



The Ultimate Guide to  
**Building a  
Custom Home**



We deliver a true one-of-a-kind  
homebuilding experience

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# The Ultimate Guide to Building a Custom Home

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# Congratulations

You have made the decision to build your own custom home. We hope you are feeling excited, inspired, and eager to begin the process. As you set out on this path, it's natural to feel a bit overwhelmed by the numerous decisions and tasks involved. Bringing your ideas to life will take a lot of organization, time, and commitment. However, with a bit of patience, and the right experts by your side, the home-building process can be exceptionally rewarding.

Building a custom home presents the unique opportunity to fine-tune every detail until it perfectly meets your needs. A well-qualified custom home builder will be instrumental in providing design insights, value engineering and cost-saving alternatives, and solutions to potential constructability issues. They will be able to ensure that your home design and budget are continually aligned. This is an ongoing process until we are ready to begin construction.

In this guide, we will walk you through the custom home-building process step by step, so you'll know what to expect before you begin. Understanding what to expect from the journey ahead will go a long way towards helping you feel confident as you embark on this exciting adventure.





# Choosing Your Builder

A custom build is a long-term project. Over the weeks and months of planning and building, you will spend a lot of time with the building professionals you choose. A strong relationship with your builder will have an invaluable impact on your homebuilding experience. As you prepare to meet with builders, you should have an idea of your budget, the key points of what you want and need from your home, and the kind of houses you find inspiring. Nothing needs to be set in stone at this stage. Your design and building professionals will help you get clear on all the possibilities and options for your project as you move through the design process. You need to feel confident you can fully trust the experts you are bringing on board.

- Do they listen and communicate well?
- Do they understand your needs and priorities?
- Do they share your vision, and do they have the commitment required to bring it into reality?
- What kind of staff do they have to handle the workload?

The task of finding the right builder can be daunting, but if you keep the following key considerations in mind, you will be off to a great start:



## Uncompromising Quality

A great builder will have the contacts and experience to get you the best possible value and keep your project on budget, but they will also be very clear and firm on the quality level of the materials and workmanship used throughout the project. Quality control is paramount. From structural materials to cosmetic finishes, every detail should be chosen and executed to the highest standard. Your new house will hopefully be your family's home for many years, and an investment in their future. Cutting corners by choosing unqualified subcontractors or skimping on key building materials to save money is a false economy which will likely end up costing you more over time and negatively impact the worth of your home in years to come.

## Experience

In Wisconsin, anyone can throw up a website and claim to be a builder. There are no licenses required to set up a home-building business. Only a certification you get online and pay a small fee (tax) for. Having a true expert by your side is a must. There is a lot to building custom homes that can only be learned after years on the job. Every home-building project comes with its own unique challenges. There will be times when things don't go according to plan. What matters is how your builder will deal with those situations. Truly experienced builders have seen it all. They don't panic when there's a bump in the road, because generally, they already know how to solve the problem. Take the time to look deeply into the reputation and history of your potential builders. Doing your homework now can save you time, money, and frustration later.





## A Diverse Portfolio of Homes

Chances are you've chosen to build a custom home because you want a home that is perfectly tailored to you, your taste, and your lifestyle. Cookie-cutter solutions won't do it for you, so don't settle for a builder who just churns out slight variations of the same house over and over again. What you're looking for is a versatile builder who can listen to you, and then make your dreams come true. No matter what style of home you're planning, your builder should be able to work in that style and type of design. A wide range of home styles and sizes is a great sign. It means that your builder has the skills and flexibility to execute what you want, instead of defaulting to whatever is easiest for them.

## Organized Systems and Processes

The administrative side of building a home is every bit as complex and as important as anything that happens on the job site. There are hundreds of small decisions and calculations to be made over the months of a build. Your builder should have a strong organizational structure to track all of the moving parts of the project. There should be a transparent system for tracking the schedule and budget, and for communication. When it comes to choosing materials and finishes, they should have a clear and easy way of soliciting and recording your selections, and then placing the necessary orders.



## Reliable Subcontractors

A project is only as good as its weakest link. This is critical. No matter how skilled a builder might be, one bad subcontractor can stall a homebuilding project for weeks or months, throwing the budget and schedule into disarray and delaying your move-in date. You want to find a builder that fosters strong, long-term relationships with an extensive network of proven, trustworthy subcontractors who will be there not only during the duration of your project but for years down the road. Additionally, it is essential for the builder to have the ability to effectively manage and coordinate with subcontractors, ensuring a smooth and efficient construction process. This skill is vital for maintaining quality and keeping your project on track.

