

Consumer Satisfaction With Pre-Built Homes

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Reasons buyers invest in prebuilt houses and levels of satisfaction with various aspects of the housing were investigated. The most frequent reason for purchase was price. For both husbands and wives, overall satisfaction was higher than satisfaction with any one specific aspect of the housing.

Most Americans prefer to live in a single-family home which they own. In a study conducted in the state of Washington, slightly more than 76 percent of the respondents selected a single-family dwelling as their first choice in housing (Dillman, Tremblay and Dillman, 1978). Owning a conventionally-built single-family home, however, has been and will continue to be costly.

The need for housing at a price consumers can afford is urgent. Prebuilt home construction is important because it uses construction skills more

efficiently than stick-built homes (Langewiesche, 1972). Interference and delays from inclement weather are averted, and large savings on building materials can be achieved through mass purchasing and direct ordering from manufacturers and wholesalers. Guaranteed work will reduce hourly wages below rates that craftsmen now demand. Production time can be decreased and builders of prebuilt homes can produce a home in a few days, as opposed to the several months that on-site construction ordinarily takes. Faster construction time also means more efficient use of scarce and costly capital and consequent reduction in the per unit cost of construction financing (Hartman, 1975).

It should be noted, however, that even though economics may bring about an increase in the prevalence of prebuilt homes, prebuilt homes are not a new idea. The English brought a panelized

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This study deals only with prebuilt fully finished modular homes

wood house to Cape Ann in 1624 for use by a fishing fleet (Battelle Memorial Institute, 1967). Parts of the houses that were already built were brought from England during early colonization. Thomas A. Edison in a patent dated December 22, 1908, specified a complete system of cast iron molds into which a cement house could be poured. This pioneering venture in prefabricated housing failed to win acceptance (Josephson, 1959). During World War II, prebuilt housing was used at defense installations (Pearson, 1972).

The Study

The purpose of this research was to: (1) investigate reasons why buyers invest in prebuilt houses; (2) describe the type of people who buy prebuilt homes; and (3) determine satisfaction with the housing.

The sample consisted of 60 husbands and wives who had ordered and purchased prebuilt houses. They were asked to respond to a questionnaire about themselves, their families, and the prebuilt houses in which they lived. The sample was drawn from available municipal and county records by identifying building permits issued for siting of prebuilt houses. The sample was limited to owners of prebuilt homes in Box Elder County, Utah. Box Elder County is rural in nature, but does have aerospace and steel industries. The sample was stratified between eight communities ranging in population from 600 to 16,000 persons. The data were gathered in October of 1978. While the population in Box Elder County has increased 18.1 percent since 1970, the growth has been slightly less than one-half of the growth (37.3 percent) reported by the state of Utah as a whole (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1980).

The data collection consisted of a two-part questionnaire plus a personal interview. Part one of the questionnaire was designed to gather data about the subject's house, and socio-economic information about the family. Part two of the questionnaire utilized a Likert scale to determine the homeowner's satisfaction or dissatisfaction

with their prebuilt homes. The homeowners were asked to evaluate design, quality of construction, and the alternative housing choices that were available before their purchase.

Findings

The Residents

Respondents ages ranged from under 20 to over 60 years of age, with the 26-30 year age category being most prevalent among both husbands and wives. A high school education was held by the largest percentage of wives, while the modal level of education for husbands was some college. Fifty percent of the husbands were employed in white-collar jobs, while most wives called themselves housewives (61.7 percent). Reported annual incomes of these families ranged from \$5,000 to over \$25,000, with a mode of \$10,000 to \$15,000. The average number of children at home was two. Six families had no children living at home, and one family had six children at home. Only one-half of the couples felt there was any alternative housing in their area. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were typical of the population of Box Elder County and of the state of Utah as a whole (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, 1970).

The Homes

Houses ranged from under 1,000 square feet to over 1,700 square feet. The most frequent size was 1,000-1,200 square feet (51.7 percent), which may reflect the policy of Farmers Home Administration of making loans only on homes of under 1,200 square feet. The homes had been occupied an average of 2.5 years.

