

PREPARED BY INSPECTEUR ÉLITE

Guide + Checklist for a Pre-Purchase Inspection

The points to observe, the warning signs to recognize, and the right questions to ask before lifting your conditions.

Every building tells a story.

IN THIS GUIDE

- 50+ points to observe
- Common Quebec-specific risks
- Questions to ask before lifting conditions
- A plain-language glossary of inspection terms
- A notes page to prepare your call



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

How to use this guide

This guide combines a field checklist with Quebec-specific expert cues. Check items on site, jot down what you see, and save your questions for the inspector.

Important: this document helps you prepare your visit and observe more carefully. It does not replace a professional inspection, an engineering or legal opinion, a code-compliance review, or a laboratory test. When in doubt, consult the appropriate qualified specialist.

How to check

- Check** the item observed on site
- Note** location, photo, question
- Ask** what is not visible, to the inspector

Potential impact

- **High** safety, structure or water
- **Moderate** monitor and plan
- **Low** routine upkeep
- **Specialist** bring in a specialist

THE INSPECTEUR ÉLITE METHOD

Start outside, follow the water, look for changes, document what repeats. Safety and water first; cosmetic defects come after risks and major costs.

Grounds, drainage and foundation

Almost everything starts outside. Follow the water and look at the base of the building first.

QUEBEC-SPECIFIC

Pyrite and slab heave

In several areas (South Shore, Montérégie), the fill under the slab can swell and lift the basement floor. Star-shaped cracks, a domed slab: a pyrite test is recommended before lifting conditions.

REMEMBER

Water is rarely a detail. An isolated trace may be old; a persistent odour or active infiltration deserves immediate follow-up.

TO CHECK ● high ● moderate ● low

GROUNDS AND DRAINAGE

- Grading slopes water away from the foundation** ●
Look for puddles after rain, especially near the walls.
- Downspouts discharge well away from walls** ●
A downspout at the wall base saturates the soil and drain.
- Window wells clear and above grade** ●
Full of soil, they let water in through the basement window.
- No standing water or settling** ●
Sinking soil or lingering water: drainage to assess.
- Hard surfaces sloped away from the building** ●
A walk or driveway tilted toward the house returns water to it.

FOUNDATION AND VISIBLE MASONRY

- No wide, active or damp cracks** ●
Stair-step or over 3 mm: a possible sign of movement.
- No major efflorescence or spalling** ●
White powdery deposit: water is passing through the concrete.
- Brick without bulging or open joints** ●
A bulging wall lets water in, then frost.
- Lintels and sills without corrosion** ●
Rusted steel signals masonry repairs ahead.

Cladding, windows and access

*The envelope protects everything behind it.
Look for water-entry points and fall hazards.*

QUEBEC-SPECIFIC

French drain and window wells

Invisible but essential, they carry water away from the foundation. Wells full of soil, poorly connected downspouts: so many paths for water. Have the drain's age and condition assessed.

INSPECTEUR ÉLITE TIP

A loose railing or an unstable step is fixed before anything else: it is first a matter of safety.

TO CHECK ● high ● moderate ● low

CLADDING, DOORS AND WINDOWS

Cladding complete, without swelling ●

Blisters or warped panels: water behind the siding.

Caulking continuous and not cracked ●

A dry, split joint is water's first way in.

Sills and flashing shed water outward ●

Poorly sloped, they hold water against the window.

Windows: no fogging between the panes ●

Fogging = broken seal, glazing to replace.

Doors close well, without rot ●

A sticking door can hint at slight movement.

BALCONIES, STAIRS AND RAILINGS

Railings stable and well anchored ●

A loose railing is an immediate fall hazard.

Steps and landings without fall risk ●

Soft wood or spalled concrete: danger and deferred upkeep.

Balconies shed water, no rotten wood ●

Standing water rots the balcony structure over time.

Slab and parking cracks noted ●

Some are normal, others follow movement.

Following the water, top to bottom

Water enters from above and collects below. Check the roof from the ground and the basement closely.

QUEBEC-SPECIFIC

Iron ochre

An orange bacterial deposit can clog the French drain and cause backups. Signs: orange water, an iron smell, a drain that runs poorly. Have it assessed before buying.

REMEMBER

Follow the water top to bottom: the same infiltration can start at the roof and show up in the basement.

TO CHECK ● high ● moderate ● low

ROOF AND DRAINAGE

Shingles without lifting or missing areas ●

A roof near end of life lets water through.

Flashing sealed at walls and chimneys ●

Flashing is the number-one cause of leaks.

No debris or standing water visible ●

Moss and debris hold moisture.

Gutters clean, without overflow ●

A clogged gutter dumps water onto the foundation.

Downspouts carry water away from the base ●

Make sure they do not empty at the wall.

BASEMENT AND STRUCTURE

No free water or active infiltration ●

Water in the basement is the costliest problem.

Foundation walls without worrying cracks ●

Several repairs can mean a recurring issue.