## Budget Comprehensiveness and Accuracy

How thorough a builder is when creating your budget directly correlates to how detail oriented and accurate they will be when managing your project. Your builder should be able to demonstrate they have put in the time, expertise, and due diligence to build a reliable budget that will end up as close to reality as possible.

# Quality



# Choosing & Purchasing Your Lot

One of the very first decisions you'll need to make before building your home is selecting the perfect location. There are many different things to consider as you view potential lots.

## Neighborhood

Where do you want to live? Do you need to consider school districts? Do you want to keep your commute under a certain length? Are you looking for a close-knit community or a secluded hideaway?

## Lot Size

How big is the lot? Is it big enough to accommodate the kind of house you're imagining? How big of a garage do you need? Do you want a big yard, a place for kids to play, room for pets?

## Lot Cost

What's your budget? Are you willing to spend more to be in a desirable area, or are you willing to go a little further out to afford a bigger site? What are the property tax rates? Is there a trend in property values in the area to consider?





## Lot Features

When you close your eyes and imagine the perfect setting for your home, what do you see? Are you in the middle of a lively street or tucked away in a cul-de-sac? Do you see mature trees bordering the property?

## Topography, Soil Conditions, and Vegetation

A steep site that needs a lot of excavation and fill, or expansive soils just under the surface can drive up your costs before the build even begins. If you've chosen a wooded lot or even one with a scattering of mature trees, will any need to be removed to make space for the house? It is critical to determine if stormwater detention and drainage happen on or off-site and whether the lot is located in a floodplain.

## Lot Shape, Zoning, Easements, Building Restrictions, Setbacks, or Neighborhood Design Requirements

Some lots come with particular design challenges. It doesn't mean they aren't workable, with a good homebuilder on your side, almost anything is possible. But it is important to be aware of these factors, which can drastically affect both the costs and the flexibility of your design.





# What to Know About Budgets

Creating a custom home budget takes a tremendous amount of time, attention to detail, and expertise. Your home builder should have the ability to provide you with a budget you can trust. One thing to know about custom home budgets is that you are never comparing apples to apples. There are so many variables that go into creating comprehensive and accurate budgets for a one-of-a-kind home. The more selections you can make as the budget is created, the more comprehensive the budget can be. More selections will lead to fewer assumptions and fewer allowance items placed in the budget.

## Historical Data

It is acceptable to use historical data to build a preliminary estimate that will help guide the architectural design phase, but this will not suffice to build a comprehensive final budget for a custom home.

## Multiple Bids and Historical Data

This is the most accurate way to estimate how much a specific plan will cost to build. As the plans and specifications are being developed, your builder should be willing to devote the time and expertise needed to give you a truly accurate picture of what it will cost to build your home. This is achieved by soliciting and thoroughly vetting hard bids from their network of subcontractors and suppliers and creating a detailed itemized budget.





## Assumptions

Because custom homes involve hundreds of details, it is inevitable that the builder will make assumptions in order to arrive at various budget numbers. It's important that your builder share those assumptions with you and gain clarity on which of those assumptions should be refined to make the budget more accurate.

## Options

With the hundreds of details going into the design of your custom home, there are multiple ways to go about implementing them. A good custom builder will help you understand your options and incorporate your priorities into the final design.

## Allowances

Because allowance items are simply plug-in numbers, you will want to understand how the builder arrived at each one. The allowances should be based on realistic estimates of what a particular line item might cost and there will be adjustments to these numbers as the desired level of finishes is determined.



## Design Process

Our design process is designed to ensure a seamless transition from one phase to another, all while keeping your vision at the forefront. Each phase of the process is meticulously planned and executed to provide you with a home-building experience that is smooth, enjoyable, and stress-free. Here's an overview of the four key phases that make up our comprehensive design process:

### Phase 1: Vision

We begin to create the conceptual design concepts for your individual home:

- Conduct site analysis to incorporate the views and topography of your site
- Discuss each individual room and its needs, proximity, and size
- Prepare preliminary floor plans that demonstrate the flow and relationship between spaces

# Details





## Phase 2: Design Development

- Create plans, elevations, 3D models, and begin selecting finishes
- Refine conceptual floor plans, elevations, and details
- Create a mood board based on your design style
- Create a virtual experience of your home

## Phase 3: Create Project Documents and Bidding

With your approved floor plans and elevations, we create the project documents, which will begin to translate your vision into reality

- Work with our Design Team to select materials and finishes
- Finalize bidding documents
- Establish an estimate based on the approved design
- Review the final bid, schedule, and present construction contract

## Phase 4: Construction Documents and Build

Build your home with the perfect harmony of size + quality + cost



## Pre-Construction Phase

The pre-construction phase is a crucial stage in the process where we will focus on financing, approvals, permits, assembling the right team, finalizing the project schedule, and making the final design selections. This phase lays the foundation for your dream home, and we are here to guide you through it every step of the way.

