

149 Photos

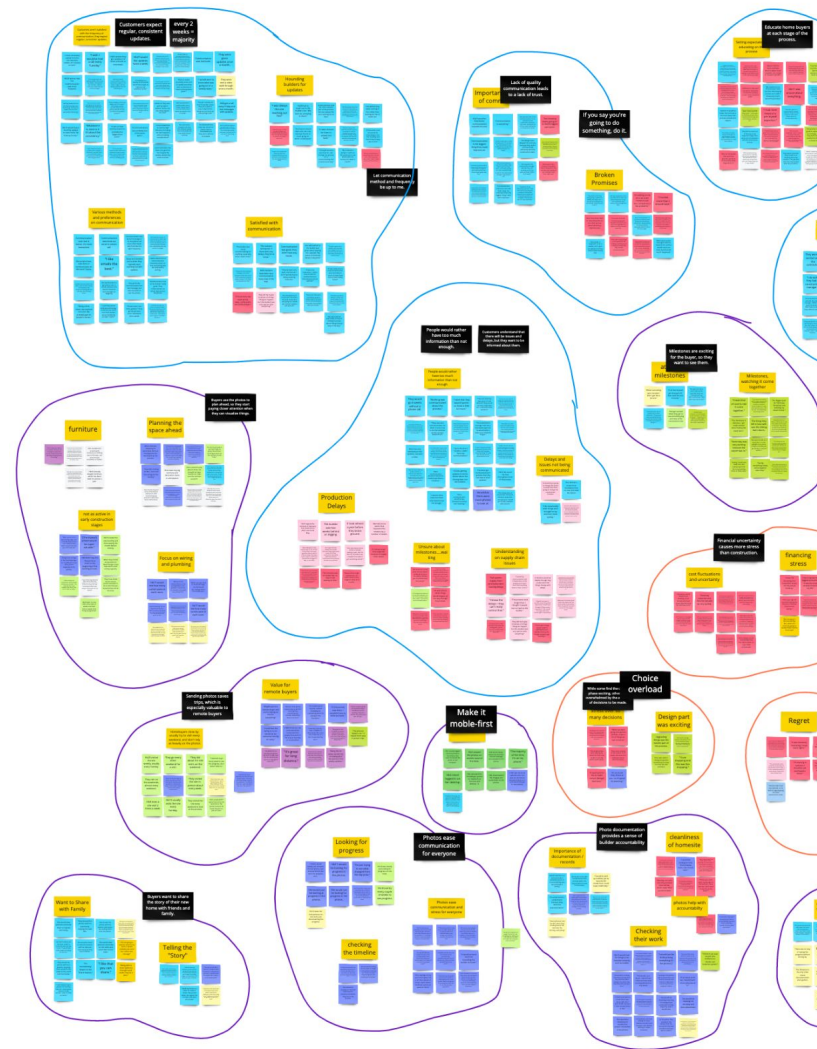
2022 Home Buyer Research Report

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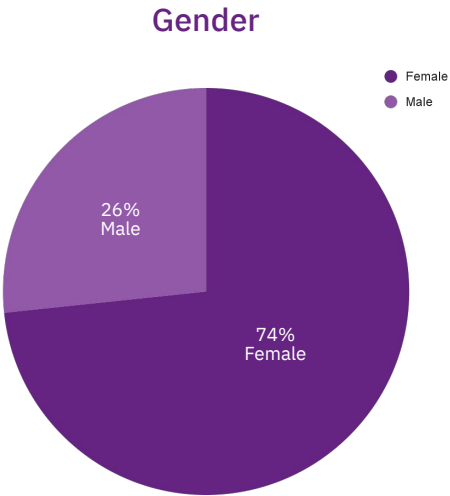
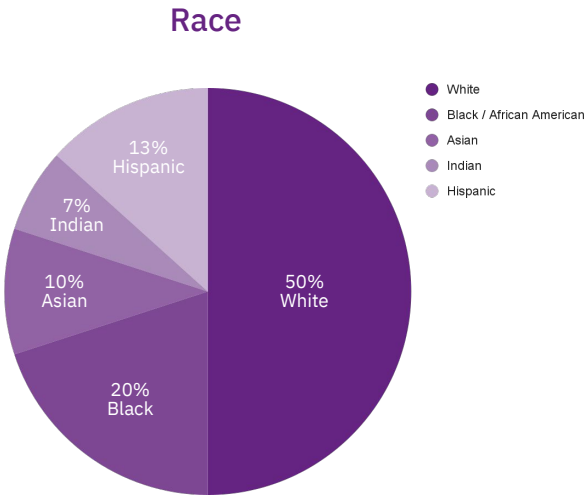
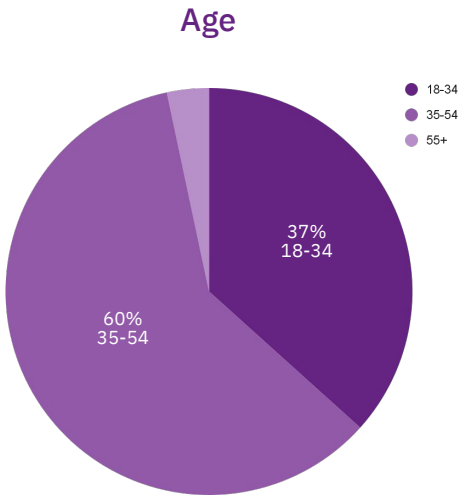
30 participants
956 observations

