

THE FOUNDATION CONTRACTOR PLAYBOOK

by Travis Nech

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THE FOUNDATION CONTRACTOR PLAYBOOK

A Texas Homeowner's Field Guide to Vetting Bids, Reading Warranties, and Getting a Foundation Repair That Actually Holds

By **Travis Nech**

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Introduction

I've spent fifty years in brick, masonry, and foundation work across Texas. Most of what I know came the hard way — hands in the clay, under houses, on top of ladders, in July heat that makes a man reconsider his life choices.

This book isn't about selling you a foundation repair. It's about making sure you never pay for the wrong one.

Every week, I talk to homeowners who signed a foundation contract they didn't understand, paid real money for a repair that never had a chance of holding, or turned down work they actually needed because a salesman scared them or bored them into confusion. The foundation industry has honest companies doing honest work, and it has outfits that will sell you whatever you don't ask questions about. The difference between them is knowing what questions to ask.

That's what this book is: a playbook. Read it before the first estimate, keep it handy after the last pile goes in, and you'll walk into every conversation with a contractor as the best-educated homeowner on the block.

Let's get to work.

Chapter 1: What Your Foundation Actually Does — and Why Texas Makes It Harder

There's a part of your house you'll probably never look at,

never photograph, and never show off to a neighbor. It's under everything, it does all the heavy lifting, and you won't think about it for a single second until the day something goes wrong. That part is the foundation, and if you live in Texas, it's up against a harder job than a foundation almost anywhere else in the country.

Let me tell you what it actually does, because most homeowners have never had anyone explain it plainly.

A foundation has one job that matters above all else: it takes the entire weight of your house and hands it off to the ground, evenly. Every wall, every roof beam, every bathtub full of water, every piece of furniture you own — all of that weight pushes down, and the foundation spreads it out so no one spot carries too much. If it does that job well, everything above it stays level, square, and quiet. Doors close. Windows slide. Floors feel solid. The house just sits there being a house, and you get to think about literally anything else.

A foundation also has a few side jobs. It anchors the house against wind, so a storm doesn't shift the structure. On a slab home, it forms the floor itself and acts as a barrier between your living space and the soil underneath. On a pier-and-beam home, it lifts the structure off the ground, creates a crawlspace underneath, and keeps the wood framing away from soil moisture and pests.

There are two main types you'll run into in Texas, and it helps to know which one you're standing on.

The first is the slab foundation. This is what most Texas homes built since the 1970s sit on. Picture a big, thick plate of concrete poured directly on prepared ground. Around the edges and under the load-bearing walls, the slab gets thicker — these thickened ribs are called grade beams, and they're where most of the structural strength lives. Inside the concrete there's steel reinforcement — rebar in older slabs, and in most slabs poured from the late 1980s onward, high-strength steel cables run through the concrete in a grid and get tightened after the pour. That design is called post-tension, and those cables squeeze the whole slab together so it acts like one solid, rigid unit. A modern post-tension slab is a genuinely tough piece of construction when the ground under it behaves.

The second type is pier-and-beam. This is the older Texas way, and you'll see it on homes built before roughly 1970, especially in established neighborhoods. Instead of one big slab, the house sits on a grid of concrete piers sunk into the ground, with wood beams spanning between them and the floor framing resting on top. Underneath there's a crawlspace — usually eighteen inches to a few feet of air between the dirt

and your floor. Pier-and-beam has real advantages: plumbing runs are easy to reach, the house can breathe underneath, and repairs to the structure are generally simpler. It also has its quirks: the wood components can rot or attract pests, the crawlspace can hold moisture, and the piers themselves can settle unevenly over the decades.

Neither type is "better" in some absolute sense. A good slab on well-prepared ground and a good pier-and-beam with solid piers will both outlive you. The problems start when the ground stops cooperating — and in Texas, the ground is the whole story.

Here's why Texas makes this harder than almost anywhere else. Much of the state, and the Dallas-Fort Worth area in particular, sits on expansive clay soil. The word "expansive" is doing a lot of work in that sentence. Clay is made of microscopic particles that act a little like tiny sponges. When it rains, clay drinks the water and swells. When the Texas summer bakes down for weeks with no rain, clay gives that water back to the air and shrinks. Swell, shrink. Up, down. Over and over, year after year.

This isn't a subtle effect. In parts of North Texas, the soil can move several inches between a wet spring and a dry August. Your house is sitting on that soil. Your foundation was built to ride out small movements, but it's not a boat — it's a rigid structure designed to stay still. When the ground under one corner drops two inches and the ground under the opposite corner stays put, the foundation has to bend or crack or lift to accommodate the difference. Concrete is strong under compression but it doesn't like to bend. So the house starts telling you, in cracks and sticking doors and uneven floors, that the ground is moving underneath it.

Here's a composite scenario from the kind of houses I see every week. Picture a brick home in the suburbs, built in 1998, slab foundation, big oak tree in the front yard. The homeowner calls because there's a crack in the brick over the garage door that wasn't there last fall. What happened? Through the summer, the oak drank enormous amounts of water from the soil around the front of the house — a mature tree can pull hundreds of gallons a day out of the ground in a Texas summer. The clay shrank away from the foundation on that side. The slab corner dropped a fraction of an inch. The brick veneer above it couldn't flex, so it cracked in a stair-step pattern, right over the garage opening. The ground moved. The house followed. The crack is just the visible part of a soil story.

And that's the key thing to carry into the rest of this book: in Texas, foundation problems are almost never really about the concrete. The concrete was almost certainly fine the day it

was poured. Foundation problems are about the soil. The ground moves, and the foundation — rigid, heavy, and unforgiving — has to deal with the movement. Everything you'll learn in the next chapters, from reading cracks to vetting a contractor's bid, comes back to that one idea. Understand the soil, and the rest of the playbook makes sense.

So why does the ground move more in some spots than others? That's about moisture, and moisture in Texas is never evenly distributed. One side of your house gets afternoon sun and dries out fast; the other side sits in shade and stays damp. The gutter on the north side overflows and dumps water against the foundation; the south side stays bone dry. A flower bed along the east wall gets watered every morning; the west side gets nothing. A big tree stands twenty feet from the southeast corner and drinks from a huge circle of soil. Every one of these differences means the clay under different parts of your foundation is doing something different — swelling here, shrinking there — and the foundation gets pulled in different directions at once. Foundation folks call that differential movement, and it's the single most important concept in this book. Uniform movement — the whole house settling down a quarter inch together — is mostly harmless. Differential movement — one part moving while another doesn't — is what breaks things.

Newer Texas neighborhoods can have their own twist on this. A lot of subdivisions built in the last twenty or thirty years sit on land that was cut and filled during grading — soil scraped from one area and piled in another to level the lots. Fill dirt, even well-compacted fill, doesn't behave exactly like undisturbed native clay. It can settle a little in the first few years, and it can hold moisture differently. If your home is in a newer subdivision and you're seeing movement in the first five to ten years, the grading history of your lot is worth knowing about. It doesn't mean the builder did anything wrong — but it means your soil story has an extra chapter.

Drainage is the other half of the Texas equation, and it's the part you can actually do something about. Water is the fuel for soil movement. Standing water next to your foundation soaks the clay and swells it; bone-dry soil against the foundation lets it shrink and pull away. The goal, year-round, is even moisture around the entire perimeter of the house — not soaked, not parched, just consistent. That means gutters that actually carry water away from the house, soil that slopes away from the foundation rather than toward it, and in dry spells, a soaker hose run at a distance from the slab to keep the clay from shrinking away. We'll get into the practical details later, but understand the principle now: you can't change the clay under your house, but you can manage the water that makes it move.

One more thing worth knowing before we move on. When foundation repair does become necessary, the standard fix in Texas is pressed concrete piles — sometimes called pressed concrete piers. Sections of precast concrete are driven down through the unstable surface soil until they reach firm, load-bearing ground, and then the foundation is lifted and supported on them. It's a proven approach that has held up Texas homes for decades, and it's the only repair method this book covers, because it's the one I'd put my name on. Later chapters will walk you through how to vet a contractor who installs them, what the bid should include, and what a warranty should actually say. But the decision to repair at all — and the understanding of what you're really paying for — starts with everything in this chapter: a foundation hands your house's weight to the ground, and in Texas, the ground is always moving.

The ground moves. The house follows. The crack is the messenger. Once you see it that way, you're already ahead of most homeowners — and ahead of more than a few contractors, too.

Chapter 2: Reading the Signs: Cracks, Sticking Doors, and What the House Is Telling You

Your house talks. Not in words, but in small, physical complaints — a crack that wasn't there in the spring, a door that suddenly needs a shove, a floor that feels a little off when you walk across it barefoot. Most homeowners either panic at the first hairline crack or ignore the signs for years until something dramatic happens. Both reactions cost money. This chapter is about reading the signs the way someone with decades in the field reads them: calmly, carefully, and in context.

Start with the most common sign, because it's the one that sends the most worried homeowners to the phone: cracks.

Not all cracks mean the same thing, and most of them mean less than you fear. Concrete shrinks as it cures, houses settle a little in their first years, and Texas soil moves with the seasons. Hairline cracks — thin as a credit card edge or thinner, running in no particular pattern — are extremely common and usually cosmetic. A hairline crack in a slab, in a garage floor, or in drywall at a corner where two walls meet is often just the house breathing. Watch it, note it, and don't lose sleep over it.

What gets my attention is different. Wide cracks — ones you can fit a coin into, or that you can see daylight through — are

a step up in seriousness. Cracks that run diagonally across a wall, especially from the corner of a door or window frame toward the ceiling or floor, are telling you that one part of the structure is moving relative to another. On the outside, the classic Texas foundation crack is the stair-step crack in brick veneer: it follows the mortar joints in a zigzag, up and over, like a staircase. That pattern means the brick wall is being pulled apart because the foundation under one section dropped or shifted. A stair-step crack over a garage door or a window opening — the wide, unsupported spans — is the most common version I see, and it's the one from our composite scenario in Chapter 1.

Horizontal cracks in a foundation wall or in brick deserve respect too. Vertical and diagonal cracks usually mean settlement or heave — the ground moving up or down. A horizontal crack can mean lateral pressure, soil pushing sideways against the structure, and that's a different and more urgent problem. If you see a horizontal crack, especially one that's widening, don't put that on the watch list — get it looked at.

