

STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS**FOUNDATION**

The foundation of a residence with conventional wood floor construction consists of the footings, foundation wall and interior piers. A solid perimeter foundation wall is generally constructed with 8" concrete blocks; brick-to grade construction has 12" blocks to grade level with the balance being 8" block allowing a 4" brick to rest on the outer edge of the 12" block. Interior piers are generally of the same materials as the foundation wall. Footings are poured concrete and must be a minimum of 8" deep and 3" wider (on each side) than the foundation wall.

With concrete slab floor construction, the floor, foundation walls and footings are poured monolithically. In such, case, there are no framing members for the floor structure.

Obviously, the footings and lower levels of the foundation wall cannot be seen. Therefore, unless you are informed of structural weakness or see evidence of excessive settlement, you must assume that the foundation has been properly constructed.

EXTERIOR WALLS

Exterior wall construction represents one of the most significant components of a residential building. It normally accounts for 25% to 35% of replacement cost new and consists of (1) The Basic Structure – wood framed houses usually have 2" X 4" studs placed directly over floor joists on 16" centers - a 2" X 4" sole plate secures the studs at floor level and a 4" X 4" ceiling plate ties the studs together at the ceiling line (2) Exterior Finish- consists of sheathing, the visible exterior wall cover, trim and painting. The materials used in the basic structure and exterior wall finish will determine the type of construction, i.e., wood framed - brick veneer, etc. (3) Interior Facing & Finish - new construction is generally 1/2" to 5/8" dry wall, taped & painted; older houses may have lath and plaster; 2" to 3 1/2" batt insulation is normally placed between the studs behind the drywall. (4) Window & Door Openings - the size and number of openings will have a significant influence on replacement cost.

ROOF

There are generally six types or styles of roof structures used in residential construction. The typical roof structure consists of 2" X 6" rafters placed on 16" centers, and secured at the peak by a 2" X 8" ridge board. Sheathing is typically 3/8" to 1/2" plywood covered with felt under-lament and 235 lb. composition shingles. Ceiling joists, which are often considered part of the composite roof structure, should be at least 2" X 6" on 16" centers with a maximum span of 14'.

The rafters and ceiling joists are attached to the 4" X 4" ceiling plates at the line of the exterior wall. The span of a roof is the distance between the outer edges of the ceiling plates, typically the width of the house. The rise of the roof is the distance from the level of the ceiling plates to the top of the ridge. The Run of a rafter is the horizontal distance from the outside of the ceiling plate to the right angle intersection of the ridge. The slope of a roof is expressed in terms of the rise of the roof in inches per foot of run of rafters. The slope of a roof is typically 5/12 but should not be less than 4/12. Generally better quality construction will be reflected by steeper pitched roofs with more overhangs at the eaves. Pitch is the ratio of the rise of the roof to the span. Therefore, to find the rise of the roof in inches per foot of run of rafters (slope), multiply pitch by 24.

With exception of a trussed frame, 2" X 4" rafters do not meet Minimum Property Standards, and generally denote lower quality construction. With a residential truss roof, rafters and ceiling joists are placed on 24" centers and are constructed with 2" X 4" boards, however, the engineering design of the truss creates structural capacity similar to a conventionally framed roof and results in a savings in construction cost.

FLOOR STRUCTURE & FINISH

Conventional wood floor construction consists of the sill plates, girders, floor joists, bridging, sub floor and finished flooring. The sill plate is the first wood member of a frame structure, and is usually a horizontally laid 2" X 6" board secured to the foundation by 1/2" X 16" anchor bolts. A girder is the main horizontal interior supporting member of the floor structure. It may be steel or wood, but a 3-ply 2" X 10" frame girder is typical. Minimum Property Standards call for no less than 2" X 8" floor joists on 16" centers with a maximum span of 13 1/2'; and 2" X 10" floor joists on 16" centers if span is between 13 1/2' and 16'. Better quality construction will have 1" X 3" cross bridging every 8' to 10' span. However, 2" X 6" or 2" X 8" block-bridging is typical of fair and average quality construction. However, diagonally laid 1" X 5" tongue & groove boards are found in some older homes and in high quality new construction. Basically, the finished flooring of a house will be either pine or hardwood. Generally, the kitchen will have an inlaid linoleum cover and the bath will have ceramic or vinyl tile. Wall to wall carpets may be laid over a hardwood finished floor or over 5/8" pressboard (particleboard).

INTERIOR FINISH

Interior construction and finish, as a whole can account for 10% to 30% of replacement cost new, depending on the elaborateness of trim, number and sizes of closets, kitchen cabinets, special wall finishes, etc.

