

MODULAR HOUSES CAN BE WELL-BUILT, EFFICIENT

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QUESTION: We are planning our dream home, and we particularly want it to be efficient and secure. We thought about a luxurious modular home model that we saw at a home show, but is their overall quality very good?

-Amol D.

ANSWER: The overall quality and efficiency of modular housing often is better than typical stick-built homes. Once a modular house is completed on your building site, it is virtually impossible to distinguish from a stick-built house. The range of styles and amenities is nearly endless.

People often confuse modular housing with the general term “manufactured housing.” Modular housing is just a small subset of manufactured housing. Manufactured housing usually refers to mobile homes and trailers that are towed to your site by a truck and are not built on a standard foundation.

In contrast, a modular house is basically a stick built-built house that is built in large sections in a factory. The sections are delivered to your building site, where they are attached together over a slab, crawl space or a basement. Some of the standard models are as large as 6,000 square feet.

The fact that modular houses are built in a factory makes them energy efficient, strong and secure. The modules (rooms) must be built strong enough to withstand the stress of transportation on a truck. Some are so well-built and air-tight that they include heat-recovery, fresh-air ventilation.

While a typical stick-built house is made with 2x4 wall studs on 16-inch centers or, at best, 2x6 studs on 24-inch centers, most modular houses use 2x6 wall studs on 16-inch centers. The 2x6 walls make them stronger resulting in less settling and more air tightness throughout the home’s life. The deeper wall studs also provide space for two extra inches wall insulation (R-19.6).

Another advantage of being built in a factory is quality control. All the wall, floor and ceiling components are sized and assembled in jigs and aligned with laser precision for exact dimensional and assembly control. You won’t find extra nails in one stud and too few in another.

The lumber used in a modular house had not laid outdoors in the weather around a building site so it is more dimensionally true. If you ever have been to an outdoor lumberyard and tried to find a straight stud, you will understand this well. This results in less settling, nail props, etc.

When selecting a modular house, compare building material and construction specifications among several manufactures. You might be able to upgraded efficiency items such as windows, doors, furnace, etc. All interior amenities, such as whirlpools, real oak cabinets, six panel doors, etc., are included.

