



E-BOOK

Modular or Stick Built Homes...
How do they compare?



Real choice

Building a new home can be both exciting and stressful. And of course, after you've made the decision to build, one of the first decisions you'll need to make is who you want to build your home and are you going to go with a stick built home or a modular home. This article is meant to help shed some light on the similarities and differences between stick built homes and modular with the goal of helping you make a more informed decision.

Before we get into the comparison, it's important to clarify what modular and stick built homes are (in case you don't already know the terminology).

A **modular home** is essentially a home that is built in a factory and then transported (in one or more modules) to your building site.

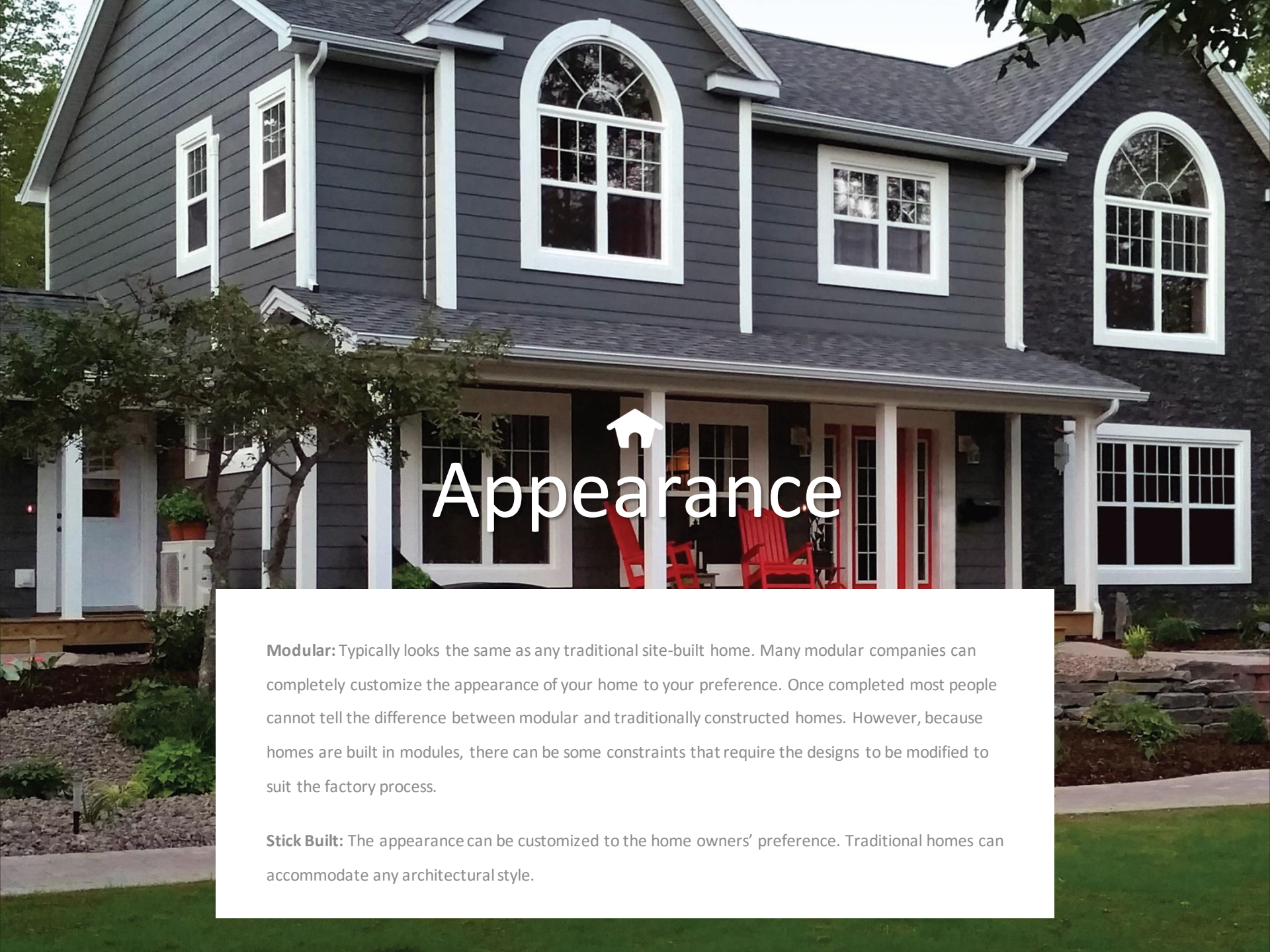
A **stick built (or site built) home** is built piece by piece on your building site – the traditional method of home construction.



