

# How American Homes Vary By the Year They Were Built

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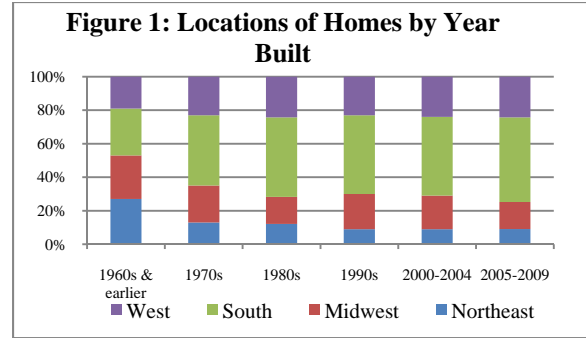
**Introduction**

More than four in ten (44%) of the nation’s housing stock was built before 1970, and the characteristics of these homes vary considerably by the year they were built. While it is commonly known that the general size of homes has increased over time, there have been other changes. These changes include increases in certain types of rooms, the types of equipment and amenities that have become standard over time, types of amenities available in the neighborhood or community, and in the types of safety equipment that are increasingly included in new homes. These conclusions are based on an analysis of data on homes in the 2009 American Housing Survey (AHS), which is a nationwide survey of housing units, and is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Department of Housing and Urban Development every two years. The analysis includes all the different types of homes in which we live and focuses on the characteristics of these homes based on the year the home was originally built.

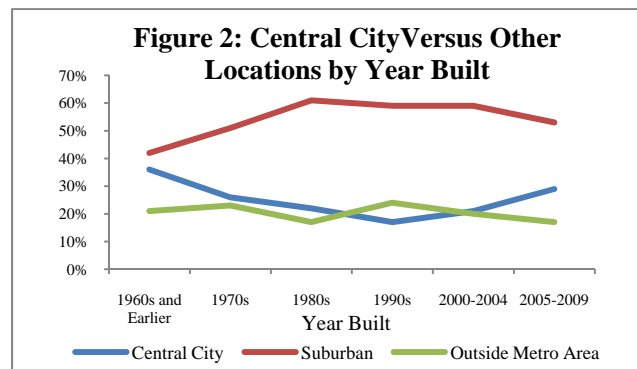
It should be noted that current residents of these homes report the size and other characteristics of the home; and in the case of older homes, some of the home characteristics, such as size of the home, number and types of rooms, equipment, and amenities may have been more recent additions or installations and did not come with the home when it was originally built.

**Location of Homes**

One of the changes over time has been where homes are being built. Building of homes has shifted from the Northeast and Midwest gradually to the South. Half the homes built between 2005 and 2009 are in the South, as are more than four in ten built from the 1970s onward. In comparison, just more than one-quarter (28%) of homes built in the 1960s or earlier (see Figure 1) are in the South. Older homes are more likely to be in the Northeast followed by the Midwest, while the South has the greatest share of homes built in recent years.

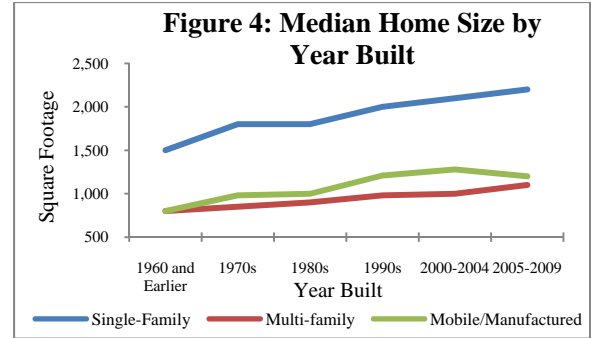
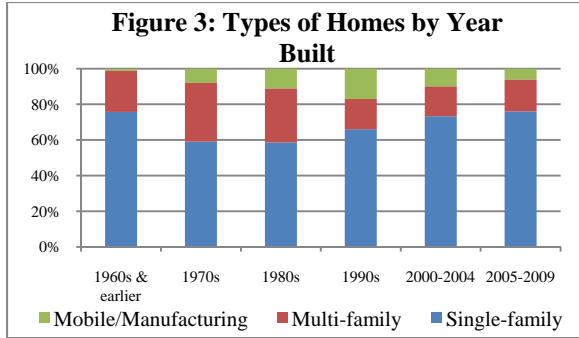


