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# CUSTOM HOME BUILDING TIPS

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## **CHOOSING A BUILDER**

Some items to consider in your search for a builder:

1. Look closely at the homes the Builder has completed and has under construction. Do they represent workmanship at the level you desire?
2. Request the names of a couple of the most recent customers who have had homes built by the builder. Call the customers and ask them for their recommendation.
3. Do you feel comfortable with the Builder? Does the builder listen and take good notes?
4. Is the builder a full-time home builder? Does the operation appear organized?
5. Does the builder have experience in building?
6. Is the builder licensed and insured?
7. What is the builder's record for staying on budget? Staying on schedule?

## **CHOOSING A DESIGN**

We suggest that you look at as many plans as possible and think carefully about how your family uses your home. What rooms get the most use? Which rooms get little or no use? For instance, you may not utilize a formal living room and would get more use from having that space allocated to a larger great room.

On what floor do you want your master bedroom?

Kitchens are an important part of any home. Do you like to do a lot of cooking at home or do you eat out a good bit. Serious cooks need to spend extra time to make sure you chose a plan with the counter space, pantry space, and amenities you need to create your culinary masterpieces!

Most builders offer some level of interior design service. Whether it's the basics, or a full-blown plan, interior design consultation can make the experience of building your new home a pleasure. Your builder may have many different samples of everything from flooring to fixtures to molding.

Specifications are probably the most important part of the agreement. Since it is so easy to forget things in today's hectic world, the complete home should be described in writing. The builder should offer specifications detailing the exact items to be included in the home. The specifications should offer not only what is provided, but also what is not provided in the home. Those specifications should also be signed and agreed to by all parties.

When the plans and specifications are complete you should receive a firm price for the home. This price should complete the home as specified on the chosen home site. Do not sign any agreement that leaves fill cost, foundation height, utility connections, governmental fees, etc. as an allowance item. This cost can end up being a large number and knowledgeable builders should be able to estimate these items and offer a firm price.

The quality of home sites can vary greatly. We suggest that you have a builder look at any home site you are interested in purchasing prior to agreeing to the purchase. In addition, never purchase a home site without having a soil test performed on the lot to be sure the soils are buildable. The builder should alert you to this need and have this test performed for you at your expense. Many times, the purchase of a home site is conditioned upon satisfactory soil test. It is further conditioned upon satisfactory percolation test if a septic system is required. We have seen the cost to correct soil problems run into the tens of thousands of dollars. Therefore, please spend a small amount for the soil test. It is the least expensive insurance that you can purchase!



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**FURNITURE PLANNING** – Many office supply stores sell templates that portray furniture sizes and styles. Use these templates with the floor plan to draw your furniture into the rooms of your home. Ask yourself if floor electrical outlets are needed, should windows be moved, are special ceiling outlets and lights needed, are wall electrical outlets in the right location, etc.

**FIREPLACES** – They are available in 2 different types. The first is a conventional masonry fireplace and the second is a metal prefabricated fireplace. The conventional fireplace has been virtually replaced by the prefab style. Fireplaces come in 36, 42, and 46 inch models. It can be veneered with brick, stone, tile, drywall banding, marble, or any other type of finish one would desire. Today, we are seeing a strong trend to a understated fireplace using drywall banding, tile, and other subtle materials. It seems buyers are moving away from a full brick or similar interior veneer since it seems to dominate most rooms and become the focal point. We are seeing many customers totally eliminate the fireplace and place more emphasis on a media center in the family room.

**HEATING AND AIR CONDITIONING** – Many homes in our area utilize electrically driven air to air heat pumps to control the homes interior comfort. In areas where natural gas is available, a gas furnace combined with an electric air conditioner offers an excellent alternative. The average person feels most comfortable when the interior temperature is between 70 and 76 degrees and the interior relative humidity is below 55 percent. As the humidity goes up the temperature must come down to feel the same comfort. To ensure proper humidity control, the system must be designed to match the heat load calculation. This is one instance where “bigger is not better.”

The conditioned air is distributed throughout the home using a system of rigid and flexible duct, collectively referred to as ductwork. Ductwork is a circulatory system that uses supplies to feed air into a room and returns to complete the circuit back to the air handler. Adequate and properly placed returns will keep closed rooms from becoming pressurized which can limit the entrance of supply air into the room.

System enhancements for your consideration are:

- A. Higher Efficiency Equipment can reduce the utility expense while providing better quality and comfort. A typical return on investment, “ROI,” can yield above 20 percent.
- B. Improved Air Filtration can improve indoor air quality. Basic filter categories are: electronic, pleated media and electrostatic. Select one that meets your needs and lifestyle.
- C. Heat Recovery Units use waste heat from your air conditioning system to heat domestic hot water. A typical payback is less than 3 years.
- D. Programmable thermostats allow the homeowner to program times and temperature for automatic operation, saving 30% during a typical setback period.
- E. Zoning the System allows a single system to be separated into multiple zones. Each zone has individualized control with its own thermostat.

