

A Smarter Way to Build, by Mark Wilson, Stratford Building Corporation

According to the NAHB's Building Systems Council, modular construction is often considered the future of the home building industry and has roots nearly a century old. The industry precursor began in 1908 with the advent of Sears & Roebuck kit homes sold via mail and delivered by rail. The second formative factor was the introduction of the assembly line concept in 1913 by automotive pioneer Henry Ford. Finally, the catalyst that brought it all together was the end of World War II when the returning soldiers created a demand for homes that was greater than the marketplace could handle with the traditional building process.

Fifty years later, with constant improvements and limitless design possibilities, it is the fastest growing segment of the housing industry and is utilized by thousands of homebuilders throughout the U.S. and abroad. From simple and affordable homes to million dollar custom homes, multi-family dwellings and light commercial projects, the benefits of pre-fabrication "off-site" are quickly becoming better understood and more in demand. Today over 90% of builders use some form of pre-fabricated components, i.e., trusses, cabinets, pre-hung doors or wall panels. With its popularity beginning in the Northeast and spreading westward, modular core construction is slowly becoming embraced here in the Northwest as builders and consumers alike are becoming increasingly aware of it.

Modular construction occurs in a climate-controlled environment with skilled craftsmen using precise machinery and methods, resulting in a level of efficiency unattainable in the field. Not to be confused with HUD-code (mobile) or panelized homes, modular construction is subject to close scrutiny by state regulatory agencies, such as L&I here in WA, and requires engineering, plan review, stringent in-house quality assurance programs and plant inspections. Built to withstand the rigors of ground transportation and being lifted into place by a crane, the homes are typically stronger than conventional homes and comply with all applicable state and local codes. Built and shipped in modules, they are approximately 85% complete when they reach the job site, including interior and exterior finishes, doors, windows, cabinets, electrical and plumbing fixtures, etc. They are typically crane set and weather tight in one day and then require only three to five

weeks for the homebuilder to complete depending upon the level of customization.

This method creates "parallel construction paths" allowing the home construction to occur "off-site" at the same time as site preparation. This dramatically simplifies the builder's project oversight responsibilities and decreases timelines and costs as well as resulting in fewer hassles. Additional benefits include smaller crews, shorter build time, fewer sub-contractors and site inspections, elimination of weather delays and damage, decrease in site waste and risk of theft or vandalism, fewer labor related delays, increased likelihood of bringing the project in on time and on budget, better quality control, as well as savings in both hard and soft costs, e.g., interim financing. Modular core construction also results in a product that is inherently more green and naturally more energy efficient.

More information may be obtained via the NAHB's Building Systems Council or at www.modularhousing.com, www.buildingsystems.com, www.automatedbuilder.com, and www.stratfordhomes.com. Other great sources are "The Modular Home" by Andrew F. Gianino, Jr., or "Modular Mansions" and "Prefabulous" both by Sheri Koonen.



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