

See your custom components clearly with an architect

Using an architect to customize your new home can save you money while allowing you to consider more custom features.



David Fleming

Alternative home building products and techniques that are more durable and energy efficient have become increasingly affordable over the past 10 years.

People should know what options are available regarding the exterior envelope and structure of their home.

For example, there are several ways to insulate the exterior walls and attic of a new home. The prevailing, cost-effective method to insulate exterior walls is to use R-13 fiberglass insulation blankets between each 2" by 4" stud. When combined with R-38 fiberglass insulation in the attic, this method can meet the minimum requirements of the energy code.

A variation of this technique is to combine R-19 fiberglass insulation with 2" by 6" studs. Neither method provides a continuous thermal barrier since there are gaps between each fiberglass blanket and each stud.

There are more effective ways to in-

ulate the exterior envelope. Using spray foam insulation at each stud cavity provides a higher whole wall insulation value. Applying rigid insulation board to the exterior side of the sheathing provides a continuous thermal barrier.

When combined with foam or fiberglass insulation in the cavities, rigid insulation provides the optimum whole wall insulation value.

The structural system used in your new home has a close relationship to the size and layout of the spaces in your house. For instance, a large great room that is open to the kitchen may be accomplished more efficiently with engineered roof trusses and floor joists than with conventional lumber.

It is only within the past few years that engineered members have become common and feasible in Western New York. The American Institute of Architects routinely provides seminars for its members on how to properly design and specify these structural systems.

If you are planning to finish your basement at some point in the future and use it for more than storage, you should consider using window wells, daylight windows or walk-out glass doors.

Window wells add very little to the cost of the home and provide a second means of egress, making your basement safer in the event of a fire. Some municipalities in the United States already require a second means of egress from the basement.

The exterior basement walls, or foundation walls, can be built several different ways too. The traditional, continuous concrete wall is still the most common in Western New York. It is often covered with fiberglass blanket insulation.

Two alternative that are growing in popularity are insulated concrete forms and pre-cast concrete wall systems with cavities between each member.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The local chapter of the American Institute of Architects has a residential committee that routinely provides seminars on the latest building products and methods.

You will be well-served by hiring a highly qualified architect who specializes in designing custom homes. Your architect's detailed set of drawings and specifications will allow you to get competitive pricing from home builders. An AIA architect is uniquely qualified to clearly illustrate the custom components you want in your new home.

Visit: aiabuffalowny.org for a listing of residential architects or call 774-3340.

David Fleming, of DRF Design, is a registered architect in New York. He is chairman of the residential committee of the Buffalo-WNY chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

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