



The Systems-Built

Systems-built technology revamps the modular way of thinking.

A systems-built home is more innovative than what is commonly referred to as a modular home. If you ask a systems-built home owner what she likes best about her home, chances are you'll get a long list of answers.

"I tend to brag about our low utility costs," said Marsha Wilkerson of Kearney, Nebr. "Our utility bills have been cut in half since we moved into our systems-built home two years ago. We save over a hundred dollars in an average month—even though our new home is bigger and we have more appliances."

Wilkerson attributes her low energy costs to the 2x6 construction of the house. "You don't normally find site-built houses with an R-23 insulation value in exterior walls."

Unlike their close-relative, the site-built home (also called stick-built),

systems-built homes are built in a factory under a climate-controlled environment and then moved to the home site. They are built following codes that meet—and often exceed—local building codes. Once on site they are fastened to a permanent foundation. From that point on it can be difficult to tell a systems-built home from a site-built home. They also qualify for the same mortgages and have similar appraisal values to site-built homes.

Because systems-built homes must withstand the rigors of moving from the factory to the location, often hundreds of miles, they are engineered to be particularly strong.

"Pretty much anything you can build in a site-built home, you can do with systems-built home," said Ken Drahota of eastern Colorado. "We were surprised. We took our hand-scribbled floor plan to the manufacturer and asked if they had a house like

it in their plan book. He said, 'it doesn't matter—we can build your plan.'"

"I liked the fact that we selected all of our options up-front. Wardcraft really took time to make sure we had our house plan exactly the way we wanted it before building. They worked with us to customize our kitchen cabinets, our bathroom fixtures, our window choices, everything. Because of that, we stayed on budget and on time," said Drahota.

Often, a systems-built home can be built in a shorter time-frame than a stick-built home. "You can work on the foundation and the house simultaneously," said Mark Weller, plant manager for Wardcraft in Minden, Nebr. "We have each house on a schedule and we don't use subcontractors—they are all employees. So we don't hold up a house for weeks while we wait on one





Advantage

person to finish a particular job. Most houses are ready to be moved to the site within eight weeks of the day it starts on the line.”

The climate-controlled environment has additional benefits, particularly in the Midwest where winter can hinder the building season.

“I was horrified to drive around our community and see ice and snow accumulate on the site-built houses that were under construction. With all you hear about mold these days, it can’t be good for the lumber to get that wet,” Wilkerson said.

Rain and snow can also cause lumber to warp. With systems-built homes, they are built indoors, so their walls are straight and true.

Another advantage of indoor construction is security. Construction theft is becoming an increasing problem at new home sites as building materials become more

expensive. Unfortunately the cost of such theft is often passed on to the homeowner. By building inside the walls of a secure factory, theft or vandalism is rare. The homes are moved to the site only after they are weathertight and have locking doors.

Building waste is also disposed of easily in a factory setting. Weller said, “you won’t find scraps of drywall in your heating ducts and you certainly won’t find it in your lawn—we are careful to dispose of all excess building material properly.”

“Our goal is to provide the best-built house at a competitive price and to continue to break the mold on design options,” Weller said. “We can build two-stories, 1½ stories and very large, elegant homes within the walls of our factory. Once they are put together and finished, the only difference you’ll notice is a very satisfied homeowner.”

Good vs. Superior

Customers often make the mistake of comparing good site-built homes to the best systems-built homes and concluding that because the price is similar there is no advantage. When the best systems-built homes are compared to the same quality site-built homes the difference in price is substantial.

“No one could offer us what we wanted for anywhere near the price that Wardcraft could. When comparing nuts and bolts, contractors could not give us better quality for their additional costs,” say home buyers Mike and Linda Bodenhausen.

After a potential home buyer tours a systems-built home or production facility “I wonder why anyone would buy a site-built home today,” says Steve Snyder, Executive Director of the Modular Building Systems Association. ■

