs seven to ten years on vertical brick walls before reapplication, and the serious products carry test data — some are even DOT-approved as water repellents for highway structures. When this book says "breathable sealer," this is what it means:

penetrating silane/siloxane, nothing else.

Silicone-based sealers — the risky cousins. Some silicone sealers form a skin on the surface — a plastic-like film that blocks liquid water and blocks vapor too. Over the long term, that film traps moisture in the brick. The preservation guidance is blunt: silicone-based film-formers can act like a plastic skin, and while they stop wind-driven rain from getting in, they cause damage over time by trapping moisture. There are breathable silicone formulations, but the family has a trust problem for good reason — too many of them seal the wall shut.

Acrylic sealers — do not put these on exterior brick. This is the hard line, straight from the brick manufacturers' technical bulletins: do not use surface-forming or acrylic-based sealers on exterior masonry walls. Acrylic sealers can actually do more harm than good. They trap moisture inside the brick wall, which causes spalling during freeze-thaw cycles. They create a "funnel effect" — the film forms little ledges on the brick edges that channel more water into the wall than would have gotten in without the sealer. An acrylic sealer on exterior brick can make water problems worse while looking like protection. If a contractor proposes an

acrylic sealer for your brick, that's your sign to end the conversation.

Paints and elastomeric coatings — different job entirely.

Paint on brick is a coating choice, not a waterproofing strategy — and once brick is painted, it's a maintenance commitment, because paint on masonry needs redoing and the wall's drying changes. Elastomeric coatings bridge hairline cracks and shed water while staying vapor-permeable, which makes them a legitimate maintenance tool for cracked stucco or masonry — but they're coatings, with their own prep and their own lifespan, not a substitute for a penetrating repellent on bare brick.

The one-line version: on bare exterior brick, penetrating silane/siloxane or nothing. Everything that forms a film — acrylics especially — stays off the wall.

Chapter 6: How the Wrong Sealer Destroys a Brick Wall

I want you to understand the failure mechanics, because "traps moisture" is too vague to protect you at the sales counter. Here's what actually happens inside a brick wall sealed with the wrong product.

The setup. Your brick wall gets coated with a film-forming sealer — acrylic, non-breathable silicone, thick paint. Looks great. Water beads on the surface. The salesman takes his check.

The wetting. Water still gets into the wall — because water always finds a way. Through a hairline crack in the film. Through an unsealed mortar joint the applicator missed. Through the top of the wall where flashing failed. Wicking up from the ground at the base. The film doesn't make the wall waterproof; it makes the wall water-resistant on the outside face, with all the usual entry points still open.

The trap. Here's the kill step: the water that gets in can't get back out. Before the sealer, the wall dried by evaporation off the brick faces — the pores breathed the moisture out

between storms. Now the faces are filmed shut. The moisture sits in the brick, in the mortar, in the wall cavity. Every storm adds more. The wall gets progressively wetter inside its sealed skin.

The freeze. North Texas gets hard freezes. Water expands when it freezes — about nine percent by volume — and it does it with enormous force. Saturated brick going through freeze-thaw cycles with no way to dry does what saturated brick does: the faces pop off. Spalling. The brick faces flake and peel, sometimes in sheets. And here's the cruelty — the spalling happens under the sealer film, so the first sign is often the film itself bubbling or peeling, carrying brick face with it.

The funnel effect. The brick manufacturers documented this one specifically: acrylic films form tiny ledges and lips on the edges of the brick units, and those ledges catch water and channel it into the wall — into the joints, into cracks — directing more water inward than an unsealed wall would have taken. The "protection" actively waters the wall.

The timeline. This doesn't happen in a month. It takes seasons — wet winters, freeze cycles, years of trapped moisture accumulating. By the time the spalling shows, the

wall has been deteriorating for years, and the repair is masonry restoration: brick replacement, repointing, sometimes partial rebuilds. The sealer that was supposed to protect the wall becomes the reason the wall needs rebuilding.

This is why the product choice in Chapter 5 isn't a preference — it's the whole game. A penetrating silane/siloxane repellent can't do this: the pores stay open, vapor escapes, the wall dries. The wrong sealer does it by design, slowly, invisibly, until the faces come off.

Chapter 7: The 2026 Costs — Products, Coverage, and Pro Application

Let's talk real money. Sealer costs break into two very different numbers: the bucket and the labor.