Here's the homeowner's monitoring method that actually works: measure and date. Put a small pencil mark at each end of the crack, write the date next to it, and measure the width with a ruler or a crack gauge from the hardware store. Then check it once a month. A crack that doesn't change through a full wet season and a full dry season is a crack that's telling you about the past, not the present. A crack that keeps growing — wider in August, wider still by October — is telling you something is actively moving. That simple habit, a pencil mark and a date, will tell you more than most anxious guesswork, and any honest contractor will respect you for having done it.

Now the doors and windows. A door that sticks is one of the most reliable early indicators of foundation movement, and it's also one of the most misread. Here's why it works: door frames are rectangles, and rectangles are fussy. If the foundation under one side of a door frame drops even a fraction of an inch, the rectangle becomes a slight parallelogram, and the door starts rubbing, catching, or refusing to latch. In Texas, I'll ask a homeowner: which doors stick, and when did they start? If three interior doors on the same side of the house all started sticking after the same dry summer, that's a pattern, not a coincidence.

But — and this matters — a single sticking door can also just be humidity swelling the wood, a loose hinge, or a house that's a little out of square from forty years of normal living. The diagnostic question is always about pattern and timing. One door, all year, no other symptoms? Probably the door. Multiple doors, multiple windows, starting around the same

time, on the same side or corner of the house? That's the house talking about the foundation.

Windows tell the same story. A window that used to slide and now needs both hands, a window with a gap at one corner where you can feel outside air, cracked glass that appeared without an impact — all of these can trace back to the frame racking as the foundation moves. Pay attention to windows on the same wall as your stair-step brick cracks. The outside and the inside are telling the same story in two languages.

Sloping floors are the next sign, and they're the one people feel in their bodies before they see with their eyes. A marble rolling across the kitchen floor. A chair that rocks on tile that used to be flat. Water pooling at one end of a shower that used to drain fine. On a slab home, a noticeably sloping floor means the slab itself has tilted or bent — and slabs don't tilt without a reason. On a pier-and-beam home, sloping floors are even more common because individual piers can settle independently over the years; a dip in the hallway often maps directly to a pier that has sunk or a beam that has sagged.

There's a simple test any homeowner can do: the long level, or even a straight board with a small level on top. Lay it across the floor in several directions and in several rooms. A floor that's out of level by a small amount across a whole room is one thing; a floor with a sharp dip or hump in one spot is another. Note where the low spots are and whether they line up with the side of the house where the doors stick and the brick cracked. When the signs cluster — cracks, doors, and floors all pointing at the same corner — you're looking at differential movement, the concept from Chapter 1, and it's time to act rather than watch.

Brick veneer separation is a sign that deserves its own mention because it scares people and it's worth understanding. The brick on most Texas homes is a veneer — a single layer of brick tied to the wood or steel framing behind it, not a structural wall holding up the house. When the foundation moves, the brick veneer can't flex, so it separates: you'll see gaps opening between the brick and window frames, between the brick and the trim, or a visible lean where the brick is pulling away from the wall behind it. In serious cases you can see the metal ties or feel a draft through the gap. Separation at the top of a wall, where the brick meets the soffit or the roofline, is especially worth noting. The veneer isn't holding your house up, but it's an honest reporter — it shows movement earlier and more visibly than almost anything else.

So when do you watch, and when do you act? Here's the plain-spoken version.

Watch when: the signs are minor, isolated, and stable. A few hairline cracks that haven't changed in a year. One sticky door in a humid month. Normal seasonal movement that comes and goes — the crack that opens a little in August and closes back up by November is the clay doing its annual cycle, and the house riding it out the way it was designed to.

Act when: the signs are growing, clustering, or crossing thresholds. Cracks widening month over month. Multiple doors and windows affected at once. A stair-step brick crack you can fit a coin into. A floor slope you can feel. Brick separating from the frame. Water intruding where it didn't before. Any horizontal crack. And any time the signs are getting worse rather than holding steady — active movement is the line between monitoring and calling someone.

When you do call someone, know who to call for what. A foundation repair contractor can evaluate the foundation and propose a repair — pressed concrete piles, the method this book covers. But for an independent diagnosis, especially before you commit to a big repair, consider hiring a structural engineer for an evaluation. An engineer works for you, not for a repair crew, and their assessment gives you a neutral baseline: how much movement has occurred, where, and what it means. I'm not an engineer — my authority is fifty years of hands-on field experience in Texas construction — and I'd rather you hear that plainly. An engineer's report in your hand makes you a much harder customer to sell something you don't need, and it makes the contractor's job clearer if you do need the work.

One more practical note. When you start documenting — and you should start the day you notice something — take photos with dates, keep your crack measurements in one place, and note the weather and season alongside each observation. "Crack over garage door, 1/8 inch, March, after wet spring" is useful. "There's a crack somewhere" is not. If you end up getting bids, that log becomes one of the most valuable things you own. It tells every contractor the same true story, and it keeps anyone from rewriting it.

Your house is talking. Measure what it says, watch for patterns, and act when the pattern points at movement that isn't stopping. That's the whole skill, and it's one any homeowner can learn.

Chapter 3: The Soil Under Everything: Clay, Moisture, and Why Movement Happens

If Chapter 1 gave you the big picture and Chapter 2 taught

you to read the symptoms, this chapter goes one layer deeper — literally. Under your slab, under your piers, under your flower beds and your driveway, there's a material that decides more about your foundation's future than the concrete itself. It's clay. And in Texas, understanding clay is understanding almost everything.

Let's start with what clay actually is, in plain language. Soil is made of particles, and clay has the smallest particles of any soil type — so small you can't see a single one without a microscope. Because the particles are so tiny, a handful of clay has an enormous amount of surface area packed into it, and that surface area loves water. The clay particles are built in thin, flat layers, almost like microscopic sheets of paper stacked together, and water molecules wedge themselves between the layers. When water moves in, the layers push apart and the clay swells. When water leaves, the layers collapse back together and the clay shrinks.

That's the whole science. Everything else in this chapter is just that one fact playing out at the scale of your house.

Different soils do this to very different degrees. Sandy soil barely swells at all — water drains right through it and the particles don't change size. Clay, especially the dense, heavy clay under much of North Texas, can swell and shrink dramatically. Engineers have a term for it — the soil's plasticity — but you don't need the term. You just need the picture: a sponge-like ground that grows when wet and shrinks when dry, sitting directly under a rigid concrete foundation that can't do either.

Now add Texas weather to the picture, because Texas weather is the engine that drives the whole cycle. Our climate gives clay exactly the extremes it responds to most. Spring brings heavy rains that soak the ground and swell the clay. Summer brings weeks of hundred-degree heat with no rain, baking the moisture out and shrinking the clay. Some years the swing is mild. Some years — a drought summer after a wet spring — the swing is violent. The soil under your house can rise and fall by inches across a single year, and it's been doing that for as long as the house has stood there.

Here's what that looks like under a real house. In the wet months, the clay swells and pushes up against the foundation — this is called heave, and it can lift a slab edge or a corner. In the dry months, the clay shrinks and pulls away, leaving a gap between the soil and the foundation — and the foundation, with the full weight of the house on it, settles down into that gap. Up in spring, down in August. Heave and settlement, alternating, year after year. A foundation can tolerate this cycling for a long time. But every cycle is a small stress event, and over years and decades, the movement stops

being perfectly reversible. One corner settles a little more each dry season and doesn't come all the way back. That's when the cracks start, the doors start sticking, and the house starts telling the story from Chapter 2.

But here's the part most homeowners miss: the ground under your house almost never moves uniformly. Remember differential movement from Chapter 1 — one part moving while another stays put. The reason it's differential is that moisture is never evenly distributed around a house, and moisture is what drives the clay.

Walk around your house mentally and think about water. The south and west sides bake in afternoon sun and dry out fast. The north side sits in shade and stays damp longer. Your gutters — if they're clogged or undersized — dump roof water in concentrated streams at the corners. The soil next to the house might slope toward the foundation instead of away from it, funneling every rain right against the slab. The flower bed along the front gets watered three times a week; the side yard gets nothing. A big tree stands near one corner, and its roots are pulling water out of a huge circle of soil every single day.

Each of these creates a different moisture zone, and each moisture zone makes its clay do something different. Wet zone swells. Dry zone shrinks. Tree zone shrinks faster. The foundation spanning across these zones gets pulled in different directions at once — one corner lifting while another drops, one edge held steady while the middle sags. That uneven pulling is what cracks concrete, racks door frames, and separates brick veneer. If the whole house moved together, you'd barely notice. It's the difference that breaks things.

Trees deserve special attention because they're the most powerful moisture force most homeowners have, and the least understood. A mature tree doesn't just drink the water that falls near it — its roots extend far beyond the canopy, often one and a half to two times the width of the branches, and they pull moisture from deep in the soil profile. In a Texas summer, a large oak or pecan can draw hundreds of gallons of water a day out of the ground. Near a foundation, that creates a localized drought zone: the clay shrinks dramatically in a circle around the root zone while the rest of the perimeter stays more stable. The result is one of the most common patterns in Texas foundation work — settlement concentrated on the side of the house nearest the big tree, with a stair-step brick crack marching up the wall right above it.

I'm not telling you to cut down your trees. Shade in Texas is worth real money and real comfort. But plant new trees with distance in mind — the mature canopy width is a good

minimum distance from the foundation — and if you have a big established tree near the house, that side of the foundation needs consistent moisture management more than any other side. A root barrier, installed vertically between the tree and the house, can also help; it's a physical shield that discourages roots from pushing under the foundation. It's not a magic fix, but it's a legitimate part of the moisture-management toolkit.

Drainage is the other great moisture force, and unlike the weather, it's one you control. Every drop of water that lands on your roof ends up somewhere, and "somewhere" should never be "ponded against the foundation." Walk your house after a hard rain — really walk it, in the rain if you have to — and look at what the water is doing. Are the gutters overflowing? Are the downspouts dumping water two feet from the slab? Is there a low spot where water stands for hours after the rain stops? Is the soil graded so it slopes away from the house, or has it settled over the years into a trough that collects water against the foundation?

The fixes are unglamorous and they work. Clean gutters. Downspout extensions that carry water four to six feet from the house. Regrading the soil near the foundation so it falls away at a gentle slope. French drains or surface drains in spots that chronically pond. None of this is foundation repair — it's moisture management — but it addresses the actual cause of most Texas foundation movement. I've seen houses where the "foundation problem" was really a drainage problem, and fixing the water fixed the movement. Not every time, and not when real settlement has already happened. But often enough that drainage should always be the first thing you check and the last thing you neglect.