### **ELECTRICAL**

All homes are wired to code requirements with plugs installed the number of feet apart as called for by the code. If you have specific electrical needs or locations you should identify those items to be sure you receive what you need. Also, look in large family rooms or living rooms and advise the Builder long before the project is started if you will need specially-placed electrical floor plugs. Choose the location of the floor outlets carefully as you will live with your decision a long time.



## INTERIOR FEATURES

**CEILING HEIGHTS** – The typical ceiling or wall height in most homes is 9 feet and the ceiling is flat. However, it is not uncommon to find the height of the walls to be higher to provide a more spacious feeling and add value to the home. The ceilings can be flat or vaulted. Hot air rises and if a ceiling fan is used to pull the cool air down and keep it down, the high ceilings will be quite energy efficient. There is a trend today toward high flat ceilings instead of vaulted ceilings.

**MOLDINGS** – Most builders construct a home that is a mix of traditional and contemporary. They sometimes include crown molding and other moldings associated with a traditional home. Should you desire these moldings you can choose from a wide variety.

**ATTIC STORAGE** – Many homes include an attic stairway in the garage or in an upstairs hallway. This attic space will typically accommodate storage of the Christmas tree, stereo boxes, etc. The roof trusses can be made to accept storage of heavier goods adding to the amount of storage space. If the trusses are not rated for attic storage, the building code will not permit the builder to install a floor in the attic.

**PLUMBING FIXTURES** – Fixtures can be a variety of colors depending on your taste and budget. Commodes are normally 2-piece toilets and consumers are showing a preference to the elongated type. The single-piece low boy commodes cost approximately \$500-600 more than the 2-piece commodes. This should be a value judgment. The master bath normally has a luxurious bathing tub, either cultured marble or acrylic. Most of the master bathrooms have dual vanities and separate shower and tubs.

**INTERIOR DOORS** – Your choice may be between hollow core or solid core. There are many different panel designs and different textures. Be especially careful to learn the height of the interior doors proposed.

**POCKET VS. SWINGING INTERIOR DOORS** – Many times the pocket door is used in door openings where the door swing would hinder the flow of traffic or the door is rarely used. A pocket door can give you up to 7 square feet of extra space that would have otherwise been reserved for the swinging of the door. The decision to use a pocket door needs to be made in the very beginning stages of the framing process and it is not always an option in some door ways. Pocket doors usually carry a slight extra charge due to extra hardware.

**CEILING FANS** – You should have the bedrooms, rear porch, and major living areas pre-wired for ceiling fans. The ceiling fan helps lower energy use and does an exceptional job cooling the home. If you want light kits installed on the bottom of the fan you will need to advise the builder so that proper wiring will be done.

**APPLIANCES** – You should have the choice of appliances used in a custom home. We suggest you spend time looking and studying the various appliances available. This will assure you long term satisfaction with the appliances.



### **WHAT IS THE PRICE PER SQUARE FOOT?**

By far, the most commonly asked question is the cost per square foot. It's easy for a builder to throw out a general price but the real question is truly understanding exactly what this figure represents. Homes can range from \$80 to \$130 per square foot. The lower end of the range accommodates customers that are budget conscious and want as much square footage for their investment and do not need custom upgrades. The upper end of the range fits a customer that desires many custom designs and amenities including an all brick exterior, columns, upgraded moldings, quartz, marble or granite, hardwoods, etc. With unfinished space incorporated into your home design, you will get the average cost per square foot down even lower! The most important part of getting a price per square foot number is to make sure that the builder listens and understands your needs and desires by asking good questions and taking detailed notes. If the builder and the customer have a clear communication from the beginning of the process, getting a fair, accurate price upfront is more likely to occur.

### **HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BUILD A HOUSE?**

When we build a home we try to get as much upfront planning as possible. You will be provided with a list of decisions that need to be made and when they need to be made by. It is best for both parties if most, if not all, decisions on things like color, material, and design are made before the process begins. The more time spent in this area making sure that every detail is defined and documented, the smoother the field execution will be. This joint investment in time also helps ensure you get exactly what you want throughout the entire home. If the time commitment for the customer is spent in the planning stages you can then relax and let Callaway Construction handle building your home. We understand that people have busy lives and that they are hiring us to relieve them of construction headaches and worry. If you choose a traditional building method, 5-8 months is a basic benchmark.

### **HOW DO I CHOOSE WHO SHOULD BUILD MY HOUSE?**

We believe that, aside from knowing that your builder has the experience, the key to choosing the right builder is becoming comfortable that you are working with someone that you can trust. Your relationship with your builder will last for a significant period of time. You must feel comfortable with the people that are helping you build, and you must be able to communicate clearly with them. You are essentially choosing a partner to help you from the beginning design to the service your home may need after you move. For the most positive experience, you need to build with someone you enjoy working with. You are forming a relationship, rather than just purchasing something from a sales person.

### **HOW DO I KNOW I AM TRUSTING THE RIGHT BUILDER?**

Talk to some people like you who have built homes with that builder. We're happy to give you references. We're proud of our high level of service and customer satisfaction. And when it comes to building your home, we want you to be comfortable throughout the entire process.