Using a variety of recruiting methods, we conducted in-depth interviews with 30 participants to help us better understand the needs and experience of new home buyers. Participants ranged from 149 Photos Home Buyers, to Prospective New Home Buyers, to non-149-serviced New Construction Buyers. The interviews yielded nearly a thousand observations that were synthesized into the insights included in this document.

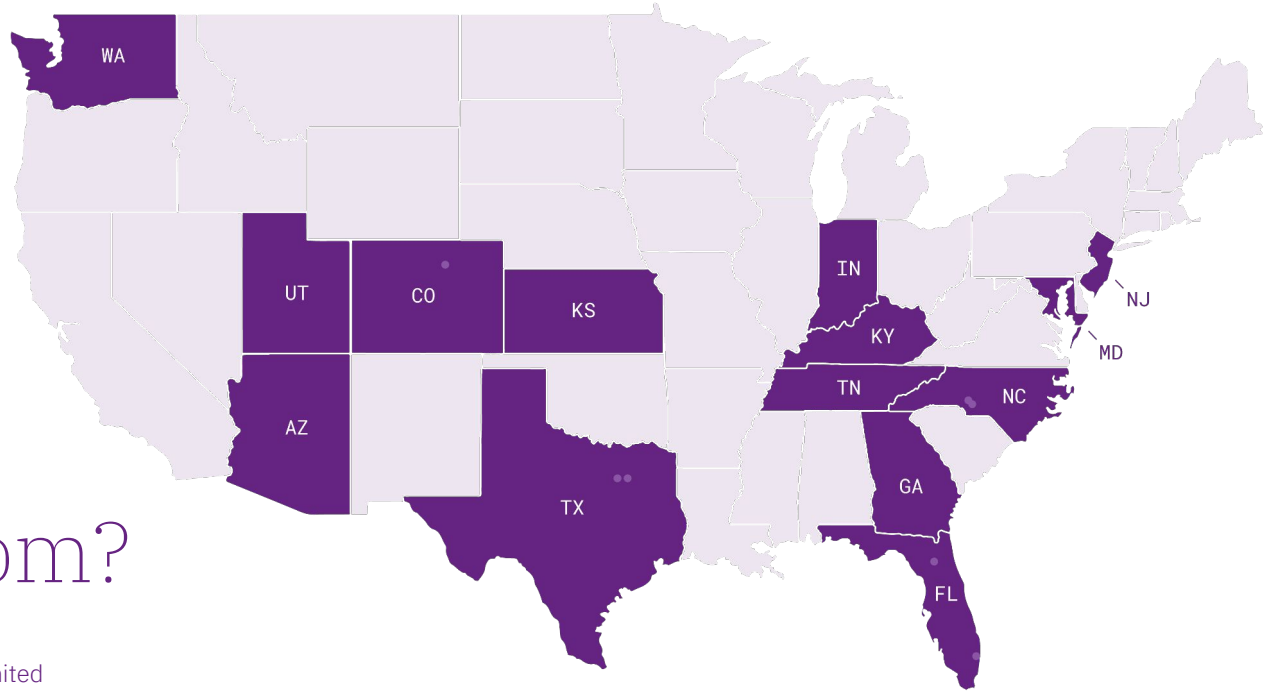


Who did we talk to?

Anyone can buy a home. That’s why we intentionally recruited participants from a variety of backgrounds, while keeping a participant pool that is reflective of the demographic breakdown of homeowners in the U.S..