Sump pump and drains observed ●

Test the pump: it guards against backups.

Walls not hidden by stored items ●

What is behind the boxes deserves a second look.

Rooms, kitchen and bathrooms

Inside, look for signs of movement, moisture and ventilation.

QUEBEC-SPECIFIC

Moisture and mould

Musty smell, stains, efflorescence: water is getting in somewhere. The source must be found before redoing finishes, or the problem returns. Foggy windows in winter = ventilation to review.

INSPECTEUR ÉLITE TIP

Open the cabinets under the sinks and smell the air: odour often reveals what the eye misses.

TO CHECK ● high ● moderate ● low

LIVING AREAS

- No ceiling stains or halos** ●
A dry halo can hide a leak. Ask for the history.
- No musty, damp or sewer odour** ●
Persistent odours betray a hidden problem.
- Floors without slope or sag** ●
A soft or sloping floor can signal a structural issue.
- Walls without repeated diagonal cracks** ●
Cracks at door corners often follow movement.
- Interior doors and windows without binding** ●
If several stick in one spot, note it.

KITCHEN, BATH AND LAUNDRY

- Under sinks: no leak or swollen cabinet** ●
A swollen cabinet base means a slow, repeated leak.
- Joints around tubs, showers and toilets sound** ●
A cracked joint lets water reach the structure.
- Bath fans vent to the outside** ●
A fan venting into the attic creates mould.
- Water heater without leak or corrosion** ●
Note the age: past ~10 years, plan to replace it.

Plumbing and electrical

Systems touch on safety. Note the age, the makeshift fixes, and any obvious hazards.

QUEBEC-SPECIFIC

Kitec plumbing and aluminum wiring

Two common Quebec insurance issues: Kitec piping (recall, orange/blue fittings) and 1965-75 aluminum wiring. Have both checked by a pro.

REMEMBER

A burning smell, a hot panel or makeshift wiring is non-negotiable: have it checked without delay.

TO CHECK ● high ● moderate ● low

PLUMBING

- Reasonable pressure and drainage** ●
Open several taps: a drop can reveal an issue.

- Pipes without corrosion or makeshift fixes** ●
Patches and clamps often hide a chronic leak.

- Water heater: age noted, no corrosion** ●
Rusted at the bottom, it is nearing the end.

- Main and local shutoff valves located** ●
Knowing where to cut the water prevents major damage.

ELECTRICAL AND SAFETY

- Panel without odour, heat or corrosion** ●
Burning smell or hot panel: check without delay.

- No exposed wire or open box** ●
Makeshift wiring is a shock and fire risk.

- Smoke / carbon monoxide alarms present** ●
Mandatory and vital. Note any missing locations.

- Exits and egress without obvious danger** ●
Each bedroom needs an exit (plexes, basements).

Heating, cooling and ventilation

A good indoor climate depends on maintained equipment and consistent ventilation, especially in Quebec winters.

QUEBEC-SPECIFIC

Ice dams

Ice building up at the roof edge in winter forces water under the shingles and stains ceilings. Often a sign of insufficient attic ventilation or insulation. Watch for it on older homes.

INSPECTEUR ÉLITE TIP

Note the age and serial number of each unit: invaluable for planning replacements and budgets.

TO CHECK ● high ● moderate ● low

HEATING AND VENTILATION

- Equipment accessible and maintained** ●

Ask for proof: a neglected unit ages fast.

- No combustion odour or corrosion** ●

A combustion smell demands a check (monoxide).

- Heat pump: clearance and drainage visible** ●

Tight to the wall or poorly drained, it wears fast.

- Consistent ventilation, controlled humidity** ●

Foggy windows in winter mean mould and discomfort.

DURING THE VISIT

Photos to take

A picture is worth a thousand words, especially for your inspector. Take these shots during the visit (never in an unsafe spot).

The foundation and every crack

With a ruler or a coin for scale.

The electrical panel, door open

And its labelling, for the inspector.

The water heater and its plate

To note the age and model.

Water traces in the basement

Walls, floors and around the drains.

The roof from the ground

And from an upper window if possible.

Flashing, chimney and vents

The most common water-entry points.

Gutters and downspouts

And where they discharge the water.

Serial numbers of the equipment

Heat pump, furnace, air exchanger.

The attic and its insulation

Without disturbing vermiculite, if present.

Any repair that looks recent

A fix sometimes hides a problem.

INSPECTEUR ÉLITE TIP

Always take a wide shot, then a close-up. The location matters as much as the defect.

The risks to know

THE MOST FEARED · HIGH IMPACT



Pyrite and slab heave

Fill under the slab that swells with moisture and lifts the basement floor. Star-shaped cracks, a domed slab: a test is recommended before lifting conditions.



Iron ochre

HIGH

Orange deposit that clogs the French drain.
Orange water, backups, iron smell.



Vermiculite (possible asbestos)

SPECIALIST REVIEW

Attic insulation that may contain asbestos. Do not disturb; test before renovating.