### **Financing, Approvals, and Permits**

After the architectural design process, we will start helping you get everything lined up for construction. We will handle all of the red tape and paperwork needed before we break ground. If you'd like help securing financing, we can assist with that. If there's a Homeowner's Association you need approval from, we'll manage the submission and approval process. We will also prepare and submit the permitting plan to the municipality. We have a dedicated team to ensure everything is in order for a smooth and stress-free beginning.





### **Sign on Key Subcontractors and Finalize Project Schedule**

We will review every aspect of your project and begin to assemble the best team for your job, taking into consideration value and reliability. With this information, we can begin to finalize your timeline and give you a projected move-in date.

### **Make the Next Phase of Selections With Your Interior Designer**

The majority of your home design was decided during the architectural design process stage, and now the selection of the remaining design/finishes details can begin. This is the really fun part of the process; where you select the finishes you'll be living with day-to-day. Flooring, lighting, kitchen cabinets, countertops, and all the things that make a house a home. While this is an exciting time, it can be a little overwhelming. We do everything possible to ensure that this is an enjoyable process. Our interior designer and project manager will work closely with you so that all of your choices and approvals are streamlined and recorded to minimize any unexpected delays. We will update and fine-tune the budget with each decision to accurately reflect current costs.

# Unique



## Construction Phase

After all the planning and strategizing, the actual building process can begin. Your home design will begin to take shape, moving from blueprint to reality. Our experienced superintendents are there in the field watching over every detail. They schedule, coordinate and supervise all the subcontractors and suppliers on-site to make sure that strict quality control is maintained at all times. In the office, our project manager is monitoring the budget, coordinating your selections, and managing the subcontracts and paperwork for the project. Our site superintendents will provide weekly written updates, including photos of the progress and what is to be expected in the coming weeks.

### **Site work and Foundation**

Grading, leveling, and filling. Once the site is ready, the foundation can be poured and set.

### **Building the Shell**

Starting with a solid foundation, it's time for the framing, roof, and exterior windows and doors to begin.

### **Plumbing, Electrical, and HVAC Rough**

The mechanical systems which make your home functional are put into place to ensure a safe and comfortable home.





## **Insulation and Drywall**

Now the house will begin to fill out. Good insulation is important for energy efficiency and comfort. The drywall forms the blank canvas of your home's interior, ready for the finishing touches.

## **Interior Finishes and Trim**

Painting, wallpaper, crown molding, and cabinets are a very dynamic part of the process, where all of the details begin to take shape. All of the decisions made in the design process come together to give your house a real identity.

## **Exterior Work**

Landscaping, siding, brick or stone work, and painting help your home show its best face to the world.

## **Plumbing, Electrical, and HVAC Finish**

The "guts" of these systems were installed during the rough, now the finishing touches of light switches, return air grills, thermostats, plumbing, and lighting fixtures are installed to control the light, water, and temperature in your house.

## **Flooring**

Tile, hardwood flooring, and carpeting are among the last things to be installed in your new home.



## Final Inspections, Walk-Through and Move-In

After all the work is finished, third-party inspectors will thoroughly check the house to ensure everything is up to code and finished according to the contract. Once this is approved, it's time to do a walk-through with us. Together, we've invested so much time and effort into this project, now we get to step back and take it all in.

Finally, you'll move in, get comfortable, and know that the hard work is done. But we're not done yet. If there are any outstanding punch list items, we will take care of them quickly and efficiently.

Our warranty covers ALL materials and workmanship for one year, plumbing, electrical, and HVAC for two years, and structural components for ten years. We believe in building strong houses and strong relationships.

# Exciting





We hope this guide has given you a good overview of the home-building process. As you take your first steps on this journey, don't lose sight of what a special experience building your own home can be. Trust the experts you've chosen to guide you, and let yourself enjoy the process. There may be challenges along the way, but the moment you step foot in your new custom home, it will all be worth it. We never get tired of watching new homeowners realize their dreams have come true. We hope we get the chance to walk down this road with you too.

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