Viewing a house in France: the buyer's checklist

Written by an independent expert en bâtiment. Every item on this list comes from real jobs.

From stone farmhouses to modern villas: what to look at on a viewing, what to ask the seller and when to call in a building expert. Print it, take it with you and tick as you go.

1 On the viewing: outside

Walls and cracks

- [ ] Cracks wider at the top than the bottom
- [ ] Cracks that have been filled and opened again
- [ ] Stepped cracks around windows and doors
- [ ] Leaning, bulging or hollow-sounding render

Roof

- [ ] Ridge line straight, not dipping
- [ ] No slipped, broken or missing tiles or slates
- [ ] Chimney: flashings sealed, stack upright
- [ ] Gutters and downpipes intact, no overflow stains

Around the house

- [ ] Trees within about 10 m of the walls
- [ ] Ground sloping towards the house
- [ ] Cement render or concrete laid against old stone
- [ ] Pool, terraces and outbuildings: cracks or gaps where they meet the house

2 On the viewing: inside

Damp

- [ ] Tide marks, white salts or flaking plaster low on walls
- [ ] Musty smell, mould behind furniture
- [ ] Fresh paint low down, or a dehumidifier running
- [ ] Every window open on a cold day

Ceilings, floors and doors

- [ ] Stains on ceilings, especially under bathrooms or the roof
- [ ] Floors that slope or bounce, above all in bathrooms
- [ ] Doors and windows that stick or don't close
- [ ] New plaster or boxing-in that hides a wall or beam

Beams and roof space

- [ ] Small round holes and fine dust in timbers
- [ ] Soft or darkened wood, especially at beam ends
- [ ] Daylight, stains or wet insulation in the attic
- [ ] Beams cut for a stair or roof window

Tip: view in the rain if you can, open cupboards, look up, and take photos and a short video of anything you are unsure about. They make a remote opinion possible later.

Found something you're not sure about? Send us your photos and the listing. Our Remote Property Check tells you whether the house is worth a full survey, and its fee counts towards the survey if you go ahead within 30 days. **ebi-surveyors.fr**

3 Questions for the seller or agent

- [ ] When was the roof last redone, and by whom? Is there an invoice?
- [ ] What is the company's SIRET number, and is there a décennale insurance certificate for the work?
- [ ] Have any cracks been repaired? When, by whom, and have they come back?
- [ ] Was any work declared or given planning permission (extension, conversion, roof windows)?
- [ ] Has the house ever flooded, or had an insurance claim for water or subsidence?
- [ ] Has the commune had a drought natural-disaster decree (catastrophe naturelle sécheresse)?
- [ ] Are there any known problems with neighbours, boundaries or rights of way? (Your notaire will check these too.)

4 The seller's diagnostics: what to look for

Diagnostic	What to look for
Energy rating (DPE)	The letter A–G. F and G homes face rental restrictions and often need insulation work.
Septic tank (ANC)	Is the system compliant? If not, how long do you have to bring it up to standard, and at what cost?
Risks (ERP)	Flood, clay shrink-swell and other risk zones for the commune.
Termites, asbestos, lead	Present or not, and where. Required only in some areas or for older buildings.
Electricity and gas	Installations over 15 years old: the list of anomalies found.

5 Call in a building expert if...

- [ ] A crack has reopened or is wider at the top
- [ ] The roof was redone without paperwork
- [ ] Beams show holes, dust or soft wood
- [ ] There is damp you can't explain
- [ ] It is a barn or mas conversion
- [ ] You are buying from abroad and can't visit twice

6 Your notes on this property

PROPERTY / TOWN _____

DATE OF VIEWING _____

ASKING PRICE _____

This checklist is general guidance to help you on a viewing. It is not a survey and does not replace an inspection by a building expert or advice from your notaire.