

# Modular Homes- Taking new home construction to the next level....

Today's modular homes offer the home buyer an exciting, efficient and highly flexible alternative to a conventional "stick built" home. Anyone planning to build a new home should explore the modular construction option before making a final decision.

Over the last twenty years the modular home industry has invested hundreds of millions of dollars into developing state of the art manufacturing facilities which use the latest advances in computer aided equipment to produce homes that are in many ways vastly superior to conventionally built houses.

Built inside the controlled environment of a modular factory, these homes are protected from the weather during construction and typically employ the use of kiln dried lumber which virtually eliminates the shrinkage that can result from the use of wet framing lumber. Additionally, because modular homes are transported from a factory to the building site, they need to be stronger than conventionally built homes. Modular homes also typically contain more framing material and employ the use of special fasteners and adhesives that make them strong enough to travel to the construction site on trailers, at highway speeds, and to then be lifted and set in place on their foundations with a crane.

In the early years of modular manufacturing design flexibility was somewhat limited - today's manufacturing technology has broadened the realm of design possibilities to the point where there is really no limit to what can be built in a factory. Today it is common to see modular homes ranging in style and size all the way from traditional ranches and colonials of 1,500 to 3,000 square feet to completely custom designed modular mansions of 8,000 to 10,000 square feet and even larger.

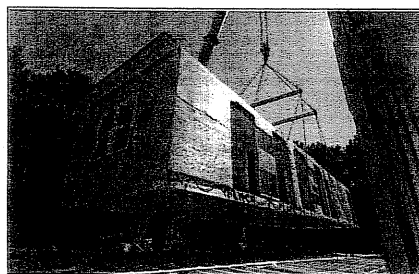
With design flexibility no longer an issue and the option to build virtually anything that can be imagined, what other reasons are there to consider the modular alternative?

## The Planning Process

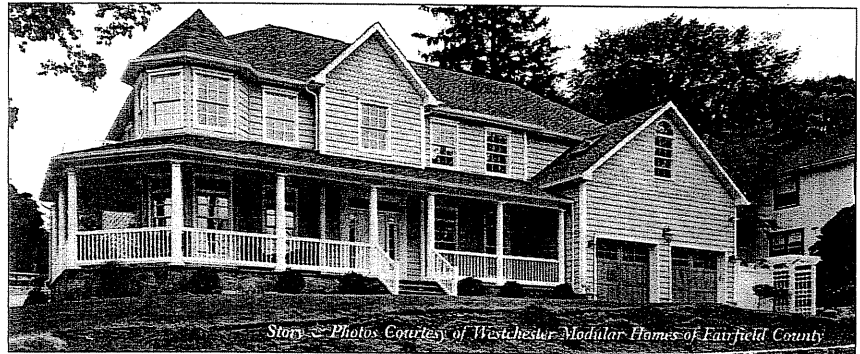
By its nature, modular construction requires forethought and planning. Because a significant portion of the final product will be built in a factory, many decisions as to design, product selections, finishes and detailing need to be made prior to the start of construction. While at first this may appear somewhat limiting, it actually only involves a shift in the timing of these decisions and ultimately results in improved cost controls and a shortened building cycle.

## Construction Standards

Typically, prior to production, the plans for a modular home go through a review conducted by certified firms, such as PFS Corporation. During this process the plans are examined to assure compliance with applicable



building codes and then approved for construction. That is, a single, complete home is built in a factory, but it means that before a piece of lumber is cut or the first nail is driven, the plans have been certified for their code compliance and structural integrity. As construction begins, and during the entire process through the factory, the workmanship is monitored and the materials are inspected to assure that they conform to established standards. Once the home is completed in



the factory it receives a final inspection and certificate of compliance which is permanently affixed within the home. Once the home is delivered to the site and set on the foundation the work required to complete the home begins.

