When purchasing an old house with the intent of saving money, you must be aware of several potential hidden costs. Many items, if left unchecked, can lead to huge unexpected costs after you have closed a sale. Once you have located a potential house for purchase, therefore, you should inspect (or hire a professional to inspect) all areas of the home.

Part 1 of the Purchasing an Old House article in this issue of *Vintage Living* discusses some checks for the exterior. Three common home exteriors include paint, brick, and stone.

Paint

If the house is painted, look for peeling, checking, and chalking.

Peeling is when the paint has lifted from the wall (like orange peels). Peeling usually is caused from old paint or poor insulation. If the paint is older than seven years, peeling is natural. When a house is insulated poorly, heat escapes and moisture develops. The moisture saturates the wood while trying to escape. In these cases, the house has to be reinsulated by removing the outside or inside walls to make the paint stick.

Checking is when the paint has little cracks on its surface with a rough-looking finish. Checking is caused by insufficient drying time between coats or poor-quality paint. To correct a checking problem, you have to remove the paint by stripping or sandblasting it and then repaint.

Chalking is when the paint surface is dull and powdery. It is caused from the use of oil-based paints. To correct chalking, simply wash the wall surface. Be aware, though, that each time the surface is washed, the paint becomes thinner.

Brick and Stone

If the house has brick siding, check if it is a solid brick wall or veneer brick. Solid brick walls usually have a header brace every third or fourth row with full bricks in the wall. A header brace is full bricks laid the opposite direction. Veneer brick, the most common today, is an outside layer of brick attached to an existing studded wall, giving the appearance of an all-brick home. Although veneer brick can look fine, check for these potential problems: moisture in the wood, termites, and poor insulation.

Stone houses are a lot like veneer brick houses in their construction and potential problems. The major difference is stone houses are much more expensive because of construction methods.

Next Issue – Part 2

Next week’s issue, which is the second of a four-part article about items to look for when purchasing an old house, covers these areas of the house: foundation, crawl space, and roof.