Then there's the dry side of the cycle. In a drought summer, the clay shrinks away from the foundation and you can sometimes see the gap — a dark line of separation between the soil and the slab edge. The standard homeowner defense is a soaker hose: laid in a loop around the perimeter of the house, a foot or more out from the foundation, run slowly so the water soaks in rather than running off. The goal isn't to flood the ground — it's to keep the clay's moisture consistent so it doesn't shrink away. Run it in the evening, move it around the perimeter over the week, and pay extra attention to the sunny sides and the tree side. Think of it as evening out the moisture map so the clay under the whole house behaves the same way. Consistent moisture, consistent soil, quiet foundation.

Here's a composite scenario that ties it all together — the kind of house I see every week. A two-story brick home, built in 2005, slab foundation. Big pecan tree in the side yard, planted when the house was built, now mature. The

downspout on the back corner has been dumping water next to the slab for years because nobody extended it. The homeowner notices a stair-step crack in the brick on the side near the tree, two interior doors sticking on that same side, and a gap opening between the brick and a window frame. An engineer or a good contractor reads the site like a map: the tree side is dry and shrinking, the back corner is wet and heaving, the slab is caught between a corner going down and a corner pushing up. The diagnosis isn't "bad concrete." The diagnosis is "the ground moves" — three different moisture zones, three different soil behaviors, one rigid slab trying to span all of it. The repair, if it comes to that, is pressed concrete piles to carry the foundation down to stable ground. But the prevention — the part that protects the repair and the rest of the house — is moisture management: extend the downspout, water the tree side in drought, keep the perimeter even.

That's the real diagnosis behind most Texas foundation problems, and it's worth saying one more time because the rest of this book builds on it: the ground moves. Clay swells and shrinks with moisture. Moisture is uneven. Uneven moisture means uneven movement. Uneven movement breaks rigid things. Every crack you learned to read in Chapter 2, every bid you'll learn to vet in the chapters ahead — they're all chapters in that one soil story.

Understand the soil, manage the water, and you've already done more for your foundation than most homeowners ever will.

Chapter 4: Drainage First: The Free Repair Nobody Wants to Talk About

Before a single pier goes into the ground, before any bid gets signed, before any crew shows up with equipment in your driveway, there is one question every homeowner should answer: where does the water go?

I have spent fifty years of hands-on field experience in Texas brick, masonry, and foundation work, and I can tell you this plainly: most foundation movement I have ever seen started as a water problem, not a foundation problem. Foundations move because the soil under them moves. Soil moves because of water. Too much water in one spot swells the clay and lifts the slab. Too little water in another spot lets the clay shrink and the slab drops. Give me a house with perfect drainage and stable, even moisture around the entire perimeter, and I will show you a foundation that mostly sits still and behaves

itself.

So this chapter is about the free repair nobody wants to talk about. Not because it doesn't work, but because there is no sale in it. Nobody earns a commission by telling you to fix your gutters. But I would rather tell you the truth and lose a job than sell you piers you don't need.

Let's start at the roof.

Every house sheds water off the roof, and that water has to go somewhere. Gutters collect it, downspouts carry it down, and then what? I walk up to houses every week where the downspout ends eighteen inches from the slab, dumping the entire roof runoff right into the soil against the foundation. One thunderstorm sends hundreds of gallons of water off a roof. If your downspout is dumping that load a foot from the house, you have built yourself a swimming pool against the slab — and then you wonder why the corner of the house is moving.

Downspout extensions are the single cheapest, highest-return foundation investment you can make. The rule I have used for decades: get the water at least six feet away from the foundation, ten feet if your yard allows it. Buried pipe that carries it out to the street, to a pop-up emitter in the yard, or even just a simple above-ground extension that slopes away from the house — any of these beat the alternative. An above-ground extension that you can see and maintain is better than a buried pipe you forget about and that clogs. Keep them clear of leaves, keep them sloped so water actually leaves, and check them after a big storm.

While you are up there, look at the gutters themselves. Gutters that are sagging, overflowing at the joints, or clogged with leaves are not collecting water — they are just holding it until it spills over the side, right against the house. I have seen houses with gutters so full of pine needles they were basically long, expensive planters. Water spilling over the gutter edge at the fascia line comes straight down onto the soil at the foundation. Clean your gutters twice a year, spring and fall. It is a Saturday chore, not a project. If your gutters can't handle the water load — heavy Texas downpours overwhelm undersized gutters fast — get them sized up before you blame the slab.

Now let's come down to the ground: grading and soil slope. This is the one that surprises people. The ground right against your house should slope AWAY from the house — six inches of drop in the first ten feet is the standard rule of thumb. Walk around your house and look. Does the soil touch the brick and slope toward the house? Then every rain sends water running at your slab. Worse, in many Texas neighborhoods, the

builders set the house and the final grading settles over the years, creating a little moat around the foundation. The fix is simple: add soil and shape it so water runs away. Keep the soil level a few inches below the bottom of the brick veneer or siding — you want to see some foundation showing above the dirt, not dirt buried up against the wall.

Flower beds are repeat offenders here. A homeowner builds a beautiful bed against the front of the house, edges it with decorative stone, fills it with nice soil and mulch — and shapes it like a bowl that holds water against the foundation. That bed is now a sponge pressed against the slab, and every time the sprinklers run or it rains, the soil under the front edge of the house gets soaked while the rest of the perimeter stays normal. Uneven moisture, uneven soil, uneven foundation. If you have beds against the house, shape them to drain away, and don't pile the mulch up against the brick.

That brings me to the mulch volcano. Landscapers sometimes pile mulch up in a cone around the trunk of a tree or right up against the house. That is not decoration — it is a moisture trap. Mulch holds water. Against the house it holds water against the foundation wall, against a tree trunk it rots the bark. Keep mulch a few inches back from the house wall and spread it flat, not heaped. Your foundation and your trees will both thank you.

Now the one that makes Texas summers interesting: sprinklers. In the summer heat, your lawn needs water and your foundation needs stable moisture — but those two needs can fight each other. Sprinklers that spray directly against the house wall soak the soil at the foundation while the middle of the yard gets whatever is left. Meanwhile, the opposite happens in a dry spell: the lawn away from the house dries out, the soil under the middle of the slab shrinks, and the foundation drops in the center while the wet perimeter stays lifted. Either way, you get differential movement.

The goal is even moisture all the way around the house. Keep sprinkler heads aimed at the lawn, not at the wall. And in the heat of a Texas summer, when the clay is cracking and pulling away from the slab, the standard practice is a soaker hose laid around the perimeter — a foot or so out from the foundation, on a timer, running early morning so the soil stays consistently moist without flooding. You are not trying to soak the ground; you are trying to keep it from drying out and shrinking. Even, steady, modest watering. Think of it like this: the soil under your house is a living thing that reacts to water. Your job is to keep it calm.

Here's a composite scenario from the kind of houses I see every week. Homeowner notices a crack in the brick at the corner of the garage. Two contractors come out, both sell

piers for the corner. Nobody looks at the downspout that dumps roof water right where the crack is. The homeowner pays for the piers, the corner gets lifted, everything looks fine — until the next heavy rain season, when the same corner moves again because the water is still hammering that same spot. That homeowner paid for a repair that treated the symptom. If someone had extended the downspout for a fraction of the cost first, there might never have been a crack at all — and if piers were still needed, the water fix would have kept them from moving again.

That is why I call drainage step zero. Before you get bids, before you spend a dime on foundation work, walk your own house. Get the water six to ten feet away from the slab. Slope the soil away from the house. Keep the beds draining outward, keep the mulch off the wall, and keep the sprinklers off the brick. Give it a full rain season if you can. Sometimes — more often than you'd think — the cracks stop growing and the doors start swinging right again, and there was never a foundation problem at all. Just a water problem, with a free repair nobody wanted to talk about.

Chapter 5: The Estimate: What a Real Bid Includes (and What a Thin One Hides)

So the drainage is handled, the water is running away from the house like it should, and you still have a crack that's growing or a door that won't close. Fine. Now it's time to get bids. This is where most homeowners get separated from their money — not because contractors are all crooks, but because the homeowner doesn't know what a real bid looks like and can't tell it from a thin one.

A thin bid is usually one page. It says something like: "Install piers as needed — \$8,500." Maybe it names a warranty. Maybe it doesn't. You can't compare it to anything because there's nothing in it. A real bid reads like a plan. Let me walk you through what belongs in one.

First: pile count and placement. The bid should tell you exactly how many piles are being installed and where. Not "piers as needed." Not "approximately twelve." A number and a map. The best contractors draw a simple sketch of your house footprint and mark each pile location — exterior piers around the perimeter, interior piers where the slab needs support from inside. You should be able to stand in your driveway with that sketch and point to every spot where work will happen. If the contractor can't tell you where the piles go until the crew shows up, he doesn't have a plan — he has a guess. And guesses on foundation work are expensive.

Second: depth and refusal language. The piles we use on Texas homes are pressed concrete piles — cylindrical concrete sections pressed into the ground one on top of another with hydraulic equipment until they refuse to go deeper. That "refusal" point matters: it means the pile has hit load-bearing soil and will support the house. Your bid should say the piles will be pressed to refusal, and it should say what happens if a pile refuses early at shallow depth, or if conditions change underground. A real bid describes the method clearly: concrete piles, pressed to refusal, driven with the equipment the contractor actually uses. If the bid talks about some other pile type, ask questions — and know that for Metro's approach, pressed concrete piles are the only foundation repair option we put in the ground. Watch for vague words like "stabilize" or "support" with no method attached. Those words cost nothing to print and commit to nothing.

Third: the lift. Some bids price just installation; the actual raising of the foundation back toward level is the point of the job. The bid should state whether lifting (sometimes called leveling or raising) is included, how much lift the contractor expects to achieve, and what the limits are. A good contractor will tell you honestly that a house can usually be raised close to level but not perfectly, and that some cracks in brick and drywall are permanent records of movement — they can be patched but the history doesn't vanish. If a bid promises your house will be "like new," keep reading carefully. Honest work doesn't need fairy tales.

Fourth: warranty terms, in writing, on the bid. This deserves its own spotlight because it's where the most pain lives. A warranty should state exactly what it covers (the area worked on? the whole foundation?), how long it lasts, whether it transfers to the next owner if you sell, and what voids it. Pay attention to the fine print: many warranties are voided if you change the drainage around the house, let the plumbing leak, or don't maintain proper soil moisture — which, after Chapter 4, you now know how to do. A warranty that can't be transferred when you sell the house is worth a lot less than one that can, because foundation work is a selling point. And a "lifetime warranty" from a company that's been in business for eighteen months is a wish, not a guarantee. Which brings us to the next chapter, where we vet the company itself.