The bucket. Professional-grade penetrating silane/siloxane sealers run roughly **\$60 to \$130 per gallon** at retail, with five-gallon pails — the economical buy — landing around **\$200 to \$350** depending on brand and solids content. The DOT-grade and architect-specified products sit at the top of that range. Coverage runs roughly **100 to 225 square feet per gallon** depending on the product and how thirsty your brick is — porous brick drinks more, dense brick less, and most products want two coats. Do the math for your wall: a 1,500-square-foot wall area at 150 square feet per gallon needs 10 gallons per coat, 20 gallons for two coats — four five-gallon pails, roughly \$800 to \$1,400 in material for a whole house, less for a chimney or a single elevation.

The labor. Professional application — wash, prep, spray or roll two coats — is priced by the job, and it depends on height, access, and how much prep the wall needs. A single-

story elevation is straightforward; a two-story chimney needs scaffolding or a lift. The honest framing: the material is the cheap part. You're paying for the wash, the prep, the careful application — two uniform coats, wet-on-wet per the product directions — and the contractor's judgment about whether your wall should be sealed at all. Get the application as its own line item, separate from any repointing or repair the wall needs first.

What moves the number. Wall condition is the big one — a wall that needs cleaning, efflorescence removal, and joint repair before sealing costs more than a wall that's ready. Height and access, same as every exterior trade. And product choice: the cheap big-box "masonry sealer" and the professional silane/siloxane are different products at different prices doing different jobs — make sure the bid names the product, not just "sealer."

The reapplication cycle. Budget for it upfront: penetrating repellents last seven to ten years on vertical walls, less on chimneys and horizontal surfaces that take standing water. Sealing isn't a one-time purchase; it's a maintenance cycle. A contractor who sells you the first application without mentioning the reapplication is selling, not advising.

The cheapest option. Doing it yourself is genuinely viable for a ground-level wall — wash it, let it dry, spray or roll two coats per the directions. The product doesn't care who holds the sprayer. What DIY can't replace is the judgment call: whether the wall needs sealing, whether the mortar's sound, whether the water's coming from somewhere a sealer can't reach. Pay for the judgment even if you do the spraying.

Chapter 8: Doing It Right — The Application That Actually Works

When sealing is the right call and the product is the right product, the application still decides the outcome. Here's the procedure, in order, with nothing skipped.

1. Fix the masonry first. Repoint every failed joint. Replace spalled brick. Let the new mortar cure — fresh mortar needs weeks before sealing, and remember the iron rule: new mortar will not bond properly to a wall that's already been treated. Every repair happens before the sealer, no exceptions.

2. Clean the wall. Dirt, chalk, efflorescence, mildew — all of it comes off before treatment, because the manufacturers are explicit: it will be difficult or impossible to remove dirt, stains, or efflorescence after treatment. The repellent locks in whatever's on the wall. Clean it like you're preparing it for inspection, because in a sense you are — you're about to make its current condition semi-permanent.

3. Let the wall dry. The masonry must be dry — not "hasn't rained today" dry, but actually dry through the wall. After a

wet season, that can mean waiting weeks. Sealing a damp wall traps the dampness. Patience here is structural.

4. Test patch. Apply the product to an inconspicuous area first. Treated walls can look slightly different — and they bead water visibly when wet, which surprises some homeowners. The test patch confirms the appearance is acceptable and the product behaves on your specific brick. Every manufacturer recommends this. Skip it and you're gambling the whole wall's appearance.

5. Apply per the directions — two coats, wet on wet. The standard for silane/siloxane repellents is two uniform coats, the second applied while the first is still wet, by spray, roller, or brush. "Uniform" is doing work in that sentence — missed spots are unprotected spots, and the wall doesn't grade on effort. Overspray on windows and trim gets cleaned promptly; the good products don't etch glass, but don't test that claim unnecessarily.

6. Protect the work. Fresh repellent needs its cure time without rain washing it off. Watch the forecast. A storm six hours after application can ruin the job — and the ruined job looks fine until the first winter, when the unprotected areas show it.

7. Document it. Write down the product name, the date, and the coverage. Seven to ten years from now, when it's time to reapply, you'll want to know what's on the wall. Future-you will thank present-you.

That's the whole procedure. Nothing exotic — just the unglamorous discipline of doing every step. The sealer failures I've investigated over the years were almost never product failures. They were step-one failures, step-three failures, step-five failures. The bucket was fine. The process wasn't.

