

Chapter 16: Selecting the Build Type

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LEVEL 1 · BEFORE YOU VISIT A BUILDER · CHAPTER 16 OF 16

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Why it matters

Not all “new” homes are built the same way. In Texas, “new construction” covers three distinct delivery methods, and choosing the wrong one for your lifestyle is one of the most common causes of mid-project buyer remorse. Before you look at floor plans, decide which construction model actually fits how you want to buy.

Each build type carries a different complexity load. Want a move-in-ready experience but choose a semi-custom build? The decision fatigue of the design center will wear you down. Want a specific architectural style but choose a spec home? You'll be frustrated by the lack of flexibility. Matching your expectations to the right build type upfront avoids both.

Most builders in major Texas metros — Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Austin, San Antonio — are volume production builders specializing in efficiency and repeatability. Even within that group, builders are tiered: some focus on entry-level affordability, others on higher-end standard specs. Knowing where a builder sits on that spectrum helps calibrate what you should expect before you tour.

Build Type	Customization	Typical Timeline	Best For
Inventory / Spec	None (pre-selected)	30–60 days	Buyers on a tight timeline who want to see the finished product before buying.
Semi-Custom	Design and structural	6–10 months	Buyers who want to pick their lot and finishes within a builder's framework.
Fully Custom	Extensive	12–24 months	Buyers who own their land and want control over architectural details.

The specs worth checking, regardless of build type

In Texas, the climate and soil — especially expansive clay — demand specific engineering standards, and they matter more than interior trim. On foundations: most production builders use post-tension slabs; custom builders may use pier and beam. Ask for the slab thickness and the PSI rating of the concrete. On framing: look for advanced framing techniques that allow more insulation, and ask whether engineered wood products

(EWP) are used for joists — they're less prone to warping than traditional lumber. On the building envelope: ask about the attic insulation R-value and the windows' Low-E coating and SHGC (solar heat gain coefficient) rating — in Texas heat, the envelope does more work than any other single spec.

TIP — Spec homes — built without a specific buyer — are often the best opportunity for negotiation. Builders lose money every day a finished home sits empty. If a home is at the finished or near-finished stage, you typically have more leverage on price and closing costs than you do starting a build from dirt.

1. Is this a “dirt start” where I choose everything, or has the design already been finalized by your team?
2. What is the specific SEER2 rating of the HVAC system being installed?
3. What roof decking material is used, and does it include a radiant barrier?
4. Can I make structural changes, like adding a bedroom, or only cosmetic changes?
5. If I choose a custom build, is the price fixed-cost or cost-plus?
6. Who is the specific project manager or superintendent assigned to this build, and how many other homes are they currently managing?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Inventory homes offer speed and price certainty but zero customization.
- Semi-custom builds balance personalization with professional project management.
- Custom builds offer the most freedom but carry the highest risk for budget and timeline overruns.
- In Texas, energy efficiency and foundation engineering matter more than interior trim.
- Your timeline should be the primary driver of your build type selection.