## Quality Control

In addition to the inspections done in the factory by the certifying corporation, the internal factory production process is scrutinized at every step by quality control personnel. In addition, the work being done is performed by experienced, skilled personnel who are well trained in the specialized tasks that they each perform. Construction materials are stored inside, out of the weather and protected from damage before and during the construction process. After the modular boxes are completed they are carefully wrapped and sealed prior to leaving the factory as to protect them in transit to the building site.

When the site and foundation are ready to receive the home, the modular components are delivered to the site and, in the case of the average home, the boxes are assembled on the foundation and made tight to the weather in one day.

## Time Savings

The potential efficiencies and time savings available with modular construction can be a significant factor in the decision making process. Depending on the size and complexity of the home being constructed, a modular built home can shave weeks or months off the time it takes to complete a conventionally built home. Homes which are largely complete as they leave the factory can often be completed within 45 to 60 days after being set on the foundation. Larger, more complex homes which may involve more work being done inside the home after the set, will naturally take longer to complete but are often completed months before similar conventionally built homes.

One clear advantage that modular homes have over conventionally built homes is the fact that site and foundation work can be done at the same time as the house is being built in the factory.

## Cost Savings

Often homeowners will enjoy cost savings on the factory built portion of a modular home and will find that other on site costs are comparable to competitive prices typical in the locale in which the home is being constructed.

Importantly, the typically shortened building duration can significantly lower the costs of construction financing and insurance coverage. For those homebuyers who are demolishing an existing home and rebuilding on the same property, the costs of alternate temporary housing are substantially lower. It is noteworthy to mention that many modular manufacturers report that as much as 40 to 50% of their business involves the replacement of an existing home.

## Warranties

While most states mandate the typical one year warranty offered by home builders, many modular manufacturers offer additional or extended warranties on mechanical systems, structural components and basement waterproofing in addition to the warranties provided by the manufacturers of the components, equip-

ment and fixtures included with the home. Often this additional coverage is available for 10 or more years and is transferable to a subsequent buyer which can be significant when selling a home.

## Building Options

After researching the various home building methods and options available, and determining that going modular makes the most sense, the home buyer has basically two potential routes which they can follow to take their project from dreams to reality. These involve determining who they will purchase the home from and who they will hire as their licensed builder. One option is to purchase home direct from a modular manufacturer and then hire a general contractor to manage the construction. When selecting this option the buyer should ask the manufacturer to recommend qualified contractors and should always attempt to hire a contractor who has proven experience with modular home building. The other option is to work with a dealer/ builder who represents, and has a close affiliation with, an established modular factory. Often these dealer/builders will have models you can visit where you can see first hand the quality of their workmanship. These dealer/builders will often have selection centers where they display a wide selection of product offerings and on-site experienced personnel who can assist with the planning process and selection of products, appliances and equipment for your home. Typically these dealer/builders will have close, long standing relationships with suppliers and subcontractors who can bring their added experience and knowledge to the planning and selection process.

Whatever direction the home buyer decides to go in, it is always important to see examples of the builders work, ask pointed and detailed questions about how they manage and schedule their jobs and inquire as to who will be on site and responsible for the completion of the home. Also ask what the warranty policies are, and how customer service will be handled following completion of the home. Many dealer/builders have been in business for a number of years and have well established reputations for quality and service which they protect through the maintenance of large staffs and considerable infrastructure investment which may add slightly to the final cost of the home, but provides a comfort level and assurance of service the value of which cannot be over-estimated.

Building a new home usually involves a significant commitment of funds and serious, thoughtful planning and deliberation. During this process, the home buyer must take the time necessary to be sure that all elements of the project are carefully reviewed and approved. It is vitally important that all work covered under the contract be detailed and specified in writing, all selection decision should be reviewed and approved and all construction drawings should reflect what is actually going to be constructed, leaving nothing to anyone's imagination.

Making as many, if not all necessary decisions before construction begins is guaranteed to save money, often a considerable amount. The process can be both financially and psychologically painful, and can usually be avoided by making the decisions required before construction begins rather than afterwards.

Go forth and create, and remember that the well informed choice always the best choice.