Compare

Modular vs. Stick Built

So how do they stack up? Which construction method is better? Like anything, each has advantages and disadvantages so only you can decide what makes the most sense to you and your family and what you value most. Here are 14 things to consider and how modular and stick built homes compare on each:



Appearance

Modular: Typically looks the same as any traditional site-built home. Many modular companies can completely customize the appearance of your home to your preference. Once completed most people cannot tell the difference between modular and traditionally constructed homes. However, because homes are built in modules, there can be some constraints that require the designs to be modified to suit the factory process.

Stick Built: The appearance can be customized to the home owners' preference. Traditional homes can accommodate any architectural style.

A photograph of a modern walk-in shower. The walls are covered in white marble tiles with grey veining. A glass door with a black frame is partially open. Inside the shower, there is a rainfall showerhead, a handheld showerhead, and a glass shelf with two bottles. The floor is made of dark grey tiles in a herringbone pattern. A white rug is partially visible in the bottom left corner.

Floor Plans & Designs

Modular: Modular homes can be highly customized in their interior and exterior designs. Full custom modular builders offer the ability to design from scratch or accept private architect's renderings for conversion by the factory to modular. Most modular companies have in-house engineering & design departments that provide custom plans for customers at no additional cost.

Stick Built: Most custom builders can show you sample plans or photos of homes they have built in the past. While some also have in-house design services, many smaller builders do not and will require you to purchase home plans yourself or have custom plans designed by an architect or drafting firm.



Timeframe

Modular: Modular homes typically hold the upper hand when timing is critical. The ground work (lot clearing, foundation excavation/pouring, etc) can begin at the same time that construction of your home is taking place. And because modular homes are built indoors, weather delays are not a factor during the construction phase of your home. As a result, modular homes can usually be completed more quickly than a stick built home. Modular builders can also start your build in the winter and have it ready for delivery in the spring.

Stick Built: Since all construction occurs on site, work projects have to be scheduled more carefully. Construction of your home can't begin until much of the ground work is complete. The work schedule is typically highly dependent on weather conditions, especially in the main construction phase. Total construction time frequently exceeds six months. Stick builders typically cannot build in the winter and so can only start building your home in the spring.

Building Process

Modular: Homes are built indoors on an assembly-line by dozens of skilled trades who each specialize in their specific job. All stages of construction are precision-engineered and have strictly controlled standard operating procedures that must be adhered to and are checked by a quality assurance team. Homes are built in sections (or modules) and delivered to the home site where the modules are fitted together and roofing, siding, drywall and flooring are installed across the areas where modules meet. Because they are built indoors, construction can begin anytime, in any weather.

Stick Built: Built on site from scratch often with a small crew of carpenters who do all aspects of rough construction and finish details. Sub-contractors are often brought in to do specific tasks like plumbing, electrical, HVAC, drywall, etc. A general contractor oversees the project and customers can watch as their home progresses day by day. Unlike Modular homes, stick built homes are exposed to the weather until the shingles are on and windows are in. And most stick builders don't build in the winter months.



Building Code

Modular & Stick Built: Modular and stick built homes are required to meet the same building codes. Most modular companies also conform to CSA construction guidelines as well and so customers benefit from whichever requirement is more stringent.





