

## Build your Custom Home without the Custom Price Tag

Have you ever dreamed of building your own custom home? Some people want to design and build their own home so that it aesthetically does not look like all of the other homes in the neighborhood. Some people have special needs that require a specific design. And some people just want the satisfaction of having their home be brand new and just the way they want it to be. If you count yourself among this group, we are going to walk you through the steps to achieve your goal from selecting the right piece of property to finishing your home all within your budget.

The first step in this process is the decision to embark upon the custom home process. This for most is one of the most important decisions of a life time. It is frequently a commitment that requires time and patience. But when the project is completed, the pride of accomplishment and the satisfaction of a job well done make the process very worthwhile. Spending ample enough time in the planning stages can save thousands of dollars later on and it is a key ingredient in making the project enjoyable.

Determining your budget is an important and critical step. Meeting with a loan consultant can help you determine the amount a lender will be willing to lend you depending on your down payment, income and the debt that you have and will be able to estimate the monthly payments that will be required. It is important that you and your family are comfortable with the amount and time frame of the mortgage.

Using this amount, it is time to find and purchase land. Working with a qualified real estate agent determine what properties are selling for of a similar size house and lot in the area you are interested in. Will your down payment and loan pay for the house that you are thinking of building and the lot? The approximate cost of construction of a house of similar size plus the cost of the lot should be equal to or less than the comparable properties. If the sum is much higher than perhaps the lot is overpriced. If the lot appears to be fairly priced after getting your offer accepted, it is time to carefully examine all aspects of

building on that specific site including soil, permits and utilities. Again, all of this gathered data will help determine the final cost of construction and whether or not the lot is affordable.

Having acquired land, the next step is to determine the design of the house. This can be achieved by working with a design professional using either standard plans or hiring an architect to design a truly custom set of plans. One word of caution is to make sure that the construction drawings meet the requirements of the local building department. Plans purchased from sources outside of the state of California may not meet our strict seismic, fire and building standards nor may they meet the requirements of local building departments for licensing. Additionally, unless the lot is perfectly level, the foundation needs to be designed and engineered for each site.

Armed with an approved set of plans, your next and very important decision is whether to hire a general contractor or to act as an owner/builder and supervise the construction yourself or to do a combination of both. We have found that many clients prefer to control the construction of their home once the foundation is in and the framing is done using a general contractor up to that point. Using a pre-cut panelized system for the framing makes this process easier, faster, and more cost effective. It is also a greener alternative to standard framing. Once the exterior shell is closed in, the owner can hire and supervise the sub-contractors or continue to work with their general contractor.

Carefully choosing finishes to stay within budget is probably the most difficult (and fun) part of building. Again time and research can pay off in the long run in obtaining the look, feel and style of your custom dream home. Comparative shopping and the internet have become invaluable tools in finding the best price for different materials. When you are choosing a material or a sub-contractor compare prices or bids along with workmanship. This can help you stay within budget while achieving the highest quality of construction.

As these articles progress we will expand and offer more insight into the process of building your own custom home. Our goal is to make the process only but enjoyable and a worthwhile investment of your time and energy.