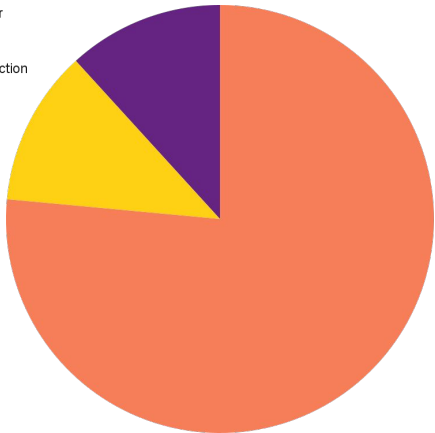


We got to know 30 home buyers from all across the United States: coast-to-coast and inbetween. A higher concentration of participants came from states where new construction homes are more common, namely: North Carolina (30%) and Texas (16%).



Homebuyer type

- First-time homebuyer
- Veteran homebuyer
- Veteran new construction homebuyer



76.5% of home buyers were first-timers

The vast majority of new construction home buyers are not only new to the new construction route, but are new to home buying altogether.

Reason for choosing new construction

- couldn't compete with resale market
- wanted something new
- wanted customization
- location
- pricing comparable to resale
- thought it would be easier
- personal connection to new construction homebuyer/builder



27% chose new construction because the cost was comparable to resale

After considering how much they'd have to put into a resale home, buyers determined they'd get more bang for their buck out of the new home route.

Primary Research Insights

COMMUNICATION

Give me regular, consistent updates.

Most home buyers are not satisfied with the amount of updates they've been given and are often left wondering about the status of their home. Most home buyers want a weekly or bi-weekly update, regardless of the progress made.

Substantiation

- HB28* had to reach out to the builder a lot. "We were so annoying to them."
- "I wish I would've had a call every Tuesday." - HB11
- Communication was the most stressful part of the process. She was always the one reaching out to them. -HB30
- "Whatever it is, stick to it. It's about the consistency." -HB25
- HB19's preferred communication cadence would be bi-weekly in the earlier stages, and then weekly updates after the cabinets go in.
- "Once a week has struck the right balance of making me feel looped in without feeling overwhelmed." -HB8

71%

of home buyers said they were unsatisfied with the level of communication from their builder

***HB = "Home Buyer"**
We're quoting home buyers, but want to keep their identity hidden.

COMMUNICATION

Let it be up to me

Everyone has a different preferred method and frequency of communication. Because they are spending a lot of money on a new home, they expect their customer service experience to be tailored to them.

Substantiation

- HB1 liked the amount of communication, which was done on the phone or via email. The primary use of email was great, because she could decide when she wanted to engage.
- HB27 would prefer to get phone calls or emails, because she doesn't check her text messages as diligently.
- Hb15 would love a monthly update or even more "let it be up to me."
- "If you want repeat customers, you need to spend the time to make them feel as though they're important." - HB13

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“I feel like it's pretty old school. I'm going through like emails and phones and going into their office to talk to them. I wish it was modernized....I wish there was an app or I could text someone.”

- HB26

COMMUNICATION

If you say you're going to do something, do it.

Home buyers expect their builder to follow through with things they say they're going to do, whether that's to do with the closing date, communication or fixing something. Broken promises lead to a lack of trust.

Substantiation

- HB1 would definitely be open to building again, but they would be cautious of who's doing the building.
- “They told me that they were going to update me weekly, but they're not. If you say you're going to do something, I expect for you to do it.” -HB10
- “Just be honest with us [the home buyers]...It's all about the communication and making sure you have that relationship with the buyer.” -HB10
- As far as the builders: “if you tell a customer you're going to do something, please do it. Respond back in a timely manner, everybody needs to be on the same page.” -HB10

COMMUNICATION

Educate me at each stage of the process

Most new construction home buyers are new to the process or may be buying a home for the first time. Even if they've owned a home before, each builder's process is slightly different, so they needed to be educated on the process and given expectations throughout.

Substantiation

- HB28 had no idea what to look for during the construction process, to him “sticks turned to walls.”
- HB29 felt like he might've been overconcerned, because he's not familiar with the process.
- “We reached out a lot, because it was our first time buying a home and I didn't know very much about the process.” -HB11
- “Not having the knowledge...when it comes to a new construction home, because I've never been through that process...It's the fear of the unknown for me.” -HB12

“

“I expect the builder to thoroughly communicate with me and walk me, step-by-step, through the entire construction phase of the home. I just expect you to hold my hand through the entire process....Assist me and be real with me.”
-HB12

COMMUNICATION

Get me as close to construction as possible

There's a perception that sales or customer service people aren't the best people to talk to when it comes to construction status and issues. Home buyers prefer to hear directly from the construction manager instead of relying on people that don't have the information they need or jumping through hoops to access it.