Interior partitions are generally wood framed with 2" X 4" studs on 16" centers. The most common basic interior facing is 1/2" or 5/8" drywall, taped and painted.

Older houses often have walls and ceilings finished with plaster on wood or gypsum lath. However, due to the wide use and acceptance of drywall in most quality levels, plaster does not necessarily increase value in proportion to cost. The exception occurs in the luxury or mansion type house where plaster is consistent in cost and quality with the entire structure.

The type and quality of materials available for finishing the interior of a house varies greatly. However, the basic wall and ceiling finish will generally conform to the grade of materials and quality of workmanship evidenced by exterior wall finish and design. Special attention should be given to the amount and quality of kitchen cabinets, closets and the finish of special areas such as the bath and den.

PLUMBING

A standard complement of plumbing for a fair or average quality house consists of one 2 3-fixture bath with shower over tub, one flat rim kitchen sink with two compartments and one 40 gallon gas or 52 gallon electric water heater. Plumbing represents a relatively fixed cost in building construction. Some nominal additional cost for laterals would be incurred in the larger house, but this would be hardly noticeable in the overall price per square foot. It is pointed out that colored fixtures cost approximately 5 % more than white fixtures. The kitchen sink and each bathroom should be vented with a metal stack extending through the roof. It is also important to determine whether waste is disposed of by public sewer or individual septic system.

ELECTRICAL

In new construction, the typical electrical service consists of 120-240 volt, 3 wire, 200 amp circuit breaker systems for houses with electric heat and 150 amp services for houses with gas heat. Minimum Property Standards requires one wall switch per room with a minimum of 6' between convenience outlets. 220 volt service is required for electric ranges and clothes dryers, whereas 110 volt service is required for convenience outlets. The majority of residential wiring is done with Romex, a non-metallic sheathed cable. More expensive homes have BX or steel armored cable. Conduit wiring is seldom found in residential construction. Older homes may be wired with Knob & Tube or porcelain insulators. Houses with old style fuse boxes, Knob & Tube wiring, or 60 amp service are generally of low quality or will soon need rewiring.

HEATING

The type and adequacy of the heating system is not only a cost important factor, but also one which has a significant influence on the functional utility and value of a building. There are several types and variations of heating systems used depending on location and availability of fuel. The systems described here are those most frequently encountered.

Floor Furnace - may be oil or gas fired. This type heating system is normally found in lower quality one story houses with crawl space. There is no duct work, and circulation is by gravity. The unit is generally placed near the center of the house. Its capacity is rated from 30,000 to 50,000 ETU.

Gravity Furnace - This system is generally found in the basements of older houses, since it must be below the level of the rooms to be heated. Coal, either stoker or hand-fired, was the main source of fuel. However, many systems still in use have been converted to oil or gas. Heat is provided as the air comes in contact with heated surfaces in the furnace. The warm air rises and flows through inclined leader pipes to supply registers usually installed in the floor or baseboard adjacent to the outside walls of the various rooms. The cooler air is drawn down through large return-air-intakes located in the floor near an outside wall to the bottom of the furnace casing for re-heating. The duct work for a gravity warm-air heating system is quite large and must be slanted in such a way as to permit the natural flow of warm and cool air. This significantly reduces the amount of useable head room in the basement. The gravity warm-air heating system is relatively inexpensive and lacks functional utility when compared to more modern systems. The cost of this type system generally ranges from 15% to 20% less than a forced warm-air system with a comparable BTU rating.

Forced Warm Air - May be electric, oil or gas fired. Air is warmed by heated surfaces in the furnace and then distributed to the various rooms through supply ducts by a blower (fan) in the furnace. The blower also draws the room air back to the furnace through return-air intakes which are usually located at the baseboard of inside walls. Adjustable registers or diffusers for the warm air are generally located on the outside wall at the floor level (baseboard), preferably below windows. This system requires less space for the furnace and ducts than the gravity system, and it does not need to be centrally located or below the level of the heated area.

Electric Radiant Ceiling - Perhaps one of the most frequently encountered heating systems. Found in many fair to average quality homes. Each room is thermostatically controlled. The heating element (cable) is attached to the ceiling drywall, coated with a layer of plaster and then laminated between a second thickness of drywall. The wattage required for each room is determined by factoring ceiling height by 1.5 and multiplying that product times the square feet of floor area. For example, a 12' X 12' room with an 8' ceiling height would require 1728 watts of heating. ($8' \times 1.5 = 12 \times 12 \times 12 = 1728$ watts).

