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A DIRECTORY TO GENERAL SERVICES

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Inspections give peace of mind

When Mr and Mrs Wong were planning to buy a second-hand flat in east Kowloon, they were concerned there might be hidden problems.

Would the roof leak, or would there be cracks on the walls they couldn't spot? It was a big decision, so before they signed the deal, they decided to enlist the help of a clerk of works to inspect the unit.

"It is something that I wanted to get peace of mind about," Mr Wong says.

He paid more than HK\$3,000 for an inspection. He was given a checklist with ticks on various aspects of the flat, which made him more at ease about confirming the purchase.

The Wongs have moved into the unit and haven't found any major problems.

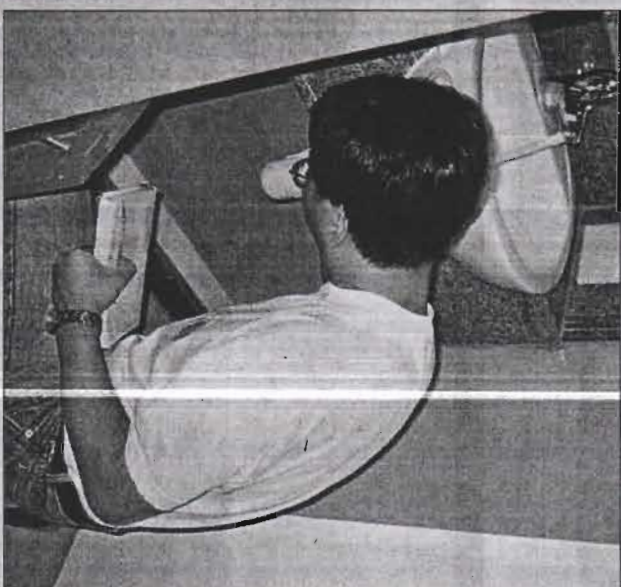
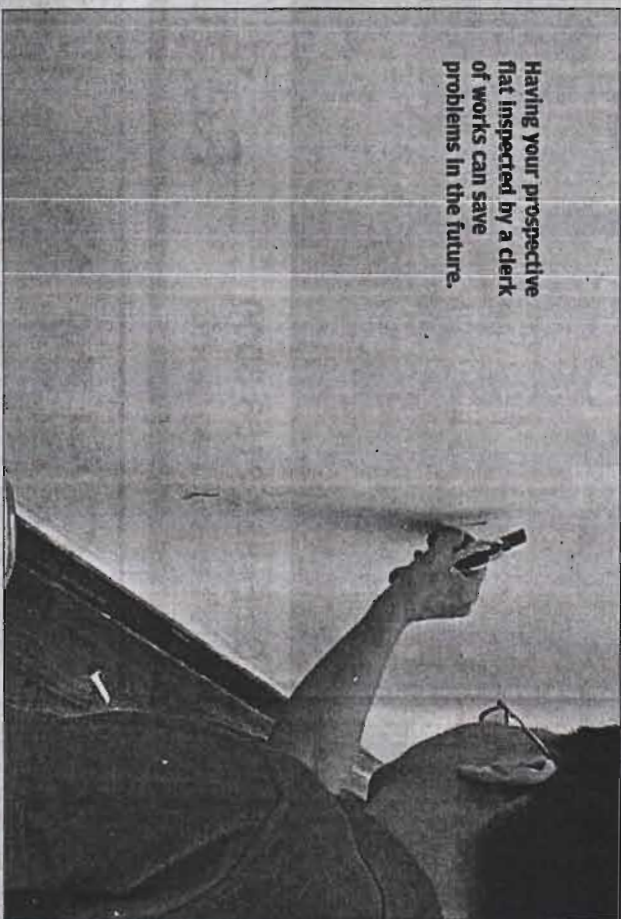
The man who helped Mr Wong was Tsim Chai-nam, who runs a company that inspects flats across the city. With 15 years on the job, Tsim has inspected more than 8,000 units during his career.

"Most inspections are done one or two days before the deal is completed. We inspect both old and new flats, but new flats make up almost 90 per cent of our business," Tsim says. He also helps to inspect units after refurbishment to check on the quality of work.

Typically, he starts with the living room, then he surveys the toilet and kitchen.

His work includes compiling a report

Having your prospective flat inspected by a clerk of works can save problems in the future.



- a defects list - after checking the quality and finishing of walls, roofs, doors, windows, cupboards, pipes, sockets, bathrooms and utensils.

Tsim says a rainy day is best to check if there are any water leaks. But even on a sunny day, his experience can tell whether windows and pipes leak.

Most of his customers are professionals and middle-class families.

"For new flats, if the report shows there are problems, then the flat owner can ask the property developer to make repairs," he says.

For a three-bedroom, 1,000 sq ft flat, it will take two people about one hour to inspect it.

"But of course if the unit has more problems, there it would take longer to inspect," Tsim says.

"People ask for our services because it saves them time and effort to do the important task of quality control on a huge purchasing decision. Also, with our experience we are much more detailed in our flat inspection than if homebuyers were to inspect the flats themselves."

Tsim, who is a member of The Hong Kong Institute of Clerks of Works, says the demand for his service is very much

related to the property market. He gets very busy when a lot of new flats are released onto the market and people move into new homes.

With property purchases being such an important decision for most people, and the occasional reports of problems with homes, flat inspection has become a service that homebuyers are finding useful.

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