Substantiation

- HB23 would expect to hear from “the builder at this point, because they’re just like there all the time.”
- “I didn’t have as much access to [the project manager] as I did to [the sales rep].” She would’ve preferred to talk to the PM at the later stages of construction. -HB18
- Communication was just with the project manager. “Which was good, because we didn’t have to call so many different people.” -HB11
- “It does put me at ease a lot, having that one on one relationship [with the builder.]” -HB8

COMMUNICATION

Who am I speaking with?

There are a lot of different points of contact during the entire home construction process. This can be confusing and nerve racking as sensitive information is being shared. Home buyers need to know who they should expect to be in communication with, especially if that is going to change.

Substantiation

- HB15 had three different supervisors for each phase of construction. Having one point of contact would've been preferred.
- In terms of who will be in contact, "tell me when and tell me who it's going to be ahead of time." -HB15
- HB2 communicated with a Construction Manager, who quit during their project. Their builder contact changed twice over the course of their construction which was stressful.
- The finance contact changed without warning part way through the process."You get a lot of spam and scam emails," so receiving an email regarding financial matters from an unfamiliar email felt off to her. -HB2

“

“I called [the realtor] in a panic this week, because our normal construction manager was out this week so they had someone else come in...and I just didn't know what was going on...it was a very different message [from him].” -HB8

COMMUNICATION

Make me feel excited and special

The home buying and construction process is deeply emotional. Communications should feel personal and relay excitement rather than feeling transactional.

Substantiation

- The builder doesn't work weekends, "so I'm always having to take off work to handle things." -HB13
- "I'm spending all of this money and you can't accommodate my schedule?" -HB10
- "They made it very much not personal and it's a huge personal thing. So, relay excitement to me. Someone is making a big decision in their life...why not be a little bit intentional with communication?" -HB15
- "We're so young...we were not as respected or taken seriously." -HB30
- "Their customer service was less than ideal. They were just very cold and they know that you're stuck with them." -HB15

“

“This is a life-changing decision and [the sales person] is over here slapping paper down and saying ‘what do you want?’...like you’re making an order at Kroger for some deli meat. Like ‘I don’t know, this just feels weird.’”
-HB15

COMMUNICATION

Not knowing the closing date has a domino effect

There are lots of logistics for homebuyers to figure out as they near the end of construction. Not knowing the closing date or having it moved at the last minute is very stressful, and often, expensive.

Substantiation

- HB13 had a fear that the home wasn't going to be built when they said it was. "I've already booked flights, I've already taken vacation from work."
- Being given the target date earlier would've been helpful and alleviated some stress. -HB3
- Figuring out whether or not HB11 was going to have the house by the time their lease ended came down to 48 hours.
- HB4 had to go month-month on their lease at a higher rate for longer than they anticipated, because of the delays.
- "There is a little bit of anxiety of 'when is this going to be done? and what do we do when we have to move out? and then what do we do with this current home?'" -HB23

COMMUNICATION

I would rather
have too much
information than
not enough

Customers understand that delays will happen at no fault to the builder, even so, they want to hear the bad news. Erring on the side of transparency keeps the buyer informed and establishes trust.

Substantiation

- If something is going to change HB10 wants to know how that's going to change the construction timeline.
- The transparency of the process "was great, because I knew what was going on, I would get constant updates with pictures." -HB1
- They did try to give timelines on things, "things do happen, but [the builder] was very upfront with everything." -HB1
- "I would rather have too much information than not enough." -HB20
- "There was zero communication. So when it came time to do the customer service survey, I tanked them." -HB13

VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

Show me the milestones!

A major benefit of new construction is the customization, buyers get excited when they get to see their choices come to life, so they pay particular attention to the things they chose and the major milestones that ultimate lead to their dream home.

Substantiation

- Communication was as needed and at major milestones. “They would send us updates like ‘we poured the concrete today’ or ‘today the driveway is going in.’” -HB11
- HB4 got excited when they got to see something big and new at the construction site.
- “When something gets installed I wish I got like a picture.” - HB26
- “We went [on-site] a month ago and we were like ‘woah, we broke ground, we didn’t even know.’ They didn’t even tell us that.” -HB23
- “The hardware is fabulous, I got really excited about seeing the towel bars.”-HB19

“

“There’s definitely this sense of excitement when you’re buying a new construction home, as you’re seeing it go from nothing to...being brought to life. For it to be captured in pictures...it keeps the excitement.”