Chapter 9: Efflorescence — Reading the White Stains

Those white stains on brick — the chalky white bloom that shows up after rain — have a name: efflorescence. It's mineral salts being carried out of the masonry by water and left behind when the water evaporates. Understanding it matters for this book because efflorescence is both a diagnostic tool and a sealing consideration.

What it tells you. Efflorescence means water is moving through the wall. That's it — that's the whole message. The salts were always in the brick and mortar; the water mobilized them. A little efflorescence on a new wall is normal — construction moisture working its way out in the first year or two. Efflorescence that keeps coming back, year after year, means water keeps traveling through the wall, and the question is where it's entering. Before you seal, find the water. The stain is the messenger; don't shoot it.

Sealing and efflorescence. A penetrating repellent reduces water absorption, which reduces the salt migration that causes the staining — so yes, the right sealer helps with

efflorescence. But two warnings. First, clean the efflorescence off before sealing — once the repellent's on, that stain is locked in, and you'll be looking at it for seven years. Second, if the efflorescence is heavy and persistent, the water volume is telling you something a surface treatment can't fix — a drainage problem, a flashing failure, a leak above. Seal the symptom if you want, but fix the source or the source will find another way to show itself.

What efflorescence isn't. It's not mold. It's not structural damage by itself — the salts on the surface are cosmetic. But heavy, recurring efflorescence with deteriorating mortar underneath means the water movement is also breaking down the joints, and that's a repointing conversation, not a cleaning conversation.

The test. If you're not sure whether the white staining is efflorescence or something else: efflorescence brushes off dry and dissolves in water. If it doesn't brush off, it might be a different deposit — calcium carbonate staining from mortar, for instance, which is harder and needs a different approach. When in doubt, a mason's eyes beat a homeowner's guess.

Chapter 10: Chimneys — The Wall That Needs It Most

If there's one place on a Texas house where a breathable water repellent earns its keep, it's the chimney. Here's why the chimney gets its own chapter.

The chimney is the most exposed masonry on the house. Every elevation catches weather. There's no overhang protecting it. It thermal-cycles every time the fireplace runs — heating up, cooling down, expanding, contracting — which works the mortar joints harder than any wall on the house. Wind-driven rain hits it from whatever direction the storm comes from. And when chimney mortar fails, water doesn't just stain something — it gets into the flue chase, damages the firebox, rots the framing around the chimney, and turns a repointing job into a rebuild.

A penetrating silane/siloxane repellent on a sound chimney — joints repointed, crown intact, flashing good — is the highest-value sealing application in residential masonry. It cuts the water absorption on the most abused masonry on the house, and the chimney's the place where reduced

absorption pays off fastest in extended joint life.

But the chimney is also where the rules bite hardest. The crown has to be sound first — a cracked crown dumps water straight down the chase, and no sealer on the brick faces changes that. The flashing has to be right. And the repellent goes on the masonry, not as a substitute for a crown repair or a flashing fix. I've seen chimneys sealed top to bottom while the crown sat cracked open like a mouth — the homeowner paid for waterproofing and got a wet chimney with beaded water on it.

Chimney math: it's a small wall area, so the material cost is modest — often a gallon or two. The labor is the number, because it's high work. But per dollar of protection, nothing on the house beats a sealed, sound chimney. If you're going to seal exactly one thing, seal the chimney.

Chapter 11: Texas Weather and Your Sealed Wall

Texas gives sealed brick a specific set of conditions — mostly favorable, with a few sharp edges.

The freeze-thaw reality. North Texas freezes — not Minnesota, but real hard freezes, sometimes after wet weeks. This is the climate fact that makes product choice non-negotiable here. A breathable repellent handles our freeze-thaw fine: the wall takes on less water, what it takes on can still dry, and the reduced saturation means less expansion damage. A film-forming sealer in North Texas is playing Russian roulette with every February — trapped moisture plus freeze equals spalling, and our winters deliver both ingredients. If you live north of Waco, the wrong sealer isn't a theoretical risk. It's a countdown.

The heat. Texas summers are the applicator's challenge and the wall's friend. Application needs morning work, shade, and attention — repellent applied to a 150-degree wall in August sun doesn't behave the way the data sheet promises. But long-term, our heat is kind to sealed walls: long dry

stretches let the wall dry thoroughly, which is exactly what the breathable system wants. The wet-dry cycle here has long dry phases, and that's the easy version of the cycle.