Although houses can be ordered from manufacturers with a variety of exterior materials including painted or stained wood, brick, stucco, metal siding or a combination of materials, a majority of the homes (71.7 percent) were painted wood siding, which is the least expensive alternative, and 13.3 percent had stained wood sides. The average length of time between ordering and moving in was five and one-half months.

Reasons for Purchase

Price was most frequently mentioned by husbands as the main reason for purchasing a prebuilt home. Wives most frequently mentioned the short length of time from purchase to completion (Table 1).

TABLE 1. — Reasons for Purchasing a Prebuilt House

Reasons for Purchase	Husbands	Wives
	Percent	
Price	38.3	25.0
Length of time needed to get the house	18.3	26.7
Quality of construction	11.7	3.3
Floor plan and design	6.7	10.0
Financing available	16.7	16.7
Other	8.4	18.3
	100.0 (N=60)	100.0 (n=60)

TABLE 2. — Evaluation of Workmanship

	Husbands	Wives
Unsatisfactory	3.3	6.8
Fair	16.7	16.9
Average	31.7	22.0
Good	31.7	37.4
Very Satisfactory	16.7	16.9
	100.0 (N=60)	100.0 (n=59)
Mean	3.42	3.40

t=.013 (means not significantly different)

TABLE 3. — Overall Evaluation of the Unit

	Husbands	Wives
Unsatisfactory	1.7	1.7
Fair	6.7	8.3
Average	23.3	11.7
Good	41.7	46.7
Very Satisfactory	26.7	31.7
	100.0 (N=60)	100.0 (N=60)
Mean	3.850	2.617

= 1.902 (using 2 tail test, means significantly different at .1 level but not .05 level.)

Satisfaction

Most residents were satisfied with the workmanship of the home (Table 2) and, expressed an overall satisfaction with the unit (Table 3). Satisfaction was also expressed with the design elements, with wives being somewhat more satisfied with this aspect of housing (Table 4). As a further indication of satisfaction, over 80 percent of both husbands and wives said they would purchase another prebuilt home.

Conclusions

The future success of prebuilt housing may hinge upon the successful conservation of time, money, and materials. Manufacturers must show potential buyers that prebuilt houses conserve money and at the same time provide housing that residents find quite satisfactory. Further study into different design possibilities, including options for expanding what may be purchased as a starter home, is desirable. Most purchasers in this study were young (under 30), and most homes were under 1,200 square feet.

The prebuilt home offers ownership of a new home at a stage in the family life cycle when it may not be possible to afford a new conventionally built home. With increasing costs of housing, the

TABLE 4. — Opinion of Design Elements by Husbands and Wives (Percent distribution)

	Storage		Traffic Flow		Room Size		Space for Furniture		Kitchen Work Space		Arrangement of Bathroom	
	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W	H	W
Unsatisfactory	6.7	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.0	3.3	3.3	1.7	1.7	0.0	0.0	8.4
Fair	11.7	5.0	6.7	8.3	11.7	13.3	16.7	6.7	6.7	10.0	8.3	16.7
Average	28.3	15.0	25.0	31.7	46.7	36.7	40.0	15.0	35.0	35.0	36.7	21.7
Good	35.0	51.7	43.3	41.7	30.0	38.3	38.3	40.0	30.0	31.7	41.7	36.7
Very Satisfactory	18.3	28.3	23.3	18.3	11.7	8.3	17	36.7	26.7	23.3	13.3	16.7
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mean	3.467	3.550	3.800	4.033	3.417	3.700	3.183	3.350	3.733	4.033	3.600	3.717
	t=.118		t=.293		t=.433		t=.261		t=.489		t=.184	

(None of the differences in means between husbands and wives were significant.)
 (1= Unsatisfactory, 2= Fair, 3= Average, 4= Good, 5= Very Satisfactory)

role of less expensive alternatives is likely to increase, serving a growing segment of young households not reached by the conventional market.

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