Fifth: the extras and the fine print. A real bid tells you who repairs the plumbing after the lift (foundation movement often breaks plumbing under the slab — somebody has to test and fix it, and you want to know in advance whose responsibility that is), what happens to landscaping and concrete that gets disturbed during installation, whether permits are pulled and who handles them, how the crew protects your property, and what the payment schedule is.

Never pay the whole job up front. A reasonable deposit with the balance due on completion is standard. If a contractor needs all the money before he starts, ask yourself why.

Sixth: the timeline and the crew. How many days? Who's actually doing the work — the contractor's own crew or a subcontracted crew you've never met? There's nothing automatically wrong with subcontractors, but you should know who will be in your yard.

Now let's talk about the thin bid and how to spot it at the kitchen table. Red flags: a single total price with no breakdown. "Piers as needed" instead of a count and a map. No mention of depth, refusal, or method. A warranty described in one line or verbally but not in writing. Pressure to sign today — "this price is only good if you sign now" is a sales tactic, not a foundation fact; real foundation prices don't expire at midnight. A bid that's dramatically cheaper than the other two or three you got. And a bid delivered by someone who spent ten minutes walking your house and five minutes at your table. A proper estimate visit takes time — measuring elevation, walking the whole perimeter, looking at drainage, asking you about the history of the movement, checking interior floors and doors. If the visit was quick and the bid was quick, the thinking was quick too.

Here's a composite scenario from the kind of estimates I see every week. Homeowner gets three bids. Bid one: one page, "install foundation piers, lifetime warranty," lowest price. Bid two: two pages, fourteen piles, sketch of the house with pile locations marked, pressed to refusal, five-year transferable warranty, plumbing test included, payment in two parts. Bid three: the highest price, glossy brochure, lots of talk about technology. The homeowner picks bid one because it's cheapest and says "lifetime." Eighteen months later the corner moves again, the homeowner calls, and the company that gave the lifetime warranty has a disconnected phone and a closed office. Bid two's company is still in business, still answering the phone, and would have transferred that warranty to the new buyer when the house sold. The cheapest bid cost the most.

So get at least three bids. Read them side by side, line by line. Ask each contractor the same questions: How many piles, and where exactly? Pressed to refusal — what if refusal comes early? Is the lift included? What's the warranty, in writing, and does it transfer? Who handles plumbing, permits, and the landscaping you disturb? What's the payment schedule? How long have you been doing this, and can I see finished work nearby? The contractor who answers all of that clearly, in writing, is the one you want in your yard. The one who waves it off and tells you not to worry about the details is the one you want out of your kitchen.

Keep every bid you receive, even the ones you reject. Put them in a folder with the date and the contractor's name. If anything goes sideways during the job you chose, those other bids become your evidence of what the going scope and price were supposed to look like — and if you ever sell the house, a file showing you did your homework is worth its weight to a nervous buyer.

One more thing, and this is important: you are allowed to slow down. Foundation work is not an emergency in most cases. A crack that has been there for three years and hasn't changed is not going to destroy your house this weekend. Take a week. Read the bids. Check the companies. The house will wait, and you'll make a better decision calm than rushed.

Chapter 6: How to Vet a Foundation Contractor: License, Insurance, References, Reviews

By now you know how to fix your drainage and how to read a bid. This chapter is about the company behind the bid — because a great bid from a company that won't be there next year isn't a great bid.

Let's start with the paperwork, and let's be honest about it: in Texas, there is no state license for foundation repair contractors. Nobody at the capitol is handing out a "foundation contractor license." So when a company advertises itself as licensed, ask licensed for what, exactly? Some cities require local registration or permits for the work, and a legitimate contractor handles those. But the absence of a state license means the vetting is on you. That's what this chapter is for.

Insurance first, because this is non-negotiable. Any contractor who puts equipment and people on your property should carry general liability insurance — it protects you if something goes wrong on your property — and workers' compensation insurance, which covers the crew if somebody gets hurt on your job. Ask for a certificate of insurance. Not a photocopy from three years ago — a current certificate, ideally sent directly from the insurance agent so you know it's real. If a contractor can't produce current insurance, the conversation is over. This is not being difficult; this is being a responsible homeowner. If an uninsured worker gets hurt in your yard, the lawyers will come looking for the deepest pocket they can find, and that's your house.

Time in business is next, and it matters more in foundation work than in almost any trade. A warranty is only as good as the company standing behind it — and as we covered in the

last chapter, a "lifetime warranty" from an eighteen-month-old company is a marketing line. Look for companies with years of local history, not months. Check how long they've been at their current address. A company that has been pouring and pressing in your county for a decade has a track record you can verify; a company that appeared last spring with a new website and a P.O. box has a story you can't. Longevity doesn't guarantee quality, but it guarantees accountability — a company that plans to be here in ten years behaves differently than one that plans to be gone by Christmas.

Local references you can drive past. This is the vetting step most homeowners skip, and it's the most powerful one. Ask the contractor for addresses of completed jobs nearby — not testimonials, not names of happy customers, addresses. Then drive past them. You can't see underground, but you can see whether the yard was put back together, whether the concrete was patched cleanly, whether the flower beds survived. Better yet, if the contractor will arrange it, talk to a past customer face to face. Ask them: did the crew show up when they said? Did the price change? Did anything go wrong, and how was it handled? How a company handles something going wrong tells you more than a hundred smooth jobs. Every foundation job has surprises underground; the good companies handle them straight.

Reviews: read them, but read them like a detective. Here's how. Ignore the star average and read the actual words — especially the two, three, and four-star reviews, where people are most honest. Look for specifics: names of crew members, details about the job, mentions of how problems were handled. Vague five-star reviews that all sound the same ("Great service! Highly recommend!") posted within days of each other are a pattern worth noticing. So is a company with two hundred five-star reviews and not a single complaint anywhere — in fifty years of hands-on field experience, I have never met a contractor who pleased everybody, and a perfect record usually means somebody is curating. Check how the company responds to bad reviews, too. A professional, specific response to a complaint tells you the company is still engaged. Silence, or a hostile reply, tells you something else. And check the dates — a flood of reviews all posted in the same month, then nothing for a year, is a campaign, not a reputation.

The in-person walkthrough test is where your gut gets its vote. When the estimator comes to your house, watch how he works. Does he walk the entire perimeter, or just glance at the crack you pointed out? Does he go inside and check floors and doors, or stay in the driveway? Does he look at your gutters, your grading, your downspouts — the drainage we covered in Chapter 4 — or does he jump straight to selling piers? A contractor who checks your drainage before selling

you foundation work is a contractor thinking about your house. One who ignores the water and goes straight to the pier count is thinking about his commission. Does he measure elevations, or eyeball it? Does he ask you about the history — when did you first notice it, has it changed, any plumbing work lately? The thorough estimator is doing diagnosis. The quick one is doing sales.

Ask about the crew, too. Who will actually be in your yard — the company's own employees or a subcontracted crew? How long has the foreman been doing this? Foundation work is skilled labor; the pressed concrete pile method works when it's done right by people who've done it a thousand times. You want experience in the ground, not just in the sales pitch.

Now the money question: why the cheapest bid usually costs the most. We touched on this in the last chapter, but it deserves the full explanation here. Foundation work has real costs: concrete piles, hydraulic equipment, skilled labor, insurance, and the time to do it right. A bid that comes in far below the others isn't magic — it's missing something. Maybe it's fewer piles than the house needs, which means the job fails and you pay twice. Maybe it's no insurance, which means you're carrying the risk. Maybe it's a crew paid by speed, not by quality. Maybe the "warranty" is a word on paper from a company that won't exist when you need it. The cheapest bid wins the kitchen table and loses the house. Get three bids, throw out the outlier on the bottom, and choose among the real ones based on the plan, the warranty, and the company behind it.

One more protection worth knowing about: for complicated cases — severe movement, a house that's been patched before, or a situation where contractors disagree about what's wrong — consider hiring a structural engineer for an independent evaluation before you sign anything. That's a licensed professional who works for you, not for the repair company, and an engineer's report gives you an unbiased diagnosis you can hand to every bidder so they're all pricing the same job. I'm not an engineer and I don't pretend to be one — I'm a contractor with fifty years of hands-on field experience — but I know when a second set of qualified eyes is worth the money, and a disputed or severe foundation case is exactly that time.

Let me close with a composite scenario from the kind of situations I see every week. A homeowner in a DFW suburb gets three bids for a corner that's dropping. She does everything right: checks insurance certificates from two companies, drives past four past-job addresses, reads the three-star reviews, and watches both estimators walk the house. One estimator spends forty minutes, measures everything, points out that her downspout is dumping at the

bad corner, and tells her to fix the drainage first and call him back in six months if the movement continues. The other spends twelve minutes and hands her a one-page bid with a "lifetime warranty." She picks the first contractor. Six months later, after the drainage fix, the corner has stabilized and she never needed piers at all. The best foundation contractor she ever hired is the one who told her she didn't need him yet. That is what vetting buys you — not just a good contractor, but the truth about whether you need one.

You now have the full playbook: fix the water first, read the bid like a plan, and vet the company like your house depends on it — because it does.

Chapter 7: Pressed Concrete Piles: The Only Permanent Repair Method

If your house is settling and you start asking around about how to fix it, you'll hear a lot of different answers. Let me give you the one that comes from standing in a hundred crawl spaces and excavated piers holes across North Texas: a foundation repair is only permanent if the piles go down to something that doesn't move. Everything else is renting time.

The method I trust is pressed concrete piles — poured cylinders of concrete, stacked one on top of another and pressed down into the ground hydraulically, section by section, until they reach a load-bearing layer of soil or rock. When I say pressed, I mean exactly that: a hydraulic jack pushes each section down, and the crew keeps adding sections until the pile physically cannot go any deeper. That point has a name — refusal — and it's the whole ball game. I'll spend all of Chapter 8 on refusal, because understanding it is how you hold a contractor accountable. For now, just know this: a pile that reaches refusal is bearing on ground that will not settle under your house. A pile that doesn't is a guess.