Costs

Building Process



Modular & Stick Built: Both types of homes are very similar in cost when comparing like materials and finish levels. Most modular home builders can provide a **guaranteed price** because all product/finish choices are made before construction begins. Stick built homes are typically priced as an estimate with allowances for things like kitchen cabinets, flooring, bathrooms and lighting because these items are often chosen after construction begins. This means that if the home owners choose a more expensive finish than the builder included in the allowance, the home owners have to cover the extra costs. This is why many stick built construction projects come in 10-15% or more over budget. On a \$200,000 home, that's an extra \$20-30,000 that home owners have to come up with at the end of the project.



Modular: Well built, high-quality modular homes retain their value. Whether a mini home or a bungalow, or any other style of home, recent research has shown that modular homes retain their value at similar levels as stick built homes. Key factors for value retention are the same as well – location & upkeep/maintenance.

Stick Built: In the past, traditionally constructed homes held their value better than modular. But that is changing now that modular homes are becoming more common and are built to similarly high standards.

Modular

Because the construction process happens quickly, all decisions have to be made before materials are ordered and construction begins. Often, once the order is placed, there is very little leeway to make adjustments to the home.

Versatility During Construction

Stick built

There is often more flexibility to make changes throughout the process. Things happen slower and customers can see the home's progress day to day. This more gradual construction timeline allows customers to change their mind in the middle of the build – of course, this also means increased costs and is one reason many stick built homes end up over-budget.

