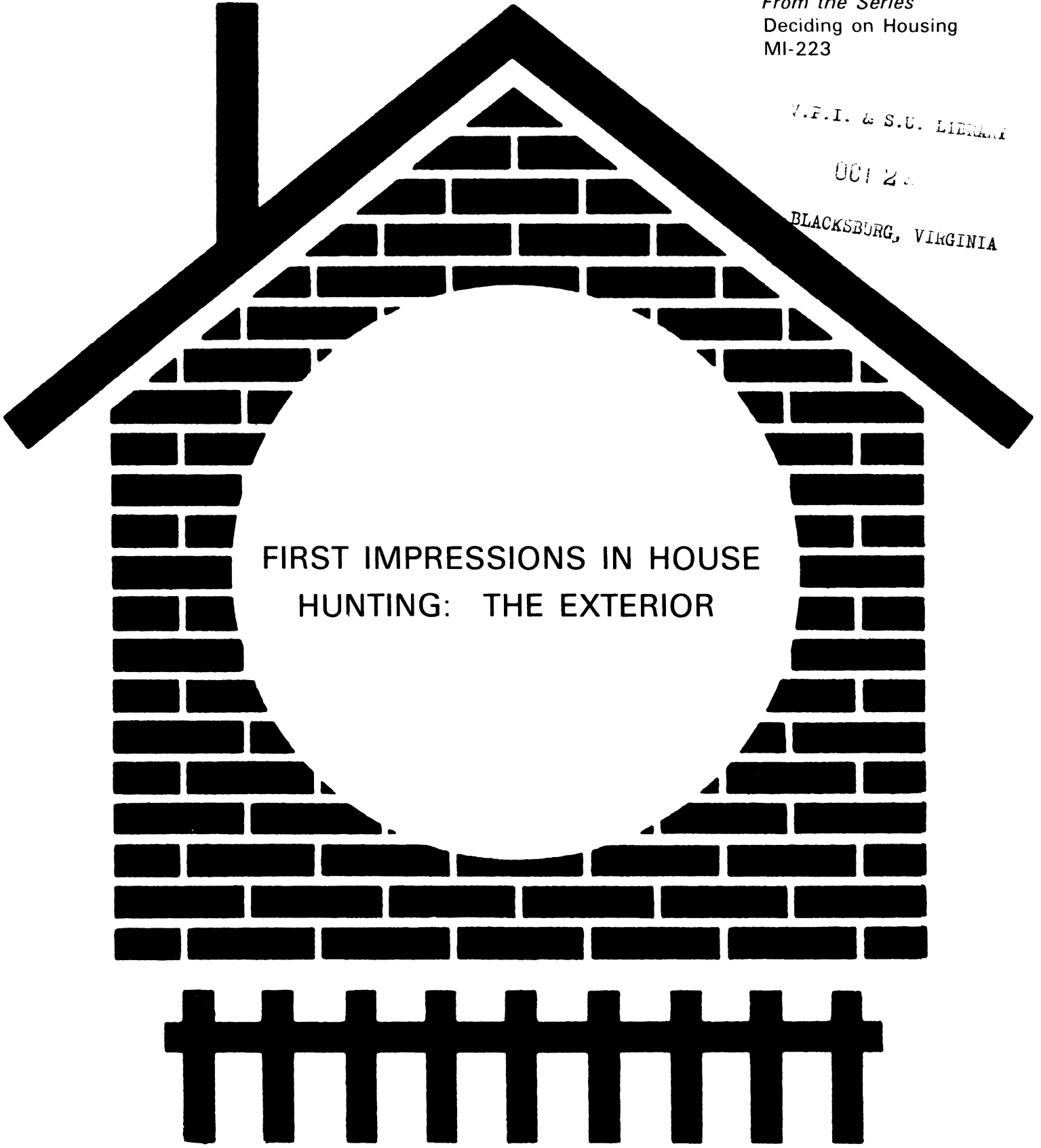


*From the Series*  
Deciding on Housing  
MI-223

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS IN HOUSE  
HUNTING: THE EXTERIOR

MI-223

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## FIRST IMPRESSIONS IN HOUSEHUNTING: THE EXTERIOR

As you approach a prospective house for the first time, observe the neighborhood: its age, character, condition, and relative cost. Does the house you're looking at fit into the neighborhood? Is it about the same age, size, style, condition, and price as the houses on either side as well as the whole block? Before you go in, make an exterior inspection because once inside, the decor may cloud your judgment. If you do not check these things on the first visit, go back later. No home should be purchased without at least two visits, preferably one in daylight and one at night. Use this checklist to assist you.