Aluminum wiring

MODERATE

1965-75 wiring; connections prone to overheating.
Correct via a master electrician.



Kitec plumbing

MODERATE

Piping under recall; orange/blue fittings. Possible failure over time.



Buried oil tank

HIGH

Risk of soil contamination. Check the disclosure and removal certificate.



Ice dams

MODERATE

Ice at the roof edge in winter that forces water back. Often a ventilation issue.



French drain and window wells

MODERATE

Carry water away from the foundation; check the age and upkeep.



Basement moisture

MODERATE

Odour, stains, efflorescence: find the source before redoing finishes.



Condo: reserve fund

SPECIALIST REVIEW

An underfunded reserve signals special assessments. Read minutes, budget, log.

BEFORE YOU DECIDE

Questions to ask

Some answers are not visible during a visit. Check off what you have asked.

TO THE SELLER

- Major work in the last 5 years? Proof?
- Ever had infiltration, backup, mould or a claim?
- Foundation, roof or French drain repairs?
- Age of the roof, water heater and windows?
- Pyrite, iron ochre, vermiculite or a buried oil tank?

TO THE BROKER / SYNDICATE

- Which items are excluded or not warranted?
- Is the seller's declaration complete?
- Condo: reserve fund and maintenance log?
- Past special assessments or upcoming work?

TO THE INSPECTOR

- Which items need a specialist?
- What could not be checked, and why?
- What are the priorities before lifting conditions?

Who to call for each problem

A good inspection identifies the issues; some then call for a specialist. Knowing who to call saves you time and avoids surprises.



Structure, major cracks or movement

▶ Engineer or qualified specialist



Electrical (panel, wiring)

▶ Master electrician



Plumbing and water heater

▶ Qualified plumber



Roofing

▶ Qualified roofer



Suspected moisture or mould

▶ Appropriate specialist, testing if needed



Pyrite, vermiculite or possible asbestos

▶ Specialized lab or testing



French drain or iron ochre

▶ Drainage and foundation specialist

REMEMBER

An honest professional does not claim to solve everything in one visit. They tell you clearly what goes beyond a visual inspection and warrants a specialist's opinion.

DECISION

Before lifting your conditions

Do a full round before committing. Check each step; anything left open deserves an answer.

- I have read the seller's declaration
- I have reviewed the condo documents, if applicable
- I have identified the items not visible or not checked
- I have requested the necessary specialist follow-ups
- I understand the priority risks
- I understand the likely short- and mid-term work
- I have discussed the major points with my inspector

DO NOT IGNORE

- Active infiltration or fresh water trace
- Burning smell or hot electrical panel
- Unstable railing or fall risk
- Displaced crack or visible movement
- Widespread mould or persistent odour

ROUTINE MAINTENANCE

- Tired caulking to redo
- Peeling paint
- Gutters to clean
- Minor door adjustments

A short inspection glossary

The words you will see in a report, in plain language.

Flashing

Metal that keeps water out at roof junctions (chimney, walls).

Lintel

The beam above a door or window that supports the wall.

Window well

A small retaining wall around a basement window.

Window sill

The lower wall section just beneath a window.

Efflorescence

White deposit left by water passing through concrete or brick.

French drain

Perforated pipe at the foundation footing that drains soil water.

Crawl space

A low space under the floor, with no finished basement.

Caulking

Flexible joint that seals openings against water and air.

Siding / cladding

The exterior wall covering: brick, vinyl, fibre cement.

Reserve fund

A condo's savings set aside for major work.

Sewer backup

Sewage water backing up through basement drains.

Heat pump

A unit that heats and cools by moving heat.

ABOUT THE INSPECTOR

Giacomo Ciavaglia



Certified building inspector - Founder

Giacomo Ciavaglia is a building inspector certified by InterNACHI and IBC. He leads Inspecteur Élite and performs residential, condo, plex and commercial inspections across Greater Montreal.

His method is simple: every building tells a story. Start outside, follow the water, look for changes, and deliver a clear report, generally within 24 h depending on the type of mandate.

Every inspection ends with an on-site verbal review to help you make the right decisions at the right time.

CREDENTIALS

- InterNACHI certified
- IBC member
- Insured by Intact
- Greater Montreal & Laval
- North & South Shore
- West Island

BOOK YOUR INSPECTION

514-802-7215 · inspecteurolite.com · info@inspecteurolite.com

READY FOR THE INSPECTION

My notes and next steps

Prepare your call and your decision. Fill in by hand before talking to your inspector.

MY TOP 3 CONCERNS

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

DOCUMENTS / FOLLOW-UPS TO OBTAIN

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INSPECTOR

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

NEXT STEP

- Book the inspection
- Send the photos
- Request a specialist review
- Clarify with the seller / broker

BOOK AN INSPECTION
514-802-7215 · inspecteurelite.com · info@inspecteurelite.com