Electrical Wall Heaters - This system follows the same principle as electric ceiling heat but is substantially cheaper, and concentrates all heat from one point in the room. Its size is also measured in wattage per coil or unit stack. The typical unit will range from 1500 watts up to 4000 watts.

Electric Baseboard Heat - This is merely a modification of the electric wall heater. However, it distributes the heat over a somewhat wider area, and costs approximately 20% more than electric wall heaters of the same wattage.

Hot-Water (Gravity System) - may be coal, oil or gas fired. In this system, hot water serves as the medium for carrying heat to all parts of the building. Circulation in a gravity system is created when the hot water ascends through the flow pipe and then flows down through return pipes which pass successively through radiators on the various floors of the building. Since heat is released as the water passes through each radiator, the ones on the lower floors must be larger. The "two-pipe" system relieves this problem since each radiator has its own individual hot-water feed. A hot water system for residential use is rather uncommon due to the cost of the system (which may run from 40% to 60% more than forced warm-air or radiant ceiling systems) and the bulkiness of the materials.

Steam Heating - Maybe coal, oil or gas fired. In this type system, water in the boiler is converted to steam which rises through the main distribution pipe. From this pipe, the steam moves into the radiators, gives off its heat and condenses. The condensed steam (water) then flows back to the boiler for reheating. In the "two-pipe" the steam and the condensate flow in separate pipes. With the two two – pipe system, the steam always enters the radiators from the top and subsequently emerges as condensate from the bottom. If the return-flow pipe is situated below the water level of the boiler, it is described as a "wet" condensate return, whereas if it is above the water level, it is a "dry" condensate return. In a single pipe system, the steam and condensate flow in the same pipe and must enter the bottom of the radiator. As with the hot-water system, steam heating is expensive and somewhat cumbersome.

MECHANICAL - CENTRAL AIR CONDITIONING

The majority of residential central air-conditioning is done with either "split" refrigerated systems, ranging from one to five ton capacity. The combination heating/ cooling or package unit utilizes the same duct work with gas heating and electric cooling. This is a central system for original construction and generally results in some savings (per system capacity) in construction costs.

The split system is usually added to an existing forced warm-air furnace. The fan coil is normally installed in the top of the furnace and the condensing unit (with compressor and condenser in the same cabinet) is located outside the house. The efficiency of this system is equal to that of the package system, although cost may be somewhat higher if it is added after original construction.

The heat-pump is an electric powered combination heating and cooling unit which consists of a compressor, condenser, throttle valve and evaporator. It operates on the principle that fluids under high pressure evaporate at a higher temperature than fluids under low pressure. The heat transfer medium is heated under low pressure in the evaporator then transferred by the compressor to the high pressure condenser where the heat is given off and blown through a duct system in the house. The cooling system is activated by thermostatically reversing a four-way valve which reverses the cycle of the unit. The heat pump is somewhat more expensive than the comparable gas-electric package unit described above, and generally requires electric resistance heaters to provide supplementary heat during periods when the temperature drops below 25°F.

The variation in models, sizes and capacities of central air-conditioning systems is virtually boundless. The only sure way to determine the type, size and capacity of a system is to note the model number and brand name and call the dealer. Generally speaking, however, the horse power of the compressor motor is approximately equal to the ton capacity of the cooling unit. Using the same duct work as the forced air heating system, central air-conditioning may run 20° to 30° more if separate duct work is required.

DESIGN

One of the most significant factors influencing quality classification and cost of Construction is design. The design of a house relates not only to the degree of functional efficiency attained in layout, but also to its overall appearance. In this sense, appearance means the refinement of exterior elevations, interior finish, and perimeter shape. The degree of refinement is usually evident in the complexity of foundation and roof outlines, plus the elaborateness of finishing materials and attention given to details.

Lower quality houses will generally be simple rectangular shaped structures with straight lines on all four walls, and a higher ratio of floor area per lineal foot of exterior wall. Higher quality structures will generally have an irregular foundation outline and a lower ratio of floor area per lineal foot of exterior wall. In other words, the design of a higher quality house substitute's esthetics for efficiency (economy of construction) but does not sacrifice functional utility. In fact, the integration of areas given to living, dining, food preparation, sleeping, hygiene and storage into a functional or logical whole can best be accomplished when design is not restricted by a rectangular or "boxed" perimeter shape.

An irregular perimeter or foundation outline generally denotes higher quality construction, because replacement cost is increased by a greater amount of exterior wall area plus special floor and roof framing.