-HB13

VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

Sending photos saves trips

Sharing regular visual documentation can save buyers the time and money that it takes to pay a site visit. This benefit is invaluable for remote buyers, who may be moving across state lines and may never have direct access to the site.

Substantiation

- “The pictures helped a lot.” It helped them save in-person trips. -HB2
- “Maybe you’re a remote buyer and you’re relying on [these photos] for everything.” -HB15
- “If [the portal] was there, I wouldn’t have to come as much.” -HB25
- “The \$800 that I’m spending flying back and forth I could invest into the actual house and do an upgrade of some sort.”-HB13
- “Being this far away, we will rely on seeing all of the photos in the weekly updates.” -HB6
- “[149 Photos] would definitely save me time and money on gas.” -HB9



VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

Help me share my story with friends and family

Home buyers are proud of what might be the biggest purchase of their life and they want to share the excitement with their friends and family. Enabling them to share their photos from dirt to completion helps tell that story.

Substantiation

- If HB3 was showing someone else the photos, she would start with the dirt photos first and then go through the building stages, she described it like going through a flipbook.
- HB25 would share a video for reels or tiktok. She posted when she signed the contract and when she closed.
- HB11's dad is elderly and has been unable to come and see her new home. "It would help other people be happy for me too."
- "I'm very much like a TikTok, Instagram kind of person...I would love pictures. I would scroll through it like it was a social media feed." - HB25
- "My mom is asking every other week to see pictures. I would love a site like this, where I could just send her."-HB8

VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

Photos ease communication for everyone

Home buyers are mostly just looking to ensure that progress is being made. If they have regular picture updates to show that, less communication is needed because they aren't left wondering about the status of their home.

Substantiation

If I got regular photo updates...

- “I would’ve felt like the level of customer service would’ve been provided..because I would be kept up to date and they wouldn’t have to say much.” - HB13
- “It would prevent me from hounding the builder as much.” -HB13
- “This would definitely reduce the amount of communication that I would even require or would expect from them, if I can see the progress myself.” -HB9
- “I would feel a whole lot of weight lifted off.” -HB11
- “It would...kinda answer some of my questions... if I had the pictures I could see where they are in the process.” -HB9

VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

Photos provide a sense of builder accountability

When on site visits or looking at photos, home buyers are checking the work of the builder to ensure everything is done properly and they're getting what they ordered. There's a sense of accountability provided when there's visual documentation of the process.

Substantiation

- One day, on a site visit, HB3 noticed beer bottles, which made them uncomfortable.
- Looking at the photos, HB12 would make sure there's no issues and check to make sure everything that she ordered is there.
- At one point, Hb3 noticed in the photos that the wrong flooring was installed and were able to catch it.
- "I think it can even benefit [the builder] as a checks and balances system." -HB13
- "Personally, as a buyer, I would love" if this tool was used to bring attention to any issues." -HB15
- "If someone is going [to take pictures] there's accountability, because they're showing a record of 'this is what was done.'" - HB22

“

“I don't have to wonder, it takes away that sense of not knowing and provides very concrete evidence of what's going on. In the event that I'm able to notice a deficiency of some sort, I actually have photo evidence to support it.”

-HB13

VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

Show me the progress, don't just tell me about it

It's not enough just to tell homebuyers about the progress of their home, they want to witness it themselves. Having a professional take progress photos instills excitement and alleviates the burden of having to do it themselves.

Substantiation

- There was no way for HB20 to see the progress without driving by.
- Hb25 likes that you're getting a good perspective of all of the rooms in the photos, because she didn't really know what to take pictures of herself.
- "I'm a visual person, I'd love to see progress." - HB26
- "We looked forward to seeing those pictures, every Friday or every Monday... it was really like a treat to receive the message with the update." -HB3
- "They keep sending me pictures and all they're showing me is the outside. I have no idea what's going on on the inside or the backyard." -HB16

“

“All I got was ‘we put up the walls today.’ And I said, ‘well, whoopdeedoo I haven’t seen them.’ Show me the progress, instead of telling me the progress.”