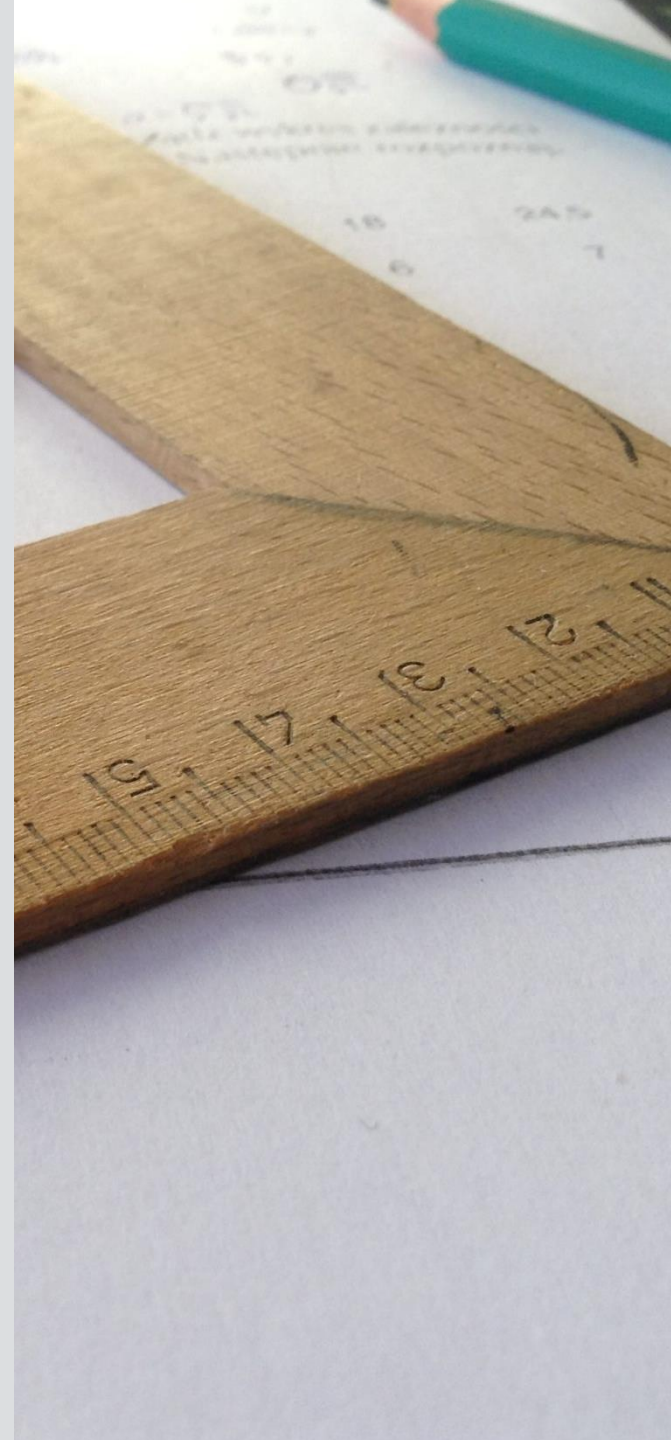
Size

- **Modular:**

The size of the modules for modular homes are limited in length, width and height due to highway restrictions. With that being said, modules can easily be combined or stacked to create any size of home and hinged roof truss technology eliminates most height restrictions caused by high roof slopes. In fact, many people don't know that many hotels and large apartment complexes have been built with modular construction.

- **Stick Built:**

As you might expect, there are no significant size limitations for a stick built home.



Foundations

Modular: Modular homes are built with a floor system to provide rigidity and to allow the home to be transported and lifted into place on site. As a result, they must be built on a full basement foundation or a crawl space/frost wall. Mini homes or single section homes (and occasionally bungalows) are typically set on concrete blocking or piers above a gravel or concrete pad.

Stick Built: Stick built homes are slightly more flexible when it comes to foundations. Like modular homes, they are often built on a full basement foundation or crawl space. Unlike modular homes, stick built homes can also be built on a concrete slab.



Environmental Impact

Modular: Factory construction is generally a more green way to build. Because nearly everything is planned in advance, modular factories can maximize material utilization, which means less waste going to landfills. In addition, all required materials are brought to the factory and many common materials are kept in stock, which means less gas and emissions from making trips to the hardware store multiple times.

Stick Built: Stick built homes generate significantly more waste because most builders don't have the time or resources to adequately plan better use of their materials. And because they don't often bring in extra materials to a job site, it is inevitable that they will need to make multiple trips to the hardware store to pick up what they need.





Energy Efficiency



Modular: Materials like insulation and windows/doors are the same as what most stick built homes are constructed with. And modular homes are required to meet the same codes. Some modular companies exceed code so it is always good to ask what their standards are. The modular building process, which involves building from the inside-out, allows for better sealing of exterior walls which should create a tighter building envelope and therefore better energy efficiency.