Let's back up and talk about why your house is moving in the first place, because the repair method has to answer the soil. Most of the DFW metroplex sits on expansive clay. That clay is famous — it's the reason half the slab repairs in this state exist. When it rains, it swells. When it dries out in an August like the ones we get here, it shrinks. That swell-and-shrink cycle is called soil movement, and a slab poured on the surface is basically riding a slow elevator. Over years, one corner of the house goes down a little more than the other corners. Doors stick. Drywall cracks at the tops of door frames. You can see daylight under the baseboard in one room. None of that is the house being "bad." It's the soil doing

exactly what Texas clay has always done.

A permanent repair has to get past that moving clay down to soil that isn't participating in the swell cycle. That means depth. The clay layer in much of North Texas runs ten, fifteen, twenty feet deep in places before you hit something stable. So when a contractor tells you their repair stops at six or eight feet, you don't need to be an engineer to ask the obvious question: what holds it up when the clay moves again? The answer, usually, is nothing. The pile is sitting right in the middle of the active zone — the soil that swells and shrinks — so it settles right along with the house, just a year or two later. That's why people pay for a "repair" and then call someone else in three years. They didn't buy a repair. They bought a pause.

Pressed concrete piles answer this by going deep. Here's what happens on a real job. The crew excavates a hole at the grade beam — that's the thickened edge of your slab, the part designed to carry the load — and sets a concrete pile segment into it. Each segment is a heavy cylinder of precast concrete, usually about a foot in diameter. A hydraulic press pushes it down. Then they stack the next segment on top and press that down. And the next. Every section gets driven deeper until the press is pushing with maximum force and the pile stops moving. That's refusal. The pile is now bearing on soil or rock that can't be compressed by a hydraulic jack — which means it certainly can't be compressed by your house.

Then the crew does something important: they transfer the weight of the house onto the pile. The pile is locked to the grade beam — typically with a concrete cap poured around it, bonded into the structure — and the house is lifted back to level, or as close to level as the structure will safely allow. The weight of the house now sits on piles that bear on permanent ground. The clay can swell and shrink around them all it wants. The piles don't care. The house doesn't move.

That's what permanent means. Not "permanent for ten years." Permanent because the physics is permanent: bearing on soil that can't compress, below the zone that moves.

Now let me tell you why shortcuts fail, because you will absolutely be offered them. The most common shortcut is a shallow pile or a short-driven pier that stops before refusal. It costs less to install — less labor, fewer segments, faster job — so it's an attractive line item in a lowball bid. On paper, it looks like the same job: piles around the perimeter, house lifted, cracks closed. For the first year or two, it even behaves like the same job. But the piles are sitting in active clay. The first long drought cycle, the clay shrinks, and the piles follow the soil down. The doors start sticking again. You call the

company, and now you're reading the warranty's fine print (which we'll cover in Chapter 9) and learning that "settlement adjustment" either costs you money or isn't covered at all.

Another shortcut is mudjacking or slab jacking — pumping a slurry or foam under the slab to raise it. I'll be straight with you: that has its place. For a driveway panel, a sidewalk, a garage approach — flat concrete work that sank — jacking can be a fine, economical fix. But under a house foundation, it's a temporary leveling, not a repair. You're lifting the slab without supporting it on anything permanent. The same soil that moved the first time is still down there, and you just bought it a few years of runway. For a homeowner's biggest asset, that's the wrong trade.

There are also systems that glue or strap things to the slab — carbon fiber straps on cracked walls, epoxy injections, surface patches. Those address symptoms. A crack in the slab is evidence of movement; sealing the crack doesn't stop the movement. Nobody ever fixed a settling house by caulking the evidence. I'll always tell a homeowner to spend the money on what's actually wrong, not on what's visible.

Here's a composite scenario from the kind of houses I see every week. A family in a brick home built in the late eighties notices a stair-step crack running through the mortar on one corner of the house, and the back door needs a hard shove to close. They get three bids. The first two describe pressed concrete piles driven to refusal, with a diagram showing the piles going below the active clay. The third bid is about a third cheaper and describes "foundation piers" with no mention of refusal and no depth specification — just a pier count. The family picks the third bid because it looks like the same thing for less money. Two years later, the crack is back, the door is worse, and the cheap company's warranty covers "adjustments" that require a paid service visit — if the company is still answering its phone. I've walked up to that house. I've heard that story. The expensive part wasn't the first bid. The expensive part was paying twice.

So here's what I want you to take from this chapter. Ask what the piles are made of. Ask how they're installed. Ask how deep they go — and not the planned depth, the actual stopping point, because the actual stopping point is refusal, and refusal is different at every hole. A contractor who can't explain refusal in plain language shouldn't be under your house. A contractor who can is the one you want.

The repair method matters more than the sales pitch, more than the price, and more than the warranty document. Get the method right — pressed concrete piles, driven to refusal — and the rest of the details get much easier to judge.

Chapter 8: The Refusal Standard: How You Know the Job Is Really Done

In the last chapter I told you that refusal is the whole ball game. This chapter is the whole ball game, then. Because if you walk away understanding one technical idea from this book, it should be this one: a pile that hasn't reached refusal isn't finished. It doesn't matter what the contract says, what the foreman tells you, or how straight the doors swing. Until every pile is bearing on unmoving ground, the job isn't done.

Refusal is a plain-language idea, and any contractor who makes it sound complicated is doing you no favors. When a pressed concrete pile is being driven, a hydraulic jack pushes each segment down into the soil. Soil has a limit. Soft clay gives way easily. Denser clay pushes back harder. And eventually — at some depth in every single hole — the pile meets soil or rock so dense and so stable that the jack, pushing with its full rated force, can't move it any farther. The pile stops. That's refusal. The ground itself has told you: this is where your house should rest.

Think of it like pushing a tent stake into the ground. In soft topsoil, it slides in. Then it hits something hard and stops. You don't keep guessing about whether the stake will hold — you felt it hit the hard layer. Refusal is the industrial version of that feeling, except the "feeling" is a pressure gauge on a hydraulic press, and the "hard layer" is the load-bearing stratum below your home's active clay.

Why does this matter more than anything else in the bid? Because refusal is the one part of the job you can't see after it's done. You can see the lifted house. You can see the closed cracks. You can see the fresh concrete caps where the crew worked. What you can't see — ever again — is whether each pile went to refusal or stopped ten feet short. The crew knows. The soil knows. And if you don't ask, nobody's going to volunteer the information. Refusal is your proof of a permanent repair, and proof only exists if someone records it.

Here's what a proper refusal-driven job looks like on-site, step by step, so you know what to expect — and what to watch for.

First, the crew excavates at each planned pile location along the grade beam. They'll dig down to expose the beam, which is the thick, reinforced edge of the slab designed to carry the wall loads. The grade beam is what the pile gets attached to, so this excavation matters — it has to expose enough beam to build a solid connection.

Second, they set the first concrete segment and start pressing. The hydraulic press sits in the excavated hole and pushes the segment down. Each segment is added on top of the last and pressed down in turn. This is slow, deliberate work. A crew that's rushing this stage is a red flag — pressing to refusal can't be hurried, because refusal is discovered, not scheduled. You find it when the gauge says so, not when the clock says so.

Third — and this is the part I want you to burn into your memory — the crew records the refusal data. Every pile, every hole. How many segments went in. What the final gauge pressure read. What depth each pile reached. This is the job's birth certificate. A contractor doing honest refusal work keeps these records as a matter of course, because it's how they know the job is done. If you ask for the refusal log and get a blank look, that's information too.

Fourth, once the piles are at refusal, the crew locks them to the structure. The standard approach is a concrete cap: the top of the pile is bonded to the grade beam with poured concrete, creating a single unit — pile, cap, and beam working together. Then the house is lifted. And here's something most homeowners don't know: the lifting is the gentle part. A good crew lifts slowly, a little at a time, watching the structure. The goal isn't necessarily perfect level — it's safe, even, supported level. A house that's settled for fifteen years has framing and finishes that adapted to the slope. Forcing it perfectly flat can crack things that were fine. An honest foreman will tell you what the structure can take and what it can't.

Fifth, the holes are backfilled and the site is restored. The piles are underground now, invisible, doing their job silently. Which is exactly why the refusal log is the only evidence that matters.

Now, the questions you can ask. You don't need to be technical. You don't need to hover over the crew all day. But these five questions, asked to the foreman before or during the job, will tell you everything about who you're dealing with:

One: "How do you know when a pile is done?" The right answer is some version of: when the press hits maximum pressure and the pile stops moving — refusal. If the answer is "when we've gone twelve feet" or "when we've used eight segments," you're hearing a schedule, not a standard. Depth varies hole to hole. A fixed depth is a guess dressed up as a specification.

Two: "Can I see the refusal readings for each pile?" The right answer is yes, or "we'll have the log for you at the end of the

job." A contractor who tracks refusal has the data. A contractor who doesn't track it can't prove the job.

Three: "What happens if a pile won't reach refusal — if you hit something shallow or the ground never firms up?" The right answer acknowledges that soil is unpredictable: sometimes you hit a hard layer shallow (that's fine — refusal is refusal), and sometimes you keep driving and the ground stays soft, in which case the crew keeps adding segments until it firms up. The wrong answer is anything that sounds like "that never happens." It happens. Good contractors have a plan for it.

Four: "How is the pile locked to my foundation?" The right answer describes the cap and the bond to the grade beam in plain language. You're listening for a real structural connection, not a friction fit and a prayer.

Five: "After the lift, what settlement do you expect, and what do you do if the house moves again?" The right answer is honest: a proper refusal job shouldn't settle, and if it does, the warranty covers it — in writing, with terms you'll read before you sign. (Chapter 9 is all about making that warranty real.)

Here's a composite scenario from the kind of houses I see every week. A homeowner watches a crew work for two days. The crew is fast — impressively fast. Twenty piles in, and they're already lifting. The homeowner asks the foreman how deep the piles went. "About ten feet each," the foreman says. "Same all the way around." The homeowner feels good about the speed and the uniformity. Here's what I hear in that story: ten feet, same all the way around, is a schedule, not a refusal standard. Soil doesn't work in uniform ten-foot increments. One side of that house might hit refusal at eight feet; the other side might need eighteen. Uniform depth on variable soil means some piles stopped early and some went deeper than needed — and the ones that stopped early are the ones that will move again. Fast and uniform sounds professional. On a foundation job, it's a warning.

The refusal standard also protects you from the most expensive sentence in foundation repair: "We'll come back and adjust it." Adjustments are what you need when piles weren't at refusal. A company that drives to refusal doesn't plan on adjustments, because there's nothing to adjust — the piles are on permanent ground. When a warranty leans hard on free "adjustments," read it as an admission. They're telling you they expect movement. Ask yourself why they expect movement on a "permanent" repair.