Additionally, as Figure 2 shows, after declining for several years, residential construction in central cities has increased. Homes were more likely to be built in central cities in the late 2000s compared to the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s – 29% of homes built between 2005 and 2009, for example, were in central cities compared to 17% in the 1990s.



**Types of Homes**

In the 1970s and 1980s, there was a trend toward building more multi-family homes (about three in ten to one-third of all homes built in those years), which began to decline in the 1990s (17% of all homes built in those years) and has held steady at that rate in the 2000s. Mobile or manufactured homes, which were about one-tenth of all homes built in the 1980s, peaked in the 1990s (17% of all homes built in that decade) and then lost market share (see Figure 3).



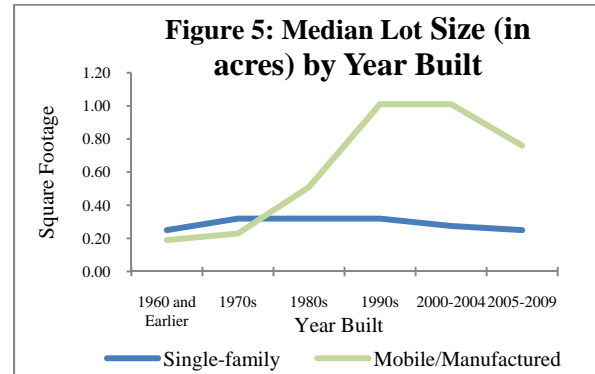
While the share of single-family homes built declined in the 1970s and 1980s, the proportion of these homes started rising in the 1990s and is back to their pre-1970s level (75%) in the 2000s. Single-family homes can be detached, i.e., homes that stand on their own, or attached, i.e., homes that share a wall with one or more other homes. Most homes built today (about two-thirds of those built in the 2000s) are single-family detached and a small proportion (similar shares of 8% and 9%, respectively, built between 2000 and 2004 and between 2005 and 2009) are single-family attached.

Size of Homes

The size of the average home built today (in the 2000s) is considerably larger than those built in earlier decades.<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that older homes may have increased in size over the years due to additions and other renovation work.

The median square footage of a single-family home built in the 1960s or earlier stands at 1,500 square feet today. In comparison, the median square footage of single-family homes built between 2005 and 2009 and between 2000 and 2004 stand today at 2,200 square feet and 2,100 square feet, respectively. Similarly, the median size of multi-family homes and mobile or manufactured homes have increased from a median of 800 square feet for these types of homes built in the 1960s or earlier to median sizes of 1,100 square feet and 1,200 square feet, respectively, for those built between 2005 and 2009 (see Figure 4).

While the size of the home has increased steadily based on the year it was built, in recent years the size of the lot the home is built on has declined. The median lot size on which a single-family home<sup>2</sup> was built, as shown in Figure 5, increased from 0.25 acres for homes built in the 1960s or earlier to 0.32 acres for homes built in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and then declined in the 2000s (median of 0.28 acres and 0.25 acres for single-family homes built between 2000 and 2004 and between 2005 and 2009, respectively). The lot size for mobile or manufactured homes has, however, risen substantially over the decades. Manufactured or mobile homes built in the 1960s or earlier generally sat on 0.19 acres of land – this number rose to a high of 1.01 acres in the 1990s and the early 2000s (2000 to 2004) and declined to 0.76 acres for those built between 2005 and 2009, but this decline is not statistically significant.