-HB16

BUYING PROCESS

Financial uncertainty causes more stress than construction

Fluctuating costs and unknown timelines lead home buyers feeling uncertain about how much their new home will end up costing them, which is sometimes more stressful than the construction itself.

Substantiation

- HB26 didn't realize that some of the finishes are considered high-end and cost extra. "I ended up picking a bunch of finishes that cost extra...I guess I just like expensive things."
- "I've been nervous to spend any extreme money, because I have no idea what I'm going to owe at the end of this." -HB9
- "Once you sign off, you start feeling the pressure. 'Now we have to start paying.'" -HB24
- Financing was the biggest pain point. "It was the most stressful time in my life." -HB11

“

“We had some people suggest the new home building, but I just felt like that's just too much for us to take on. With the prices fluctuating...it was too uncertain. I would rather...we see what we're getting. The uncertainty of it makes me want to throw up.”
-HB7

BUYING PROCESS

Choice overload

Home buyers are presented with an overwhelming amount of decisions and documents to sign. While some find the design phase exciting, others are overwhelmed by the amount of decisions they have to make in such a short period of time, on top of everything else.

Substantiation

- The design center was too much. “I’m a commitment phobe...like 30 years of having the same [cabinet] color, this is too much pressure.” -HB25
- HB12 has been looking at floor plans for 8 weeks because she’s indecisive about what she wants.
- The design phase was really quick, decisions had to be made in one day which wasn’t great. -HB29
- “It’s so much they throw at you.” -HB25
- “When we were going through the process, it was a lot of things we had to look at.” -HB24
- “It was hard for me to make certain [design] decisions.” -HB18

BUYING PROCESS

Did I make the right choice?

Home buyers are filled with uncertainty throughout the entire process of building a home that doesn't exist. If things go much differently than they expected, they may have a sense of new construction buyers remorse and prefer resale in the future.

Substantiation

- The house wasn't built yet, so Hb3 had to trust that the end result would look like the renderings. "It was super weird."
- Hb22 feels like she should've done more research before signing on with them, because there's no accountability on the builder's end.
- "I'm hoping—fingers crossed—it looks dreamy once it's finished." -HB23
- "You'd bid on a house that didn't exist. It sucked." -HB21
- "I'm starting to rethink if I should've just purchased a resale." -Hb10
- "The questions I ask myself are 'am I making the right decisions on like everything? Is this going to last long or am I picking it because it's a fad and it's going to last two years?'" -HB26

“

“We want to see what we're getting...They can have the prettiest model home, but there's no way that you can guarantee me that that's what my house is going to look like.”
-HB7

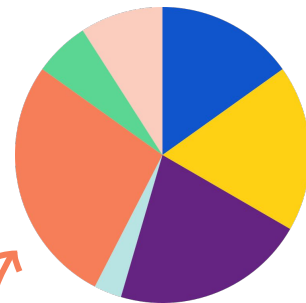
BUYING PROCESS

More bang for my buck

Many buyers are led to new construction because they have more choice and it's financially comparable to resale, especially in a fluctuating and highly competitive housing market.

Substantiation

- HB6 picked a new construction home because existing homes were just as much if not more money and going for \$50-60,000 over the asking price.
- HB28 wasn't originally looking for new construction homes, but a price/quality comparison led them to the conclusion that they'd get more bang for their buck going that route.
- HB29 was outbid on 6-10 houses, so he started looking at new construction homes.
- "The price per square foot is close enough [to resale] that I don't know why people don't just do new construction." -HB20
- "The housing market is so expensive, so if I want to put that much money into it I might as well build it myself and customize it." -HB26



27% chose new construction because the overall cost was comparable to resale

BUYING PROCESS

Having outside help holds builders accountable

Skepticism arises when buyers have no one to consult with outside of the building company contacts. They want third party help to ensure that they aren't getting taken advantage of throughout the process.

Substantiation

- They have a real estate sector of the building company, which HB15 thought was “unethical.”
- The relator was a buffer between him and the builder “to a degree. She wasn’t as proactive as [he’d] like her to be.” -HB13
- The realtor has been really helpful in stepping in for HB9 if there are any issues that arise.
- “Definitely have a realtor, even if you’re doing new construction.” -HB9
- Hb8’s realtor has so much experience with new builds that she was able to tell them what upgrades are worth it and what things they should upgrade down the line. -HB8

“

“Make sure you have people that are helping you with the process, don’t try to do it by yourself.” -HB9

Want more information on how weekly construction progress photos can help you to create a more engaging, deeply emotional customer experience?

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