

The Road Home

building a safer, stronger, smarter Louisiana

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Modular Homes: Faster and More Energy Efficient

A modular home is constructed in a factory and built to meet the state, local and regional building codes where the home will be located. It usually consists of two or more sections. The sections are transported to the building site and placed on a permanent foundation. Once the units are secured to the foundation, electrical and plumbing work is done by qualified personnel. These personnel may be hired locally or may be furnished by the manufacturer as part of an installation team.

Modular homes are very similar in construction to the wood-frame homes that are so common throughout Louisiana. Modular homes, although they are manufactured, should not be confused with what we call manufactured homes, which are mobile homes or trailers. Manufactured homes use a completely different type of building system and are built to the Federal Construction Safety Standards Act (HUD/CODE).

Advantages of modular homes

Construction time: In the current environment, where the need for housing is so great compared to the capacity of the homebuilding industry, faster construction time may be the most important advantage of modular homes. While a traditional site-built home usually takes six to eight months to finish, a modular home can be built in as few as eight weeks. Since it is built in a closed environment, a modular home doesn't suffer from the usual construction delays, such as bad weather, no-show contractors or other outside effects. Modular home factories are capable of fabricating homes 24 hours a day, 365 days a year when necessary.

In New Orleans, there are many active modular home companies contributing to the city's reconstruction process. The very high demand for housing and the necessity of higher, more-complex foundations in the recovery area are resulting in slightly longer delivery times for modular homes. However, most companies in the Greater New Orleans area guarantee a 12- to 16-week construction time after ordering the modular home. This period includes the preparation of the foundation, ordering, construction, transportation and installation of the modular home and all other necessary preparation needed before the homeowner moves in.

Structural strength: Modular homes are built to meet local codes where the



Modular homes are built in modern facilities without any weather interruptions. This controlled environment significantly increases the productivity and quality of the work.



Drywall is mounted to the framing with special adhesives and screws while metal plate connectors provide a secure connection between the sections.

home will be located just as traditional site-built homes are. The height of the foundation is taken in to consideration during the design process. This is a very crucial point in our coastal region since many homeowners need foundations eight to ten feet high. A home ten feet off the ground would be subjected to much greater wind loads than a home on slab or a home that is just three feet above grade, and it needs to be designed and built accordingly.

A recent FEMA study showed that modular homes performed much better than traditional site-built homes during Hurricane Andrew in 1992. The better performance is attributed to the fact that modular homes are constructed with an average of 20% more material than traditional site-built homes in order to deal with the rigors of shipping from the factory to the permanent site. For example, drywall isn't just nailed on, it is mounted to the framing with special adhesives and screws. These additional materials increase the overall strength of the structure. Consistent quality control in the factory is another reason for modular homes, as a class, having better structural strength. All phases of the construction are inspected by qualified personnel.



This modular home is almost ready for its new owner. The home sits on a 9-ft. foundation, which costs nearly \$50,000.

Energy Efficiency: As a result of their design and the way they are built, modular homes are often more energy-efficient structures than traditional site-built homes. Tests done for the Energy Star program showed that modular homes are considerably tighter than typical site-built homes, which contributes significantly to their better energy efficiency. Some modular home companies offer optional energy savings packages. By purchasing this package you guarantee that your modular home is built to the full Energy Star specifications.

Cost: When compared to site-built homes, modular homes often cost less. The modular home factories buy their material in large quantities, which gives them quantity discounts. Also, weather interruption is not a problem.

The cost of a modular home varies depending on many factors, such as foundation, size and quality. In New Orleans, the average cost of a typical modular home in Spring 2007 started from \$90 per square foot, which includes a basic foundation excluding pilings, and went as high as \$140-\$150 per square foot when extra features such as hardwood floors, Jacuzzi tub and granite countertops were included. The most important factor that affects price is the foundation. Many homeowners don't want to worry about getting flooded ever again, so they would like to build above Hurricane Katrina flood level, which usually means foundations eight to ten feet high. Typically that kind of a foundation costs more than \$50,000 itself including the pilings and the concrete columns. Choosing a non-standard floor plan might increase the cost. Most mortgage companies do have special programs to finance modular homes; however, the interest rates for modular home mortgages are slightly higher than those for traditional site-built homes.

Negative impressions of modular homes fading

Aesthetics and limited choice in floor plans have been the major drawbacks of modular homes for many years. Today the gap between modular homes and site-built homes, in terms of floor plan flexibility and aesthetics, is smaller than ever. Hundreds of modular home floor plans are now available. Also, some modular home companies now offer special designs that help these homes adapt to the neighborhood. One modular home company in New Orleans is offering modular homes that are modeled after the classic New Orleans architecture and can be adapted to the variety of neighborhoods in the city. A modular version of the classic New Orleans style shotgun double will sit on a 30-foot-wide lot and fit right in with the the neighborhood. Other styles are available.

Modular homes are becoming more popular in United States. Modular homebuyers usually can chose the colors and style of details inside their homes such as the windows, floor types and colors, crown moldings, paint colors, appliances, kitchen cabinets, doors and more. Sales are increasing constantly every year. Quality, affordability and fast construction time make modular homes a good alternative to site-built homes.