Let me be blunt about something, because this is where homeowners lose the most money. A foundation repair without refusal is not a discount version of the real thing. It's a different product wearing the same name. It looks the same

on bid day — piles, lifting, a warranty page. It behaves the same for a year or two. Then the clay does what clay does, and the difference shows up in your door frames. By then, the cheap bid is the most expensive bid you ever signed, because now you're paying for the repair twice — once to the company that didn't finish, and once to the company that will.

Refusal is the line between a repair and a rental. Make the contractor cross it, pile by pile, and make them prove it in writing. That's the whole chapter. That's the whole standard.

Chapter 9: Red Flags: Pressure Tactics, Lowball Bids, and the Lifetime-Warranty Shell Game

You've learned what the right repair looks like: pressed concrete piles, driven to refusal, locked to the grade beam, with a refusal log to prove it. Now let's talk about the other side of the table — the sales game. Because in foundation repair, the bid process is where most homeowners get separated from their money, and it happens long before a crew ever digs a hole.

I want to be fair here. There are honest foundation companies in Texas doing good work. I've shared job sites with good crews and I've seen salespeople who educate first and sell second. This chapter isn't about them. It's about the patterns I've watched for decades — the tactics that show up again and again when a company is selling something other than a real repair.

Red flag number one: today-only pricing. The salesperson sits at your kitchen table, opens a folder, and tells you the price is good today and today only — that if you don't sign tonight, the number goes up, sometimes by thousands. Let me translate that for you. A real repair price doesn't expire at midnight. The cost of concrete segments, crew labor, and excavation doesn't change between Tuesday and Wednesday. What changes is your ability to think. Today-only pricing is designed to do one thing: stop you from getting a second bid. Any contractor who is afraid of a second bid is telling you exactly what that second bid would reveal. A legitimate company will put the price in writing and honor it for thirty days without blinking. If the price can't survive one night of sleep, it was never a real price.

Red flag number two: scare tactics. This is the salesperson who walks your house and finds catastrophe in every corner — who tells you the house is unsafe, that the foundation could fail, that your family's safety is at risk if you don't sign now.

Here's the truth from fifty years of looking at settled houses: the overwhelming majority of foundation settlement is a serviceability problem, not a safety emergency. Doors stick. Cracks appear. It's unsightly and it gets worse slowly. It is very rarely dangerous in the short term. A salesperson who tries to frighten you into signing is selling fear, not repair. The honest version of that conversation sounds like this: "Your house has settled about two inches on this corner. It's not an emergency, but it won't get better on its own, and here's what I'd do about it." Calm, specific, unhurried. Fear is a sales tool. Don't buy it.

Red flag number three: the absurdly low bid. You get three bids — two in the same general range, and one that's dramatically cheaper. Your instinct says you found a deal. Let me tell you what that cheap bid usually is: fewer piles, shallower piles, no refusal standard, a thinner warranty, or some combination of all four. Remember Chapter 7's composite scenario — the family that picked the bid a third cheaper and paid for the job twice. The math of foundation repair is stubborn: concrete segments cost what they cost, driving to refusal takes the time it takes, and a crew that does it right can't do it for half the price of everyone else. When a bid is dramatically lower, something real has been removed from the job. Your job is to find out what. Ask for the pile count, the depth standard, and the refusal log policy, and compare line by line. The cheap bid almost never survives that comparison.

Red flag number four: the vague scope. A bid that says "foundation repair — front of house" with a lump-sum price and no details is not a bid. It's a wish. A real bid specifies the number of piles, the locations, the installation method, the depth standard (refusal), the connection method at the grade beam, and what happens after the lift. If the scope fits on an index card, the contractor is keeping their options open — and their options are your risk. Vague scope also makes warranties meaningless, because you can't enforce a warranty on work that was never defined.

Red flag number five: the lifetime-warranty shell game. This one deserves its own section, because it's the slickest trick in the business and it works on smart people.

Here's how the shell game works. The salesperson offers a "lifetime warranty" — sometimes "transferable lifetime warranty" — and it sounds like the strongest guarantee in the industry. Who wouldn't want a lifetime warranty? But a warranty is only as good as the company standing behind it, and foundation companies come and go. Here's the question nobody asks at the kitchen table: who honors this warranty in ten years? If the company closes, gets sold, or changes its name — and in this industry, that happens constantly — your

lifetime warranty is a piece of paper from a company that doesn't exist. The warranty didn't fail. The warrantor vanished.

There's a second layer to the shell game: what the warranty actually covers. "Lifetime" describes the duration, not the coverage. Read the exclusions. Many of these warranties cover "adjustments" — meaning the company will come back and re-shim or re-press — but not the underlying failure. Some require annual paid inspections to stay valid, and missing one voids the whole thing. Some are voided if you do any drainage work, landscaping, or plumbing repair near the foundation — which is to say, voided if you maintain your house. Some cover the piles but not the labor to access them, so the "free" warranty visit comes with a four-figure labor bill. The word "lifetime" on the cover page tells you nothing. The exclusions page tells you everything.

So what does a real warranty look like in writing? It's specific. It names what's covered — the piles, the lift, the workmanship — in plain language. It states the duration in years, not in poetry. It lists the exclusions where you can find them, in the same document, before you sign. It explains the claims process: who you call, what happens, how fast. It addresses transferability directly — whether the warranty transfers to a new owner if you sell the house, whether there's a fee, whether the new owner has to do anything to activate it. And critically, it's backed by a company with a track record: years in business under the same name, a physical presence, a reputation you can check with people who aren't on the company's payroll.

On transferability specifically: if you're selling your house within the warranty period, a transferable warranty has real value to a buyer. But "transferable" has to mean something concrete. Get it in writing: does it transfer automatically, or does the buyer have to register and pay a fee? Does the coverage change after transfer? Does the clock restart or keep running? I've seen "transferable lifetime warranties" that transfer for a fee nearly as large as a new repair. That's not a benefit. That's a coupon.

Here's a composite scenario from the kind of houses I see every week. A couple gets a bid with a "lifetime transferable warranty" and it seals the deal — it's the deciding factor over a competitor with a twenty-year written warranty. Eight years later, they sell the house. The buyer's inspector asks about the foundation work, and the couple proudly produces the warranty. The buyer calls the company to transfer it. The company was sold three years ago; the new owners honor warranties from the old company "at their discretion," which turns out to mean a paid inspection, a new contract, and coverage terms that look nothing like the original. The

"lifetime warranty" that won the bid is now a negotiation. The competitor's twenty-year warranty, from a company still operating under the same name, would have been worth more — because a warranty is a promise, and a promise needs a promisor.

A few more quick red flags before we close the chapter. Be wary of the salesperson who won't leave the bid with you — "I'll email it later" that never comes, or a price that's only verbal. Everything in writing, always. Be wary of large upfront deposits — a reasonable mobilization deposit is normal, but paying most of the job before the crew arrives is not. Be wary of the company with no local references you can drive past — not testimonials on a website, but addresses of jobs from five-plus years ago that are still holding. And be wary of anyone who badmouths every competitor by name. The honest contractors I've known spend their sales calls talking about soil and piles, not about the other guy.

Let me leave you with the simplest rule in this whole book. Slow the process down. Get three bids. Read every warranty before you sign anything. Ask the five refusal questions from Chapter 8. And never — never — sign a foundation contract at your kitchen table on the first visit because someone told you the price expires at midnight. The house waited years to settle. It can wait a week while you think. The right contractor will still be there in the morning, price unchanged, ready to drive every pile to refusal and prove it. The wrong one needed you to decide before you could think. That tells you everything.

Chapter 10: Repair Day: What Installation Actually Looks Like at Your House

You've done the hard part already. You got the estimates, you picked your contractor, you signed a contract with a pile map and a warranty you're happy with. Now comes the part most homeowners dread, because they don't know what to expect: the crew shows up, and there's heavy equipment in your yard.

I want to walk you through a foundation repair day the way it actually goes when it's done right, so that morning you're watching from the kitchen window instead of worrying about what that noise was.

Before the crew arrives

A good contractor will tell you ahead of time what to clear

out. Move your cars out of the driveway. Move patio furniture, grills, and anything breakable away from the work areas. If they need interior access — and with a slab foundation they sometimes do — they'll tell you which rooms, and you should clear a working path a few feet wide along the foundation walls where the pile locations are marked. It doesn't need to be perfect; it needs to be passable.

You don't have to take the day off work. You don't have to babysit the crew. But somebody should be reachable by phone, because a good foreman will check in with you before lifting the house, and you want to hear that conversation yourself.

Here's a composite scenario from the kind of house I see every week: a single-story brick home on a slab, built in the 1990s, with a corner dropping where the big oak tree drinks the soil dry every August. The contract calls for eight pressed concrete piles along two sides. When the crew arrives, here's what happens.

Morning: the walkthrough

The crew pulls up — usually a pickup or two, a small trailer, and the pile segments stacked on pallets. A pressed concrete pile is a cylinder, about the diameter of a dinner plate, roughly a foot tall. They get stacked one on top of another and pressed into the ground. The truck ride is the whole reason they come in pieces: you can't haul a thirty-foot column through a neighborhood, but you can haul a pile of foot-long cylinders and drive them down one at a time.

The foreman should walk the property with you before anybody starts digging. He'll confirm the pile locations against the contract, point out where the access holes will go, and tell you what he's going to disturb — a section of flower bed here, the patio edge there. If his walkthrough doesn't match what the salesman told you, stop him and sort it out before the first shovel hits dirt. That's a clean sentence that costs you nothing and has saved more jobs than any other sentence I know.

Access: outside and underneath

Here's what surprises most homeowners: on a slab house, most of the work happens outside the house, along the perimeter beam. The crew digs down to the bottom of your foundation's edge beam — usually a few feet — creating a working hole at each pile location. The house is still sitting on its own foundation while this happens. You're not in danger. The holes are strategic: each one is exactly where a pile goes, and nowhere else.

For interior piles, they work from inside: a small square is cut out of the slab at the pile location, the hole is tunneled or dug down to the clay, and the pile is pressed in there. Yes, there's a hole in your floor for part of the day. No, you won't fall through it. And when they're done, that spot gets concrete backfill and it disappears under your floor covering. If your flooring was going to be replaced anyway, repair day is a fine time to coordinate that.