\_\_\_ Are yard, landscaping, fences, sidewalks, curbs, gutters, and driveways acceptable, easy to keep up, and needing no major maintenance or repairs?

\_\_\_ Are there pets present or evident in the form of dead spots or holes in the lawn?

\_\_\_ Will accessory buildings such as garages and sheds meet your needs? Are they the right size, wired, and in good repair?

\_\_\_ Study the structural lines of the house: roof ridge, walls, and foundation. Are they straight, or are there any sags, bows, or bulges? Suspect any visible flaws--they may be only symptoms of serious defects.

\_\_\_ Is there evidence of termites or ant damage?

\_\_\_ Check the roof. Missing or crumbled shingles warn of possible leaks, which may be obvious on ceilings and walls inside the house.

\_\_\_ Count the layers of shingles. If new shingles are laid over more than one or two old roofs, the nails may not sufficiently penetrate the structure underneath.

\_\_\_ Look for rustproof metal flashing around chimneys, vent pipes, and in valleys.

\_\_\_ Is there a TV antenna, well anchored? Or, is TV cable installed or available?

\_\_\_ Check chimney for missing mortar, fallen brick, cracks, stability, and caulking. (One can check chimney for leaks by covering its top with a wet burlap bag, lighting a fire and checking around the chimney, particularly inside the attic for escaping smoke. This is often impractical).

\_\_\_ Is there an attic vent or exhaust fan to help keep the house cool in summer and let moisture escape in winter?

\_\_\_ Gutters and downspouts are needed even in dry states to carry rain and melting ice and snow to the ground without causing paint to peel or wood to rot. They should not be rusted or clogged, worn out or falling down, and should be angled to attach to the house.

- \_\_\_ The ground and any sidewalks, driveways or patios next to the house should slope gently downward to carry water away from the foundation. Use a stick to see if the ground next to the foundation is damp or mushy.
- \_\_\_ If downspouts do not empty directly into an underground storm sewer or dry well, splashblocks or "elbows" with long leaders are necessary to avoid icy areas, flooding, or problems with the foundation.
- \_\_\_ (Basement) window sills above grade level or metal wells installed with edges above the ground will inhibit water leakage into basements.
- \_\_\_ Walk around the house looking for weatherproof electrical outlets, hose bibbs, and check exterior surfaces for curled or loose siding, popped or rusted nail heads, and peeling, chalking or flaking paint. Peeling paint indicates lack of a primer coat, or on an older house, more likely the lack of a vapor barrier to keep moisture "leaking" from the house interior, through the wood to the paint.
- \_\_\_ On a brick house, normally the only exterior maintenance needed is the wood trim, but brick walls can crack as the house settles or if it was not built properly to accommodate soil conditions. Occasionally, re-pointing may be necessary as mortar falls out.
- \_\_\_ Take time to look at all windows and doors. Are there both storm glass and screens, plus weatherstripping and caulking to save energy?
- \_\_\_ Check for broken or cracked glass and loss of putty around windowpanes.
- \_\_\_ Do window placement and sizes allow adequate privacy from neighbors and the street?
- \_\_\_ Is the foundation straight and level, with no abnormal cracks or evidence of muddy termite tunnels. (If there is a crawlspace, it should be vented to permit air circulation).
- \_\_\_ Are entrances easily accessible, sheltered yet open to street view, lighted, and a pleasing first impression?
- \_\_\_ The porch steps and floor should be easy to climb, level, slip-resistant, and have no places that might cause you to trip.
- \_\_\_ Walk heavily across wooden porch floors and steps to see if they are solid, because they have a short life unless protected against wood rot or termites.

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