

Expert Insight: Chimneys

We recently talked to Shane Imburgia, Chimney Inspector to the Stars, and asked him all about chimneys.

H & L: How did you get into chimney inspection?

SI: My little brother's fiance's uncle owned a chimney company so at 19 years old I started to clean and repair chimneys. It was dirty and I hated heights and then after the Northridge Earthquake in 1994 it was too hard to compete because everyone was fixing broken chimneys. At that point I talked to someone who was doing chimney inspections for litigation. I thought, this could apply to real estate transactions and started the business. From 1995-1996 I was the only guy doing inspections only for real estate, not for court, and not doing repairs.

H & L: What determines how often a chimney should be inspected?

SI: Use and location. There's a national standard that says it should be cleaned yearly. In California where they aren't used as much it shouldn't be left for more than 3 years, but it's best to inspect yearly, especially in Malibu and Santa Monica where the metal corrodes because of the moisture.

H & L: Any good upkeep tips?

SI: Think of a chimney like a car, it's good to start up from time to time so that it isn't just sitting around. In Malibu, and other coastal homes, owners should fire up their chimneys once a week for half an hour to an hour to dissipate any compensation in the pipe. It keeps the collar from rusting out. Also, keep water away from the chimney. I don't like to see vines on a chimney or a sprinkler that hits the chimney. The bricks are very porous.

H & L: What's your favorite type of chimney?

SI: Masonry, good old brick and mortar. If it's built right, it should last 100 years. Metal is corrosive, its lifespan is more like 20-25 years.

H & L: How many fireplaces have you ever had to inspect in one home?

SI: 17. It was in Bel Air for a TV personality who didn't wind up buying the house. I've done bigger houses, but that was definitely the most fireplaces I have seen in one house.

H & L: Do you have a chimney in your house?

SI: Of course. It's a house from 1927 with a brick chimney.