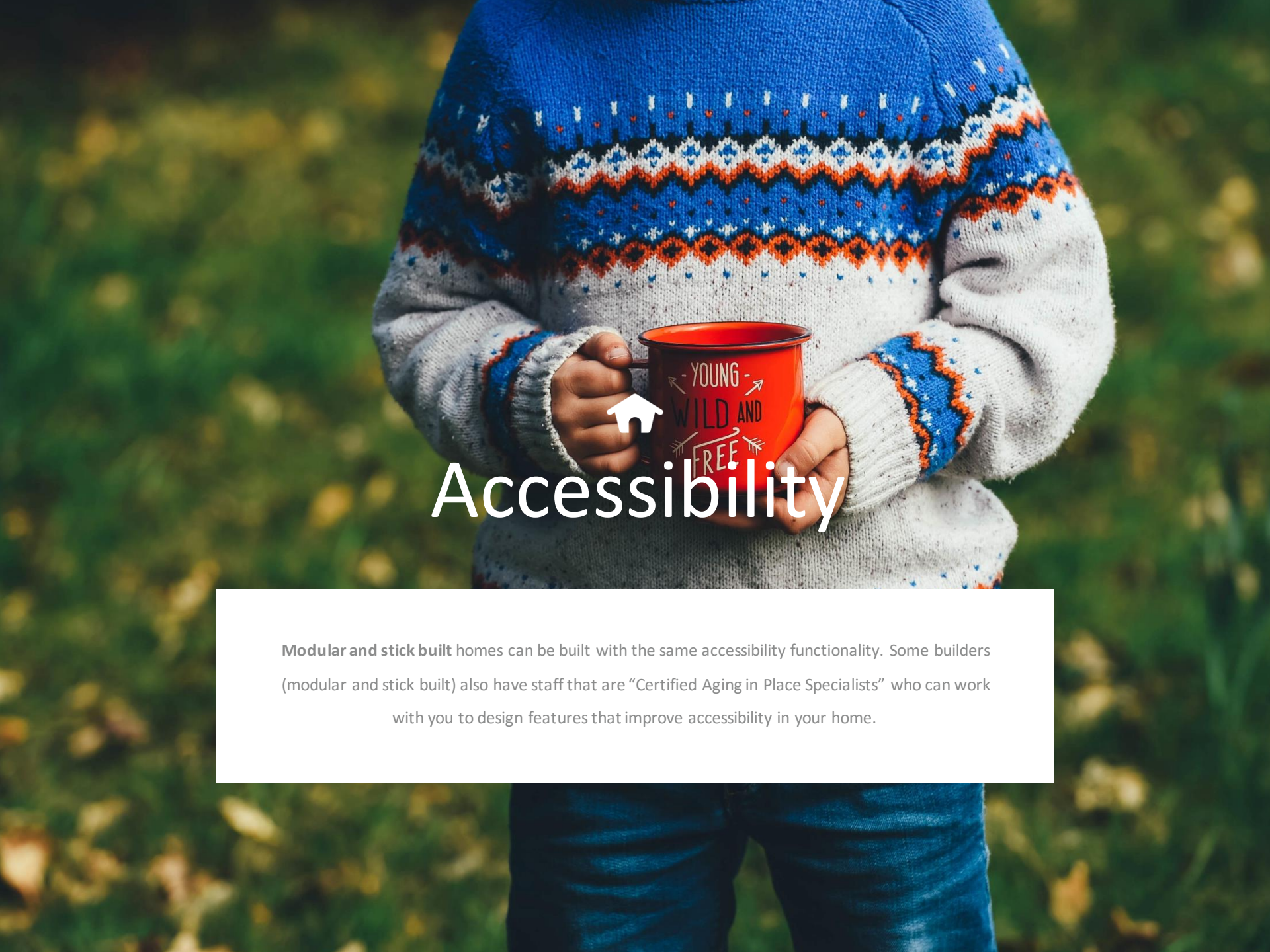
Stick Built: Stick built homes use the same materials as modular, and similarly, some exceed building code. But unlike modular construction, stick built homes are constructed from the outside-in. As a result, they are not able to seal penetrations through exterior walls for electrical boxes or plumbing in the same way that building from the inside-out enables.



Insurance

Modular: Modular homes are built to the same codes as stick built homes and most also conform to CSA guidelines. Getting home insurance for a modular home is very easy.

Stick Built: Typically no problems getting a stick built home insured as long as it has passed all required building inspections.

A child wearing a blue and white patterned sweater is holding a red mug. The mug has the text "YOUNG WILD AND FREE" and a small house icon. The word "Accessibility" is overlaid in large white text.

Accessibility

Modular and stick built homes can be built with the same accessibility functionality. Some builders (modular and stick built) also have staff that are “Certified Aging in Place Specialists” who can work with you to design features that improve accessibility in your home.

Choice is yours

Of course, these 14 things are just a few of the items you should consider when choosing a builder. The fact of the matter is that whether you decide to stick build or go with a modular builder, there are good builders and bad ones, and lots in between.

You need to be comfortable that you can trust your builder and know that they are looking out for you and your family's needs. Ask lots of questions. Compare apples to apples. Decide what you can and can't live with. But most importantly, consider all of

your new home construction options for the best fit.

Building a new home is exciting, but can also be a stressful process. Finding the right builder will help remove some of the stress so you can really focus on the excitement and joy that a new home brings.

Wishing you the best of luck with your new home!

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