The storms. Spring storm season throws wind-driven rain sideways at walls — the exact condition repellents are tested against, with some products rated to stop wind-driven rain at highway speeds. After a major storm season, walk the sealed walls: the beading should still bead. Where water no longer beads, the repellent's wearing — note it for the reapplication schedule.

The clay. Our expansive clay soil moves foundations, and moving foundations crack mortar joints — and cracked joints are water entry that no sealer bridges. In Texas, the sealer conversation always runs alongside the foundation conversation: seal the brick faces all you want, but if the soil's moving the wall, the joints are the water path and repointing is the fix. Seal the wall, watch the soil.

Sprinklers, again. If a sprinkler sprays your sealed brick wall every morning, you're testing the repellent's lifespan daily for no reason. Redirect it. The repellent is rated for storms, not for a pressure washer on a timer.

Chapter 12: The Maintenance Cycle — What Happens After Year Seven

A penetrating repellent doesn't last forever. Seven to ten years on vertical walls, less on chimneys and anywhere water stands. Here's how to manage the cycle instead of being surprised by it.

Watch the beading. The simplest test in masonry: spray the wall with a hose or watch it in rain. Where the repellent's alive, water beads and sheets off. Where it's worn, the brick darkens as it absorbs. When large areas stop beading, it's reapplication time. You don't need a lab — you need rain and eyes.

Reapplication is easier than application. The wall's already clean-ish, the mortar's been repaired, you know the product. Wash, dry, two coats. Many homeowners who hired out the first application do the reapplication themselves — the judgment call was the hard part, and it's already been made.

Don't switch families mid-stream. If the wall has silane/siloxane on it, reapply silane/siloxane. Don't layer a different chemistry over it — compatibility isn't guaranteed,

and the wall doesn't need an experiment. Your documentation from Chapter 8 tells you what's on there. This is why you wrote it down.

The chimney goes first. Higher exposure, more thermal cycling, faster wear. Inspect the chimney's beading every couple of years and expect to recoat it ahead of the walls. Budget it as its own small job, not as part of the whole-house cycle.

What if you skip reapplication? Nothing dramatic. The wall just goes back to being an unsealed brick wall — which, as Chapter 3 established, is fine for most houses. The repellent wearing off isn't damage; it's the end of a maintenance cycle you can renew or not. No wall ever failed because its sealer wore off on schedule. Walls fail from the wrong sealer, not from the absence of reapplication.

Chapter 13: Hiring It — Bids, Red Flags, and the Right Questions

If you're hiring the sealing out, here's how to do it without getting sold a bucket of trouble.

The bid names the product. Not "masonry sealer" — the actual product name, the chemistry (silane/siloxane penetrating repellent), and the manufacturer's application spec. If the contractor can't name the product, he hasn't chosen one — he's planning to grab whatever's on the shelf that morning.

The bid prices prep separately. Washing, efflorescence removal, joint repair, crack repair — each its own line. The prep is half the job and most of the judgment. A bid that's one line — "seal brick house, \$X" — is a bid with no prep in it, which means the sealer's going over whatever's there.

The bid addresses the water first. A good contractor walks the house and talks about gutters, flashing, drainage, and mortar before he talks about sealer. If his first recommendation is the bucket and he hasn't looked at the roofline, he's a salesman with a sprayer.

Red flags. "Waterproofs your brick permanently" — repellents aren't permanent and brick isn't waterproofed; it's water-repelled for seven to ten years. Acrylic or "elastomeric waterproof coating" proposed for bare brick — wrong family, walk away. Sealing proposed before repointing — wrong sequence. A price dramatically under the others — the prep's been deleted. "We seal from the inside too" — moisture trap. Pressure to decide today — the wall will wait; the salesman won't.

The questions. What product, specifically, and why this one for my brick? What's the solids content and the expected service life? How are you prepping — wash method, efflorescence treatment, joint repair? Is the wall dry enough, and how are you judging that? Two coats, wet-on-wet, per the data sheet? What's your plan if it rains during the cure? And: do I actually need this — what happens if we don't seal? The last question is the most important one. An honest contractor will sometimes answer "nothing — your wall's fine." Hire that man for the next thing that actually needs doing.

Chapter 15: The Sales Pitches You'll Hear — Translated

Before the final framework, one more piece of armor: the actual sentences salesmen say at kitchen tables, translated into what they mean.

