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Building Systems Network: Modular Homes Meet Homebuyers' Needs

In a nation of hybrid cars, crops, medicines, and even music, scientific visionaries take the best of the past and combine that with new ideas, materials, and technologies. The future arrives with each new achievement. And such is the case with the home construction technology of "systems-built" homes, according to Grant Smereczynsky, CEO of Building Systems Network, Gainesville, GA.

Systems-built, industrialized, or modular home construction (formerly called pre-fabricated [pre-fab] construction) has moved into a strong position in home construction trends. "Systems-built housing has grown at a rate of 10 percent over the last five years and is forecast to increase its market share by 12 percent annually," Smereczynsky said. Why?

Systems-built homes respond to the needs expressed by America's homebuyers: high quality built at greater speed in optimum conditions with significant cost savings compared to traditional site-built homes. The entire spectrum of the housing market—from affordable single-family and multi-family housing to high-end luxury homes—is covered by today's industrialized home construction industry.

Smerezynsky's latest project is "The Homestead," his own "modular mansion," in Hall County—a true homestead in the fullest sense of the word. BSN's largest luxury home, the Homestead is appraised at \$695,000 with 6,800 square feet of living space over a 3,000-plus square feet basement. Behind the main house is a matching garden house, complete with an oak-trimmed front porch, children's playroom, garden room, and woodworking shop. A detached, three-car garage with a 1,100 square feet guest apartment sets adjacent to the main house.

The main house offers a retreat-type lifestyle infused with luxury finishes and handcrafted details. Natural materials suggesting "heritage" are found throughout, including hand-hewn Amish hardwood floors, and handcrafted oak trims. The design features granite kitchen counters, two fireplaces, a state-of-the-art theatre room, craft room, teen suite, and cozy finished porches. A highlight of this retreat is the homeowner's suite with a 600 square foot master bedroom, and elegant marble finishes throughout the master bath.

The blending of hand-craftsmanship and heritage materials with the industrialized building process of this "systems-built" home is a significant example of how home construction technology has evolved in general. The Homestead represents a trend in American homebuilding as an example of what can be accomplished through the advanced technologies of the modular building process combined with custom finishes.

Overall, it is the *homeowner* who benefits from the increased efficiency of industrialized home construction. Unlimited customization, superior quality control, reduced waste of materials which brings down costs for the buyer and faster completion (30-60 days) versus two to eight months for site-built construction are primary benefits.

It only makes sense that home construction techniques have evolved like this, out of necessity. The growing shortage of skilled trades-people is causing many builders to switch from site-building to industrialized building. For decades, builders have constructed homes on-site in unfavorable weather conditions which compromise the building materials from the effects of dust and dirt, rain and snow, and extreme heat and cold. It is the homeowner that ultimately pays the price. Their finished home can include dirt and dust inside the walls and flooring which recycles throughout the air vents after they move in. Their framing may have been rained on, resulting in dampness potentially remaining in the studs, flooring, and insulation that can contribute to mildew. Extreme sun can cause dry rot and warping of lumber. Homebuyers who ignore these factors are not protecting the well-being of their families unless they demand improvements and more rigorous quality control from their builder.

The systems-built process constructs modules like roof sections, insulated wall sections, and floor sections, complete with electrical wiring and plumbing, in a controlled factory environment—to *the same building codes as traditional site built homes*. The construction process, as well as the 300-step quality control process, surpasses what is able to be accomplished onsite in uncontrolled factors including workers, weather, and materials control. In the state of Georgia, for example, the Department of Community Affairs must stamp each systems-built home with its seal of approval as proof of meeting all construction codes to its high standards.

Design options of today surpass the limited options of yesterday's pre-fab models. Draftsmen have used computer-aided design (CAD) techniques for years to draw the actual elevations and floor plans for site-built homes. Now, computerization is applied to the mass customization of industrial-built modules

used to construct homes. Modular builders are able to meet homebuyer's precise design needs. This contrasts with the pre-fabs of the past when the industry offered only a few standard models with limited options.

With such benefits of modular homes afforded to home buyers, one could question, why would homebuyers buy anything but a modular home? Some consumers may be confused by misconceptions about "manufactured" or mobile homes (built under entirely different zoning, building codes and processes) versus modular, industrialized homes. They may not yet be educated about systems-built home construction methods, the development and growth of the industry, or the fact that its technology has developed into a fine art.

Just as there have been inferior quality pre-fab homes built in the past, there have also been inferior onsite built homes. These are facts that shouldn't be ignored as we benefit from the history of home construction, but outmoded ideas cannot stand in the way of recognizing that today's systems-built homes are emerging into the forefront of home construction.

This is so true that in cities, counties, and states across the country, some laws and codes have to be revised and updated to accommodate the modular building methods. Progress in construction techniques is surpassing our existing traditions, laws and codes. "The faster America's lawmakers and zoning officials respond to the call for updated codes and ordinances, the better the homebuilding industry can respond to our homeowner's needs, as well as eliminate the discriminative codes affecting modular home building," Smereczynsky said. Any city or county should already include planning for systems-built homes in their 10-year plan, which every city zoning commission is required to have, to make way for this home construction method that is moving in across the country.

As with any new hybrid, it's up to the industry to educate consumers on the benefits of these latest developments. It is people with an eye for the future in building trends—America's "visioneers"— who are investing wise dollars in either developing industrialized modular systems, or who are buying a systems-built home. Smereczynsky invites you to the BSN showroom in Gainesville, GA to see photos and talk to staff about systems-built homes. For convenience, visit the BSN website at www.buildingsystemsnetwork.com.

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