



Plans Aren't Enough: Why Specifications are Important

Written by Collin Frisbie | August 10, 2017

Once you've made the decision to build a new home, you can hardly wait to start planning. If you had the choice to see exactly what your new home will look like, you'd probably take it!

Most peoples' first reaction when starting a home building project is to go straight to an architect with their dreams and vision to get a set of plans drawn up. It's wonderful to feel as though your vision is becoming a reality, and when you see your home plans for the first time, you start picturing yourself living in your new home.

Be careful of the biggest home plan pitfall!

A designer can listen to what you need and want in a new home and get a floor plan on paper. While it's exciting to see your home come together in 2D, we are all understandably nervous that the plan will be out of the budget. And why wouldn't you be? Rarely can you get more than a rough estimate for a set of plans, no matter how detailed.

The pitfall comes when you take those plans to a builder looking for the price—how much will it cost to build this home that you have designed? If you go to a builder looking for a low quote on your home plans, but those plans don't include *specifications*, you may end up being disappointed with the estimated cost you get back.

Specifications are a written description that spells out everything in your home that is not included in the plans—*everything* from your plumbing, electricity and insulation infrastructure to the make, model and color of your appliances to what kind of drawer pulls you'll use in your bathroom. When you first see the designs and hear the builder's estimate, you have no way of knowing what is or is not included in that price.

A new home is probably the biggest purchase you will make in your life. When anyone sets out on a home building project, we all have a budget. Can we build *this* house for *this* amount? Can we stay on budget throughout the project? The floor plan and the specifications should work in a fifty-fifty partnership to define exactly what is included and thus a price for your new home. The great thing about complete specifications is that by defining what you want, you reduce risk for yourself and the builder by allowing them to give you a far more accurate number. Fewer surprises, less stress.

Luckily, you don't need to be the expert here; no need to struggle through creating these specs on your own! Your job is to communicate your vision. Allow professionals to help you create the right specifications to achieve that vision.

The best way to ensure that you are armed with a set of plans and specifications that work together is to work with a company that offers complete design-build packages. For instance, the Sterling Homes Design-Build package provides complete transparency into what exactly is included in your home and what it will look like once it's completed. Plus, you know exactly how much your home will cost to build.

To get an idea of what level of specifications will suit your needs, wants and wishes, walk through some builders' models or recently completed homes. This will allow you to better pinpoint the spec level you might want. You can say, *yes I like these windows, these doors, this trim—but let's add some things that are important to me, like quartz countertops and central air conditioning.*

Even the best drawn set of home plans doesn't say what kinds of windows or doors you'll install, or what kind of insulation will be inside your walls—all factors that significantly impact the final cost of your house. By defining specifications, you can truly know how much it will cost to build your new home.

Beyond the budget: why specifications are so important

Everyone is concerned about budget when building a home, and "building" on purpose, on paper, before going 3D by defining your specifications early is an ideal way to alleviate any budget-related stress. However, specifications have other important benefits that shouldn't be underestimated. Here's why no set of home plans is complete without specifications:

Maximize your value and prioritize your spending

Building a home is all about what *you* want and need most. Defining your specifications ahead of time allows you to get the most value for your money. It also enables you to spend more money (and time!) on the things in your home that truly matter to you. Sure, you can take the time to pick out every last knob and screw. But most people would rather use their money and energy to select the things that will make the most difference in how they live day-to-day in their home.

Capture your decisions and communications

The endless email threads, the texts when you suddenly remember a detail you want to share—it can be hard to keep track of all the decisions you make throughout the process. A clearly spelled-out specifications sheet details each and every item that goes into your home, and can be updated if the decisions change. Imagine the chaos if you are sure you requested upgrading to a marble countertop when your builder is positive you settled on laminate! Specifications ensure that you and your builder are *always* on the same page.

Align your expectations

You shouldn't be expected to remember and keep track of the elements in your home based on a product number or written description. We want our clients to understand exactly what they'll be getting, and we want to understand exactly what we are expected to deliver. Therefore, we provide specification sheets that include photos of each item. We've found that this type of visual spec sheet is vital to helping our homeowners see their home as a 3D reality. This way, we avoid the incredibly disheartening and challenging problem of misaligned expectations between builder and client.



Create a smooth and seamless construction process

Specifications become your home builder's complete guide during construction. When you define each item ahead of time, the building process runs smoothly with as few interruptions as possible. Equipment, fixtures and appliances can be effectively ordered in advance, so that everything is ready when it's time to install.

Specifications are vitally important both *before* and *during* the home building process. They help you define your budget and ensure that the construction process is straightforward and smooth. If you're still trying to figure out a ballpark budget for your home, try touring a finished home or model unit. You'll leave with a firm idea of the specification level that makes the most sense for you.