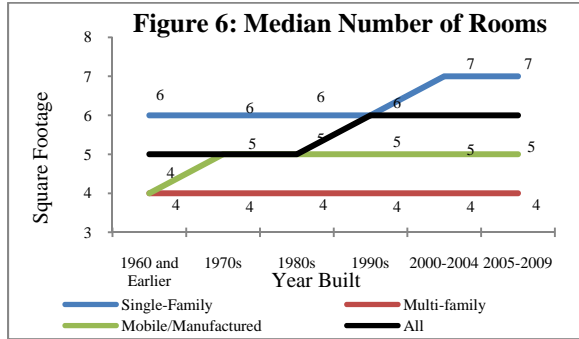
Types of Rooms in Homes

Increasing home sizes have led to some increases in the number of rooms. The median number of rooms

<sup>1</sup> The Survey of Construction conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau shows that the size of new construction has increased over the years. See <http://www.census.gov/const/www/charindex.html> for additional information.

<sup>2</sup> Lot size is only collected for single-family homes and mobile/manufactured homes. Residents of multi-family homes are not asked this question.

increased from five to six for homes built in the 1990s and has remained there for homes built in the 2000s. Most of the change, as Figure 6 shows, occurred among single-family homes between the 1990s and the 2000s (from a median of 6 to 7 rooms) and among mobile or manufactured homes in the 1970s (from a median of 4 to 5 rooms), while multi-family homes have held steady at a median of four rooms.



The trend has also been toward homes with more of almost every room type based on the year the home was originally built. Homes built in the 2000s are more likely to have four or more bedrooms compared to those built in earlier decades. Similarly homes built today are likely to have more bathrooms – about 48% of homes built between 2005 and 2009 and 44% of those built between 2000 and 2004 have 2.5 or more bathrooms compared to just 10% of the homes built in the 1960s or earlier. Homes built today are also more likely to have more living rooms, family/great rooms, dining rooms, dens, recreation rooms, and laundry/utility rooms (see Table 1).

Additionally, homes built in the 2000s are more likely to have garages – almost eight in 10 homes (79%) built between 2005 and 2009 and 77% of those built between 2000 and 2004 have garages compared to 71% of the homes built in the 1990s, and fewer than two-thirds of the homes built in earlier decades.

**Table 1: Rooms in Homes (Percent of All Homes With Each Type of Room)**

Room Type	1960s & Earlier	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000-2004	2005-2009
Bedroom	98.5	99.1	99.5	99.7	99.6	99.4
<i>Percent With 4 &amp; More</i>	16.8	17.2	17.2	25.2	31.2	33.6
Kitchen	99.1	99.5	99.7	99.8	99.7	99.7
Bathroom	99.4	99.8	99.7	99.8	99.9	99.9
<i>Percent With 2.5 &amp; More</i>	10.1	16.7	23.9	35.8	43.9	47.9
Living room	98.4	98.1	98.2	98.5	97.9	98.3
<i>Percent With 2 &amp; More</i>	3.1	3.4	3.6	4.8	5.4	6.1
Porch/Deck/Balcony/Patio	79.8	83.1	88.4	89.6	90.6	88.6
Garage	59.5	58.7	62.4	70.7	76.6	79.3
Dining room	46.9	40.4	42.5	48.6	52.1	50.6
Laundry/Utility room	17.5	19.7	21.8	29.3	34.0	38.2
Family/Great room	12.7	16.7	16.8	22.2	21.6	21.6
Den/Library/TV room	8.9	7.3	8.1	10.8	14.0	14.7
Recreation room	2.9	3.0	3.6	4.5	5.3	6.2

**Equipment in Homes**

While most homes have always been built with some type of heating equipment, the type of equipment used to heat homes has seen some small changes in recent years. Forced warm-air furnaces remain the primary form of heating, but the use of electric heat pump increased in homes built in the last 4 years, with one-quarter of units built between 2005 and 2009 using these systems compared to those built in earlier years (about one-fifth or fewer). The use of steam or hot water systems has been declining since the 1970s, with only 3% of units built between 2005

and 2009 using it as a heating system compared to 18% of units built in the 1960s or earlier (see Table 2).