How a pressed pile actually goes in

This is the part worth understanding, because it's elegant once you see it.

The crew sets a hydraulic jack in the bottom of the access hole, braced against your foundation's beam. Then they feed the first concrete cylinder into the jack and press it down into the soil. Then they stack the next cylinder on top and press again. One cylinder at a time, each one driven deeper by the jack.

Here's the beautiful part: the jack pushes down against your house. The house is the reaction point. So the pile goes down with exactly the force the house itself can push back with — meaning the pile is seated at a load the structure has already proven it can carry. When the pile finally refuses to move — when it hits rock or soil so dense the jack can't budge it — that refusal point is the bearing point. The crew keeps a count: how many cylinders, how deep each pile drove. Every pile's depth should get written down, because that's part of your pile map and part of your proof that the work was done honestly.

One thing I want you to notice: pressing is quiet work. There's no hammering. Nobody is pounding the foundation with an impact driver. The loudest thing you'll hear all day is probably the small excavator or the jackhammer opening the access holes, and the jackhammer only runs when there's concrete or brick flatwork to break through. A lot of jobs run most of the day with nothing louder than conversation and the hum of a hydraulic pump. If your neighbor works nights and sleeps days, this is about the friendliest heavy construction you'll ever host.

The lift

Once the piles are in and locked, the crew sets jacks on top of the piles, under your foundation beam, and begins to raise the settled section. This is the moment of truth, and a good foreman treats it with respect.

The lift happens slowly — fractions of an inch at a time. The foreman watches the gap, watches the cracks, and watches a

laser or level line. He'll often stop and go open a door or a window himself, checking that the binding is releasing. Homeowners sometimes hear little ticks and pops from the framing as the house adjusts. That's normal. That's the house finding its way back.

Here's something important to hear from me, a man with fifty years of hands-on field experience watching houses come back up: "level" doesn't always mean perfectly level. Sometimes a section gets lifted to full design elevation. Sometimes a contractor deliberately stops short — because the house has been sitting crooked so long that the framing has memorized the crooked shape, and forcing it perfectly flat would tear apart things that had adapted. A good foreman lifts to the point where the structure is stable, supported, and the doors and windows work — and he explains to you exactly what he's done and why. If your contract promised a specific lift and you didn't get it, that conversation happens at the end of the day, with the foreman, while the equipment is still in the driveway.

What "done for the day" looks like

When the lift is set, the crew doesn't just pull the jacks and leave. The pile tops get capped — concrete shims are stacked to fill the gap between the pile column and the foundation beam, locked in place so the load transfers permanently onto the piles. The jacks come out. The access holes get backfilled: the dirt that came out goes back in, compacted in layers, and where there was concrete flatwork, it gets patched.

A professional crew cleans up before they leave. Tarps come up. The dirt piles get hauled or spread. The driveway gets swept. Your flower bed might need replanting where the hole was, and the grass will grow back — that's just honest construction, and any contractor who pretends otherwise is selling you something.

You should walk the property with the foreman before the trucks leave. Check the work areas. Ask your questions now, while the people who did the work are standing in your yard. And get your updated paperwork: the final pile count, the depths each pile drove to, and a note on the final lift elevations. If your contractor promised a pile map in the contract — and he should have — the end of repair day is when you confirm it's coming.

Most residential jobs take one to three days. An eight-to-twelve pile job on a single-story home is often a one-day job. A big two-story with interior piles and tunneling can run two or three. A contractor who tells you two weeks for a standard residential job either has a scheduling problem or a crew problem — the work itself goes fast once it starts.

One honest note about mess

There will be dirt. There will be a patch in your flower bed and maybe a section of driveway or patio that got cut and re-poured. Nobody can press piles under your foundation without moving earth. What separates the contractors worth hiring from the rest isn't whether they make a mess — it's whether the place looks respected when they leave. Tarps under the dirt piles. Ruts filled. The patio patched clean instead of lumpy. You can see in the cleanup how they'll handle anything that goes wrong later.

So when repair day comes, make your coffee, keep your phone nearby, and watch a little. You're about to see your house get its foundation back. It's genuinely interesting work — and now you know what you're looking at.

Chapter 11: After the Piles: Soil Moisture, Gutters, Trees, and Keeping It Level

Here's the part of the foundation business that nobody advertises, because it doesn't sell anything: the piles under your house are only half the repair. The other half is the ground around them — and that part is on you.

I know that's not the most popular sentence in this book. You paid real money for a professional repair. But Texas clay is alive in a way northern soil isn't. It swells when it's wet and shrinks when it's dry, and it does that forever, piles or no piles. The pressed concrete piles under your home are bearing on stable soil far below the active zone — that's the whole point of the repair. But the slab and the soil between the piles still ride up and down with the moisture, and if you let the ground go bone-dry on one side and swampy on the other, your doors will start telling you about it.

The good news: keeping it level is simple. It's not expensive. It's just consistent. Let me walk through it.

Consistent moisture is the whole game

The number-one enemy of a repaired foundation in Texas is uneven soil moisture. Not dryness by itself — dryness is fine as long as it's even. The problem is one side of the house sitting in soaked clay while the other side sits in cracked, shrunk clay. That difference is what moves things.

Here's a composite scenario from the kind of situation I run into every week: a house repaired in the spring, nice and level

all summer, and by October the back door is sticking again. Nothing is wrong with the piles. What's happened is the homeowner watered the front flower beds all summer and never watered around the back of the house. The front soil stayed plump, the back soil shrank away, and the slab between the piles flexed on the difference.

The fix is a watering program. In the hot months, soaker hoses laid about eighteen inches to two feet out from the foundation, run on a schedule that keeps the soil at a steady, moderate moisture — not soggy, not cracked. You're aiming for what I call the wrung-sponge feel: damp all the way through, no standing water, no dry cracks. A simple mechanical timer on the hose bibb does the job for most houses. Smart controllers are nice but not required; consistency matters more than technology.

Water all four sides. This is the part people skip. The shady side of the house needs less, but it still needs some. The side under the big patio needs attention because the patio blocks the rain that would have watered that soil naturally. Think in terms of the whole perimeter, not just where you can see the plants.

And in winter, don't turn the system off and forget it. Texas winters have dry spells too, and a two-week dry wind in February can shrink clay just like August can. Dial the schedule back, but keep the soil steady.

Gutters and downspouts: the free insurance

If there's one thing I'd spend money on right after a foundation repair, it's gutters that actually work. Here's why: a roof collects an enormous amount of water, and without gutters it dumps all of it in a ring about two feet from your foundation — exactly where you least want it.

Every downspout needs to send its water well away from the house — extensions, buried drains, something that carries the roof water out past the zone where it can soak the clay against the slab. Splash blocks alone aren't enough on Texas clay; they just move the puddle a foot. Get the water ten feet away or more, to daylight or to a drain system that does.

And keep them clean. A gutter full of leaves is a gutter that pours water straight off the side of the roof in a waterfall — right against the foundation. Twice a year, ladders and gloves, clean them out. It's the cheapest foundation insurance that exists.

Trees: the quiet water thieves

Trees near a foundation are beautiful, and nobody wants to

hear they should cut one down. So here's the honest version: a big tree within twenty feet of your house is drinking from the same clay your foundation sits on. Every summer it pulls hundreds of gallons out of that soil. That's not a theory — you can see the soil pull away from the slab in a ring around a thirsty tree in August.

You have options, and "cut it down" is only one of them. Root barriers — physical shields installed in a trench between the tree and the house — can cut the competition for moisture in half. Extra watering on the tree side of the foundation compensates for what the tree drinks. An arborist can thin the canopy, which reduces the tree's water demand. What you can't do is ignore it. If your repair contract included piles on the side where the big tree is, and you let that tree keep drinking the soil dry every summer, you're spending the repair's lifespan to fight a tree instead of letting the ground rest.

Here's a composite scenario from the kind of house I see every week: two houses on the same street, both repaired the same summer, both with a big oak on the southwest corner. One homeowner put in a root barrier and ran the soaker hoses a little longer on the tree side every July and August. The other one didn't. Five years later, one house is still dead level and the other one has needed an adjustment visit. Same piles, same contractor, same clay — different aftercare.

What maintenance actually looks like, year after year

Let me give you the short version of the calendar, because the details matter less than the rhythm:

Spring: walk the perimeter. Look for soil pulling away from the slab, new cracks in the mortar or sheetrock, doors that rub. Clean the gutters. Check that downspout extensions survived the winter.

Summer: run the watering program. Watch the tree side. If the soil cracks more than a hairline, water more. If water stands, water less.

Fall: clean the gutters again after the leaves drop. Check grading — the dirt should still slope away from the house. Over years, mulch and soil can build up against the slab and reverse the slope, and that reverses your drainage. Pull it back.

Winter: dial the watering back, but don't abandon it. Walk the perimeter after big rains and look for standing water that wasn't there before.

That's it. Nothing exotic. The homeowners whose repairs last the longest aren't the ones who spent the most on the repair — they're the ones who spent the most consistent attention on the ground afterward.

When to call the contractor back

Your warranty is a tool, not a trophy. Use it. If you see movement — a new crack wider than a hairline, a door that starts sticking when it didn't before, a floor that feels like it's changed — call the contractor who did the work and describe exactly what you're seeing. A reputable company sends somebody out, puts a level on the elevations, and tells you the truth: either it's within normal seasonal flex, or it's an adjustment they owe you.

Document what you see. Date your photos. Keep a little log. "Back door started rubbing, September 2026, photo attached." That log is what turns a warranty claim from an argument into a conversation. And don't wait — the longer movement goes undocumented, the harder it is for anyone, including you, to know when it started.

One more thing worth saying plainly: if you hired a contractor and he disappears after the check clears — no answers, no return visits — that's information too. Note it in your file, and next time hire the company that answers. The repair under your house is permanent. The relationship with the company that put it there should be, too.

Chapter 12: Buying or Selling a Home With Foundation Work: Disclosures and Paperwork

At some point, a house with foundation work in its history is going to change hands — maybe you're buying one, maybe you're selling one. And when it does, the pile of paper in your filing cabinet matters almost as much as the piles under the slab. Good paperwork protects the sale. Bad paperwork — or missing paperwork — costs you the sale, or costs you money after it.

Let me take it from both sides.

If you're selling a home with foundation work

Texas law requires you to disclose what you know about the property, and foundation repair is one of those things you absolutely know about if it happened while you owned the

house. Disclose it. Fully. "Seller had foundation repaired by [company] in [year], [number] pressed concrete piles installed, transferable lifetime warranty included." That's not a confession — that's a selling point. A repaired foundation with paperwork is stronger than an unrepaired foundation with questions.

