



[home](#) | [inspection request](#) | [inspectors](#) | [about us](#) | [reports](#) | [checklists](#) | [contractors](#) | [articles](#) | [technical info](#) | [email](#)

Key Word List

In an effort to assist our customers and friends in better understanding the sometimes complex terminology used in the real estate world, we have provided a short glossary of often used words and phrases.

This is meant to assist you in achieving a clearer understanding of construction and contracting terms. Please contact a Licensed General Contractor or an approved Contracting dictionary for more definitive definitions.

Glossary of common construction and architectural terms

[A](#) | [B](#) | [C](#) | [D](#) | [E](#) | [F](#) | [G](#) | [H](#) | [I](#) | [J](#) | [K](#) | [L](#) | [M](#) | [N](#) | [O](#) | [P](#) | [Q](#) | [R](#) | [S](#) | [T](#) | [U](#) | [V](#) | [W](#) | [X](#) | [Y](#) | [Z](#)

abatement: asbestos control beyond a special operations and maintenance program.

air ducts: pipes that carry warm and cold air to rooms and return back to the heating and cooling system.

air gap: the unobstructed vertical distance between the lowest opening of a faucet which supplies a plumbing fixture (such as tank or wash bowl) and the level at which the fixture will overflow. 2. In a drainage system, the unobstructed vertical distance between the outlet of a waste pipe and the flood-level rim of the receptacle into which it discharges.

anchorage: Device used to anchor a wire, bar, rod during the curing of concrete.

asbestos: fine, flexible, noncombustible material. It can withstand high temperatures without change.

[back to top](#)

baseboard: board along floor attached to wall and partitions in a building .

basement: any building story having a floor below grade.

beam: principal horizontal wood, steel or concrete support members of a building.

blower: (hvac) fan used to force air under pressure.

bonding wire: (pool) an approved conductor that connects all electrical equipment to the metal that constructs the pool.

box (junction box): (electrical) metal or plastic enclosure within which electrical connections are made; has removable cover to provide easy access.

bearing wall: wall that supports a floor or roof of a building.

[back to top](#)

cable: two or more insulated conductors wrapped in a metal or plastic cover .

casing: window and door trim.

caulking: a resilient material used to seal cracks, fill joints, prevent leakage, and/or provide water proofing.

central heating system: boiler or furnace flue connected and installed as an integral part of the structure and designed to supply heat adequately for the entire structure.

chimney: vertical masonry shaft of reinforced concrete or other approved noncombustible heat-resisting material enclosing one or more flues. The chimney removes the products of combustion from solid, liquid or gaseous fuel.

circuit: path of electrical flow from a power source through a fixture and return to ground or neutral.

circuit breaker: device that interrupts electrical flow automatically in case of an overload in the circuit. The circuit breaker can be reset by either a switch or push-button.

condensate line: drain line attached to the evaporative coil of an air conditioner to remove condensation.

condensation: change of water from vapor to liquid when warm, moisture-laden air comes in contact with a cold surface.

conductor: wire or some other material that will carry electrical charge.

containment: work area isolated from the rest of the building to prevent escape of asbestos fibers.

composite shingles: roofing material that is made in layers usually with one layer being tar and one being fiberglass for strength.

corrosion: the gradual wearing away by rusting or by action of chemicals.

cripple walls: Less than full height walls that rest on the perimeter foundation walls and support the floor(s) above.

[back to top](#)

damper: A device used to vary the volume of air passing through an air outlet, inlet, or duct; it does not significantly affect the shape of the delivery pattern.

double-tap: where two wires are attached to one circuit breaker that is approved for one wire only.

downspouts: pipe that leads water down from a gutter.

drain: (plumbing) any pipe that carries waste water or waterborne waste in a building drainage system. (roofing) device that allows for the flow of water from the roof area.

drip pan: (HVAC) pan shaped panel or trough used to collect condensate from the evaporator coil.

dry rot: dry crumbling decay in wood caused by various fungi.

dry wall: wall surface of plaster board.

[back to top](#)

eave: lower edge of a sloping roof projecting beyond the wall.

efflorescence: an encrustation of soluble salts, commonly white, deposited on the surface of stone, brick, plaster, or mortar; usually caused by free alkalies leached from mortar or adjacent concrete as moisture moves through it.

Environmental Protection Agency: (EPA) agency of the U.S. government tasked with the responsibility for regulating, advising on and assisting in resolving environmental issues.

evaporator coil: (HVAC) device made of a coil of tubing that functions as a refrigerant evaporator that cools air when passed over it during the A/C function .

