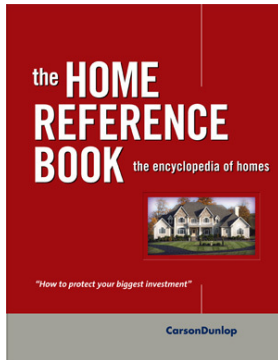




The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them. - Mark Twain

FROM DAVE'S LIBRARY

Book Review by Dave Bottoms



Title: The Home Reference Book
 Publisher: Carson, Dunlop & Associates
 Publication Date: 2010
 Number of Pages: 472
 ISBN: 978-1-895585-80-3
 Cover Price: \$69.00 - \$23.00 depending on quantity

There's no denying it, even if as a home inspector you have never used Carson Dunlop's inspection reporting system, The Home Reference Book, you've undoubtedly heard of it and likely own a copy. I found this book to be an invaluable bridge between how I looked at old houses as a general contractor and how I saw them as a home inspector. I never held the viewpoint that building or renovating houses automatically qualifies one to inspect them for homebuyers. Sure, it definitely helps, but there's so much more to professional home inspection. Sadly, some let their ego get the best of them and can't be bothered to read books or take courses. On the plus side, the money not wasted on books and courses can go towards a nice suit and tie for the first of what may be a series of visits to small claims court.

My first introduction to the Home Reference Book (HRB) came by way of a college course on electrical inspection for home inspectors back in 1996. As a guide line for the course, our teacher handed out copies of the electrical section from the HRB. He often referenced the electrical code but felt the code book was rather limiting for what we'd be doing in the field. Simply put, the code book is not designed to teach people how to inspect the electrical systems of older homes. Our electrical teacher's decision to use that section of the HRB was no doubt a good one for Carson Dunlop, since it wasn't long before my classmates and I were sporting our own copies. Later I purchased Carson Dunlop's ten volume Home Inspec

tion Training Program for home inspectors, which is an outstanding system for anyone starting out in the field.

The Home Reference Book, however, was never intended to be a training tool for new home inspectors. In an email exchange with Carson Dunlop president, Alan Carson, he expressed frustration on how the book was being adopted as a study guide for new home inspectors. "Sadly, there is not one sentence in the Home Reference Book about how to inspect a home or what to look for," he said "It was and is a consumer product, designed to help homeowners understand their home. It was never intended to help inspectors learn their craft. And yet today it is used by many as entry level education, and is even included with the Carson Dunlop Home Inspection Training program offered by over 20 colleges and universities in Canada and through the US, where it is private labeled as the ASHI@HOME program. The Home Reference Book is intended to set the stage for learning about home inspection, it is not the central figure."

The HRB has been described as a living document, so to speak, since it has been updated continuously since its inception back in 1988. Co-written by Alan Carson and Bob Dunlop primarily for internal use by Carson Dunlop employees, it didn't take long for the book to take off. "We introduced the Home Reference Book to the home inspection community at the ASHI conference in January 1989 in Nashville Tennessee," said Alan Carson, "and immediately sensed we had something significant on our hands. We had all kinds of orders from people wanting a single copy and others who adopted it almost immediately as their reporting system. The simple reporting interface made writing a report fast and easy for inspectors, and real estate professionals loved the on-site immediate report delivery.

"Our first edition was 2,000 copies, with forms and layout that were simplistic by today's standards. More recent versions are printed in quantities of 16,000. Changes have been made every year and almost every edition contains additions and revisions. Hundreds of thousands have been printed and used in home inspection businesses throughout North America."

The new soft cover version for 2010 is the 24th edition of the book, featuring over 550 full colour illustrations and updated text. Even the report forms in the back of the book have been updated, along with the contract. The NCR forms that make up the inspection report are now in triplicate, the "Life Cycles and Costs" section has

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FROM DAVE'S LIBRARY *continued*

been revised, and there are nine blank pages for inspector notes. And of course the infamous "When Things Go Wrong" document still plays an important role in managing customer expectations. Although the HRB has an international audience, its Canadian roots show through. The focus has always been to take things that are complicated and present them in simple, easy to understand language. The latest edition is a nice improvement over my much older Home Reference binder. It should also be noted that the book is still available in the binder form with the interchangeable cover for those inspectors who wish to re-brand the book to their own company.

Like every front runner, however, the book has its critics. Some have argued that the book offers too much information for new homebuyers to absorb. At first blush it does appear somewhat overwhelming, and all those report form codes can be daunting, but it really doesn't take long to get the hang of it. For homebuyers who want just the facts, the inspection report points them to the information they need to make an informed purchase decision. Those who embrace the idea of truly understanding how their house works will likely read beyond the "need to know" information. The HRB is also invaluable to anyone looking to make improvements or repairs to their home, since it helps to educate the reader on how things go together and work as a system. As stated on the back cover,

"This remarkable text uses simple language, analogies and plenty of colour illustrations to help the average homeowner understand what house systems and components are supposed to do, and what it means if they don't. This book helps you determine your home's performance and take appropriate action when and where needed. The Home Reference Book gives you the knowledge to protect your biggest investment."

For those new to the industry and considering which reporting system to use, the Home Reference Book is definitely worth a look. Carson Dunlop has put a lot of work into its success over the years and it shows. For the average homebuyer or owner looking for a definitive book covering the numerous systems and components that make up a house, the HRB is chockablock with information that is, more often than not, accompanied by detailed illustrations. Whether you are using it as a reporting system or buying it for a house warming gift, with the HRB you can't go wrong. ■

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