

Building a Modern Home on a Budget

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Many people will say that you cannot build a modern home on the same budget that you would use for a similar size traditional home. This might be true, but if you can't, you should be able to get close if you carefully choose the materials used in your modernist home.

It is a fact that many contractors will want to charge a higher price to build a modern style home as compared to a contemporary home. This is mainly because of the use of new/different materials and possibly unusual building elements. The contractor expects these things will probably take more time to use/build and in turn pads his bid a little more to ensure that he does not lose money on the job.

Some of the concerns of the contractor may be valid while others may not be valid. It seems that the key to getting a reasonable bid is to find a contractor that is familiar with the materials and methods that would be used in your home.

If you break down the elements that make a home have a modern style, you will find that it is mainly the windows, exterior finishes and roof lines that help to define a home as modern. When you compare the floor plans of many modern homes with contemporary homes, you will find them very similar: living room in the center, kitchen and dining room on the left, bedrooms to the right or upstairs. What makes you think of it as a modern home is possibly the low pitch of the roof, the style of windows used in the front and possibly the large expanses of glass in the back, and possibly the style or type of siding used.. Beyond these elements would be the finishes and fixtures used on the interior.

When broken down, do these elements cost more than those used in a contemporary home? Some yes, and some no.

Keep in mind, other than the structural shell of the home, you can always change the exterior siding and interior finishes at a later date. You may be able to use a less expensive material today and upgrade later.

All homes have roofs. Most contemporary homes have pitched roofs and utilize trusses in their construction. Trusses are fast and efficient. They save time which is very expensive. Most trusses also have enough pitch to allow you to use less expensive roofing materials such as shingles. You can use trusses in a modern home too, but most do not because of the style of roof desired. If you utilize a low pitched shed roof or a flat roof on a modern house, you will typically have to stick frame the roof which takes longer and is more expensive. These types of low pitch roofs may also require more expensive roofing materials. You cannot effectively use shingles on a roof with a pitch less than 2/12 or a rise of 2' for every 12' of horizontal distance. Materials that are acceptable on lower pitch

roofs may cost twice as much (or more) than standard roofing materials. So, the roof system of your modern house will probably cost more than that of a contemporary house.

The exterior and interior walls of both modern style and contemporary homes are built the same way and should cost the same. The only two exceptions might be if you have lots of vaulted ceilings in the home and/or large banks of windows. The vaulted ceilings will typically require that you build a number of knee walls to connect a standard wall with the vaulted ceiling.. This takes more time than using flat ceilings with trusses and costs more. To limit the cost here, you can have vaulted ceilings in some of your main rooms, but use cheaper flat ceilings in other rooms. Large banks of windows require beams and supports to hold up the roof which can also increase your costs.

Most modern style homes have many large windows. These windows are expensive. If you choose commercial style windows, they are more expensive still. So, the more windows you have, the higher your cost. When you do utilize a window wall, to control your costs you can limit the size and number of windows used in other parts of the house. If you going commercial, shop around, you may find a better price (but ask for references just in case). Also, keep in mind that commercial windows are not very energy efficient compared to residential windows.

The type of exterior siding you choose can also affect your overall costs. Horizontal lumber installed as a rain screen is very effective and looks great. But, it is also labor intensive and expensive. For installation efficiency and initial cost, it is hard to beat fiber-cement lap siding. An even more cost effective option is galvanized barn siding; Modern, long lasting and the cheapest thing on the market.

Now all that is left is the interior. If you have to have hard wood floors, Italian kitchen cabinets, and glass tile on every square inch of the bathrooms, get out your check book. But, if you need a more realistic budget, there are many good options.

Instead of \$50 grand on Italian cabinets, check out local sources or IKEA. You can get some very nice cabinets for \$5K from IKEA (you will have to put them together). You might like granite counter tops, but using a laminate counter top is more cost effective. You can always change it to granite in a few years. Another option is concrete counter tops that you can make. If you do them yourself, they really can cost as little as a few dollars per foot.

Interior walls can be very modern simply with good drywall and paint. You can always upgrade the walls later. Hardwood floors are very nice, but there is nothing wrong with carpet. Tile is used widely in modern style homes. Tile can be expensive or it can be relatively cheap. Slate is a beautiful and inexpensive tile. You can get slate for as little as \$2 per square foot. Tile is also easy to install. You can do it yourself. All you need is a \$200 tile saw, a \$5 trowel and some knee pads. One great thing about installing tile, if you mess up installing a piece, you can always rip it out and put and new one in.

When it comes to plumbing fixtures, you do not need to spend \$500 on every faucet. Yes, the \$500 faucet may be sleek, stylish and finely crafted, but, it costs \$500. If you shop around, you can find nice stylish faucets for much less. Many of the big box home improvement stores are carrying more modern fixtures. You might also check on eBay. The inexpensive fixtures purchased over the Internet might not be the highest quality, but they are typically very functional. It may not be what you ultimately want, but you can always upgrade in a couple of years as your budget allows.

The bottom line is, be sure and get the bones of the house right (structure, HVAC, insulation, windows and doors, etc.). You can still have a unique, beautiful, stylish modern home on a realistic budget. You may just need to be willing to make a few compromises on the finishes you choose, knowing that you can always upgrade them later.