Here's a composite scenario from the kind of transaction I see every year: two houses for sale on the same street, same floor plan, same year built. One seller hands the buyer a folder: the original contract, the pile map showing every pile location and depth, the warranty document with the transfer clause highlighted, and the elevation readings from the day of the repair plus the follow-up readings two years later. The other seller says, "Yeah, we had some foundation work done a few years back, I think," and has nothing to show. The first house closes without a hitch. The second one gets a lowball offer "for the foundation risk" — or the buyer walks entirely. Same repair, maybe. The difference is paper.

So keep everything, and keep it organized:

The contract. The original signed agreement, showing the scope, the pile count, the locations, and what was promised.

The pile map. This is the drawing or diagram showing where every pile went and how deep each one drove. It's the proof of the work. If your contractor didn't give you one, ask for it now — while the company still has your job on file.

The warranty document. The full text, not the brochure. You need the transfer clause — the exact language that says the warranty moves to the next owner, and any conditions: transfer fees, notification windows, inspections required. Some warranties transfer free. Some charge a few hundred dollars to re-register in the buyer's name. Some require the transfer paperwork within thirty days of closing. Read the fine print before listing day, not after.

Elevation readings. If your contractor took elevation measurements before and after the repair — and a good one did — keep them. They're the baseline. If a buyer wants an independent check, these are what the new readings get compared against.

Maintenance records. Your watering schedule, your gutter cleanings, your adjustment visits — whatever you did to take care of the repair. A seller who can say "I've watered the perimeter every summer since the repair and the elevations haven't moved in four years" is selling confidence.

If you're buying a home with foundation

work

First: don't panic. A home with a properly repaired foundation and a transferable warranty is, in many ways, a safer buy than a home that's never been repaired but sits on the same clay. The repair is done. The ground under it is pinned. The question isn't whether the work happened — it's whether it was done right and whether the paper protects you.

Here's what to ask for, in order:

1. Who did the work, and when? Get the company name and the date. Then check that the company is still in business and still honoring warranties. A lifetime warranty from a company that folded three years ago is just paper with nice words on it.

2. What kind of repair was it? For a Texas slab home, you want to see pressed concrete piles. Ask how many, where they were placed, and how deep they drove. The pile map should answer all of this.

3. Is the warranty transferable, and what does it take to transfer it? Get the actual warranty document and read the transfer terms yourself. Don't take the seller's summary. If there's a transfer fee or a deadline, make sure it's handled in the closing — get it in writing that the seller completes the transfer before or at closing.

4. What do the elevations look like now? If the seller has recent elevation readings, compare them to the post-repair baseline. If they don't, consider having your own readings taken. An elevation survey costs a fraction of what the repair cost, and it tells you whether the house has stayed where the piles put it.

5. Has there been any adjustment work since the repair? Adjustments aren't a red flag — they're the warranty working as designed. What you want to know is the pattern. One adjustment in the first year is normal settling-in. Adjustments every year for five years is a conversation you want to have with the contractor before you buy.

The transfer: how it actually works

In most cases, transferring a foundation warranty is simple. The seller contacts the foundation company, provides the buyer's name and the closing date, pays any transfer fee, and the company issues the warranty in the buyer's name. Sometimes there's an inspection — the company sends a technician out to verify everything is still performing before the transfer. That's actually a good sign: it means the warranty is real enough that the company checks its own

work.

Build the transfer into the contract for the sale. A line in the purchase agreement — "Seller to transfer foundation warranty to Buyer at or before closing, at Seller's expense" — costs nothing to add and removes the single most common post-closing fight over foundation paperwork. Your real estate agent has seen this before. Ask her to include it.

At the inspection: what to expect

If you're the buyer, your general home inspector will note the foundation repair — the patches at the perimeter, maybe a slab patch inside — and he'll flag it. That's his job. Don't let the flag rattle you; read what it says. A good inspector notes the repair, notes the documentation provided, and recommends you verify the warranty transfer. That's a clean report.

What you don't want is a vague report: "evidence of prior foundation repair, condition unknown." That sentence is what happens when the seller has no paperwork. If you get one of those, go back to the seller and ask for the folder. If there is no folder, price that in. You have every right to ask for a price reduction or a credit when the foundation history can't be documented — because you're buying risk, and risk has a price.

If you're the seller, don't wait for the inspection to surprise you. Hand the inspector the folder when he arrives. Most inspectors are relieved to see documentation — it lets them write "prior foundation repair professionally performed and documented, warranty transferable" instead of guessing. You want the inspector working from facts, not from imagination.

And one piece of plain advice for both sides: never, ever hide foundation work. Texas sellers are required to disclose known defects and repairs, and "forgetting" to mention the piles is the fastest way to turn a clean sale into a lawsuit. The repair isn't the problem. The repair is the solution. Disclosing it proudly — with the folder to back it up — is how you keep it that way.

How good paperwork protects value

Let's be honest about what foundation work does to a home's value. An unrepaired foundation problem is a discount — sometimes a steep one, because buyers price in the unknown. A repaired foundation with full paperwork is, at worst, neutral, and often a positive: the buyer knows the work is done, knows what was done, and holds a warranty that outlives the seller's ownership.

But a repaired foundation with NO paperwork is worse than either. It's a question mark. The buyer's inspector will note the patches, the buyer will ask what was done, and the seller will shrug — and into that shrug, the buyer's imagination will pour the worst case. Every missing document is money off the price or a dead deal.

I've watched this play out more times than I can count, and the pattern never changes: the folder wins. The homeowners who kept their contract, their pile map, their warranty, and their maintenance notes sell smoother, sell faster, and sell for more. The ones who trusted their memory lose.

So whether you're buying or selling: treat the paperwork like it's part of the house. Because it is. The piles are under the slab where nobody can see them. The folder is what proves they're there.

Conclusion: The Honest Recap

If you've made it this far, you know more about foundations than most of the salesmen who knock on doors in this state. Let me leave you with the short version of everything this book taught you.

Your foundation's job is simple: hold the house up on ground that wants to move. Texas clay expands when it's wet and shrinks when it's dry, and that cycle is the real force behind almost every crack, sticking door, and sloping floor you've ever seen. The house isn't broken — the ground is restless. Your job is to understand the difference between cosmetic noise and structural signals.

Water is the free repair. Before you spend a dime on foundation work, fix your drainage: gutters, downspout extensions, grading that slopes away from the house, sprinklers that don't drown one corner. More foundation "problems" have been solved by a ladder and a shovel than the industry will ever admit.

A real bid is a document, not a number. Pile counts and placement, depth expectations tied to refusal, warranty terms in writing, what's excluded and who fixes what if something goes wrong — if it's not in the bid, it doesn't exist.

Vet the contractor, not just the price. Insurance, time in business, references you can drive past, and your own gut during the walkthrough. The cheapest bid usually costs the most — it just takes a few years to collect.

Pressed concrete piles, driven to refusal, are the permanent repair. Everything else is a patch with an expiration date. And refusal is how you know the job is really done: each pile keeps going until the ground itself says it can't go further. If a crew packs up without hitting refusal, the job isn't finished — no matter what the paperwork says.

Read the warranty like a contract, because it is one. Know exactly what it covers, for how long, whether it transfers, and — most importantly — who you call in ten years and whether that someone will still be there. A lifetime warranty from a two-year-old company is a promise without a backbone.

Pressure tactics are information. Every "today-only" discount, every scare story, every salesman who won't leave your kitchen table is telling you exactly what kind of company you're dealing with. Believe them and show them the door.

Installation day is straightforward if the planning was good. Crews arrive, access points get dug, piles get pressed in, the house gets adjusted, and everything gets cleaned up. The chaos you hear about comes from contractors who didn't plan — not from the work itself.

After the repair, the ground still moves. Consistent soil moisture, working gutters, and sensible tree management are what keep a permanent repair permanent. The piles do the holding; you do the maintaining.

Keep your paperwork forever. The contract, the pile map, the warranty, the elevation readings — this folder is worth real money when you sell, and real peace of mind while you stay.

That's the playbook. One honest guide, twelve chapters, no sales pitch. If you take nothing else from these pages, take this: the homeowner who asks questions always gets the better repair. You now know the questions.

Resources & Next Steps

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in brick, masonry, and foundation work across Texas. He owns and operates Champion Brick Repair, Metro Foundation Repair, LintelLOCK, MortarMagic, and WhiteStone Construction.

- **Champion Brick Repair** — brick & masonry repair, Dallas-Fort Worth — championbrickrepair.com — (817) 900-6324

- **Metro Foundation Repair** — pressed concrete pile foundation repair — metrofoundationrepair.com — (817) 523-1540
 - **LintelLOCK** — the field-developed lintel replacement system — lintlerepair.com — (469) 730-0650
 - **MortarMagic** — mortar color matching & the Mortar Bucket — mortarmagic.netlify.app
 - **WhiteStone Construction** — stone, ranch & property work, Hamilton TX country — (254) 723-5040
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About the Author

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in brick, masonry, and foundation work across Texas. That's five decades of hands in the clay, under houses, reading cracks like a weather map, and learning — the long, hot way — what holds and what doesn't.

He owns and operates **Metro Foundation Repair** (pressed concrete pile foundation repair for Texas homeowners), **Champion Brick Repair** (brick and masonry repair across Dallas-Fort Worth), **LintelLOCK** (his field-developed lintel replacement system), **MortarMagic** (mortar color matching and the Mortar Bucket), and **WhiteStone Construction** (stone, ranch, and property work in Hamilton County country).

Travis writes these books for the same reason he's spent his life on job sites: so the next homeowner doesn't have to learn the expensive lessons firsthand. Everything in this book comes from the field — not a textbook, not a sales seminar. Fifty years of doing the work, written down so it does somebody some good.

- **Champion Brick Repair** — brick & masonry repair, Dallas-Fort Worth — championbrickrepair.com — (817) 900-6324
- **Metro Foundation Repair** — pressed concrete pile foundation repair — metrofoundationrepair.com — (817) 523-1540
- **LintelLOCK** — the field-developed lintel replacement system — lintlerepair.com — (469) 730-0650
- **MortarMagic** — mortar color matching & the Mortar Bucket — mortarmagic.netlify.app

- **WhiteStone Construction** — stone, ranch & property work, Hamilton TX country — (254) 723-5040