[back to top](#)

flashings: metal used around angles or junctions on exterior walls, chimneys or roofs to prevent leaks.

flex line: a flexible pipe usually used for gas or water.

flue: a pipe, tube or channel for conveying hot air, gas, steam, or smoke, as from a furnace or fireplace to a chimney.

flush valve: device located at the bottom of the tank for flushing toilets.

footing: portion of the foundation that transfers the structural load to the ground.

foundation: masonry and concrete foundation walls usually below ground level that support house structure.

french drains: underground perforated pipe that removes subsurface water.

fungi, decay: fungi that are major destroyers of the strength of wood, such as white rot and brown rot.

fungi, stain: fungi that feed on wood at a slow rate, causing discoloration but little damage.

fuse: device that stops the electrical flow in case there is a circuit overload for any reason. Fuses can not be reset; they must be replaced.

[back to top](#)

gable: triangular end of a building with a sloping roof.

GFCI: (see [Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter](#))

glazing: fitting glass into window frames and doors.

ground (grounding): (electrical) electricity always seeks the shortest path to earth. Neutral wires carry electricity to the ground in all circuits. An electrical panel must have a ground connected to either the copper cold water line or a rod driven in the ground.

ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI): safety device that senses any shock hazard and interrupts the flow of electricity in the circuit.

gutter: trough that gathers rainwater from a roof.

[back to top](#)

HVAC: heating, ventilation and air-conditioning.

[back to top](#)

insulation: material high in resistance to heat transmission placed in walls, ceilings or floors of a structure.

[back to top](#)

junction box: (see [box](#))

[back to top](#)

masonry: stone, brick, concrete, hollow tile or building units or materials, bonded together with mortar to form a wall, pier or similar mass.

mastic: A sealant with putty like properties that is usually tar base.

mitigation: to reduce the severity of.

molding: strip of decorative material with a planed or curved narrow surface prepared for ornamental

applications; also used to hide wall imperfections.

[back to top](#)

piling: structural members driven in the ground and used to support vertical loads.

pitch: slope of roof.

pressure release valve: In a pressure tank for water storage, a pressure-actuated safety valve that is designed to open and relieve pressure automatically if the pressure within the tank exceeds the value for which it was designed to operate safely.

[back to top](#)

radiant heating system: a system for heating a room or space by means of heated surfaces (such as panels heated by the flow of hot water or electric current).

radon: naturally occurring, colorless, odorless, radioactive inert gaseous element formed by radioactive decay of radium atoms.

rafter: series of roof framing members.

refrigerant: substance circulated under pressure within a cooling system that produces the refrigerating effect.

reinforced concrete: concrete strengthened with metal bars or wire mesh.

retrofit: the addition of new building materials, building elements, and components, not provided in the original construction.

reverse polarity: where the hot (energized conductor) is reversed with the neutral conductor.

ridge: the line at the junction of the upper edges of two sloping roof surfaces of a roof.

ridgecap: any covering (such as metal, wood, shingle, etc.) used to cover the ridge of a roof.

roof covering: material placed on roof.

roofing: wood, asphalt, tile, slate, metal or water proof materials that forms protection against weather on the uppermost portion of a house.

run-off: precipitation discharged into stream channels. Water that flows off the land surface with out sinking into the soil is surface run-off.

[back to top](#)

secondary condensate line: The emergency condensate line, if operating, indicates the primary line is clogged.

seepage: movement of water through soil.

septic system: comprises all piping and facilities used for the collection and disposal of sewage.

sewer, public sewer: common sewer directly controlled by public authority.

shear panels: usually plywood panels attached to cripple walls for bracing.

skylight: glass or plastic opening in roof.

soil: surface layer of dirt that supports plant life.

stud: vertical wood members of house framing.

[back to top](#)

temperature pressure release valve: a valve that combines the functions of a pressure release valve and a temperature release valve.

temperature relief valve: a temperature affected safety valve designed to open automatically when the temperature of the water being heated exceeds a preset value.

[back to top](#)

wall: a structure which serves to enclose or subdivide a building.

watt: measure of the power an electrical lamp or appliance consumes.

weep holes: openings that allow entrapped water to escape.

[back to top](#)



LaRocca Inspection Associates, Inc.
10623 Sherman Grove Avenue
Sunland, California 91040

San Fernando Valley: (818) 951-1795
Los Angeles: (323) 469-5466
Fax: (818) 951-1365



Copyright © 2003 LaRocca Inspection Associates, Inc. All Rights Reserved. LARocca INSPECTION ASSOCIATES and its logo are trademarks of LaRocca Inspection Associates, Inc.

[Home](#) | [Inspection Request](#) | [Inspectors](#) | [About Us](#) | [Computerized Reports](#)
[Inspection Checklists](#) | [Contractor Referrals](#) | [Informative Articles](#) | [Technical Information](#) | [Send Email](#)

[back to top](#)