"This waterproofs your brick permanently." Translation: it water-repels for seven to ten years, and brick is never "waterproof." "Permanent" is doing fraud-adjacent work in that sentence. The honest version — "this reduces water absorption for about a decade" — doesn't close deals as fast, which is why you don't hear it.

"Every brick home needs this." Translation: I sell sealer. Most brick homes don't need it — Chapter 3's list is short on purpose. The man who tells you your healthy wall needs a bucket is telling you about his quota, not your wall.

"It's breathable — see, it's got silicone in it." Translation: maybe, maybe not. "Silicone" on a label doesn't mean vapor-permeable — plenty of silicone sealers form films. Ask for the chemistry — silane/siloxane penetrating repellent — and the data sheet's vapor transmission numbers. "Breathable"

without numbers is a word, not a specification.

"We can seal right over the old paint/sealer." Translation: we're skipping the compatibility question. Layering chemistries without checking compatibility is how you get peeling, poor penetration, and a wall wearing two failed coatings instead of one. What's on the wall now determines what can go on next.

"This will stop your efflorescence/leaks/cracks." Translation: it might reduce the symptom while the cause continues. A repellent doesn't fix flashing, doesn't bridge failed joints, doesn't cure a leak. If the pitch promises the bucket fixes the problem rather than assisting the repair, the problem isn't fixed.

"Special price, today only." Translation: the oldest close in the book. Your wall has stood for decades; it can stand another week while you get a second bid and read this book twice. Any sealer worth buying is worth buying next Tuesday at the same price.

The pattern in every pitch: urgency, universality, permanence — hurry, everyone needs it, lasts forever. The truth about brick sealers is the opposite on all three: take

your time, most walls don't need it, it lasts a decade. Now you know which voice to trust — the one that sounds like this book, not the one that sounds like a countdown.

Chapter 16: The Decision Framework — Your Wall, Your Call

Let's put the whole book on one page. Walk through it in order.

1. Is water damaging the wall? Staining, spalling, deteriorating mortar, damp inside, efflorescence that won't quit. If no — stop. Your wall doesn't need sealing. Spend the money on something that does.

2. Where's the water coming from? Walk the roofline, the gutters, the flashing, the grade, the sprinklers, the mortar joints. Fix every source you find. Most "sealer jobs" die at this step — the water had a source, the source gets fixed, and the wall never needed the bucket.

3. Is the masonry sound? Repoint the failed joints. Replace the spalled brick. Let new mortar cure. Sound masonry is the prerequisite — sealer over unsound masonry is a waste and a risk.

4. Is the wall dry? Actually dry, through the wall, not just surface-dry. Wait if you have to. This step has no shortcut.

5. Does the wall still need help? After the sources are fixed and the masonry is sound — is this a wall that still takes more water than it can dry? Chimney, exposed elevation, thirsty old brick, persistent efflorescence? If yes, seal it. If no, you're done — and "done" is a perfectly good outcome.

6. The right product, applied right. Penetrating silane/siloxane. Two coats, wet on wet, per the data sheet. Test patch first. Document everything.

That's the framework. It's conservative by design — it seals fewer walls than the salesmen would like, and every wall it seals is a wall that needed it. In fifty years, I've never seen a homeowner regret not sealing a healthy wall. I've seen plenty regret sealing the wrong one with the wrong product.

A Final Word Before You Buy the Bucket

Brick has survived thousands of years without sealers. The Roman brick, the colonial brick, the brick on your grandparents' house — all of it managed water the same way: take it in, give it back up, dry out, repeat. A sealer doesn't improve on that cycle. At best, it assists it — less water in during the storm, same drying after. At worst, it breaks the cycle and destroys the wall.

So the question was never "which sealer." The question was always "does this wall need help managing water, and what kind of help." Sometimes the help is a gutter. Sometimes it's a trowel full of mortar. Sometimes it's a breathable repellent on a thirsty chimney. The bucket is the last resort, not the first — and now you know enough to tell the difference.

Your walls have been talking. Now you speak the language.

If you want to keep learning, my [free brick repair books](<https://metro-foundation-repair.web.app/free-books/>) cover the rest of it — and for the technical deep end on water repellents, the [Brick Industry Association on water repellents](<https://www.gobrick.com>) publishes the industry's own guidance. For the hands-on side — the repointing, the chimney work, the [brick waterproofing](<https://championbrickrepair.com>) done right — that's what we do.

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/>).