Additionally, central air, a comparative rarity among homes built in the 1960s or earlier, with fewer than half of units built in that time reporting having it, is almost standard in new units built today – about 89% of homes built in the 2000s have central air. There has been a corresponding decline in the use of room air conditioners, as shown in Table 2.

Note that heating systems may have changed over the years or central air may have been added into homes built in earlier years. This means that the actual

proportion of these homes that were originally built with central air, for example, is probably lower than the percentages shown here.

**Table 2: Equipment (Percent of All Homes With Each Equipment)**

Equipment	1960s & Earlier	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000-2004	2005-2009
Heating	99.0	99.3	99.6	99.3	99.9	99.5
Most Commonly Used Primary Heating Systems						
Forced warm-air furnace with ducts and vents to individual rooms	59	62	63	70	71	68
Electric heat pump	5	13	20	19	20	25
Steam or hot water system	18	8	4	4	3	3
Built-in electric baseboard or coil	4	8	5	2	2	2
Other	14	9	8	5	4	2
Central air conditioner	45.3	65.8	77.7	83.3	88.6	88.7
Room air conditioner	35.5	23.1	15.3	11.2	6.1	4.5

Amenities in Homes

Just as with different types of rooms, homes built today come with more amenities. Items such as dishwashers, washers and dryers have become standard items in homes built in the 2000s compared to their earlier built counterparts, as Table 3 shows. The prevalence of washing machines and clothes dryers, however, declined in homes built in the later part of the 2000's compared to those built in the earlier part of the decade. Garbage disposals, which

are available in two-thirds or fewer of the homes built prior to the 2000s, are increasingly gaining in popularity with more than seven in 10 of the homes built in the 2000s having one. It should be noted that residents of the homes report the presence of these amenities; and in the case of older homes, some of these amenities may have been more recent installations and did not come with the home when it was originally built.

**Table 3: Amenities (Percent of Homes With Each Amenity)**

Amenity	1960s & Earlier	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000-2004	2005-2009
Cooking stove	96.1	97.9	98.7	98.6	99.1	98.5
Refrigerator	96.2	97.8	98.5	98.3	99.0	96.4
Kitchen sink	98.4	99.2	99.6	99.4	99.8	99.4
<i>Complete Kitchen (includes all of the above)</i>	<i>94.4</i>	<i>96.1</i>	<i>96.9</i>	<i>97.3</i>	<i>98.3</i>	<i>95.3</i>
Bath tub/Shower	98.3	99.1	99.4	99.3	99.6	99.8
Hot and cold running water	99.0	99.5	99.6	99.6	99.8	99.9
Bathroom sink	99.0	99.4	99.6	99.7	99.8	99.8
Flush toilet	99.0	99.5	99.6	99.7	99.8	99.8
Exclusive use	98.7	98.8	99.3	99.5	99.6	99.8
<i>Complete Plumbing (includes all of the above)</i>	<i>96.8</i>	<i>97.8</i>	<i>98.7</i>	<i>98.9</i>	<i>99.1</i>	<i>99.6</i>
Dishwasher	45.9	63.6	76.8	82.3	89.7	93.0
Washing machine	73.5	70.4	80.8	89.6	91.7	89.1
Clothes dryer	70.2	68.7	79.5	88.5	91.0	88.4

**Table 3: Amenities (Percent of Homes With Each Amenity)**

Amenity	1960s & Earlier	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000-2004	2005-2009
Garbage disposal	32.6	52.2	63.0	63.1	72.5	74.4
Fireplace	24.5	30.9	40.7	45.5	45.1	44.7
Trash compactor	2.0	3.8	4.6	4.7	5.0	6.6

**Neighborhood Amenities**

While homes built in the 2000s are likelier to have more amenities in the home, they are less likely to have many of the amenities in the neighborhood compared to homes built in earlier decades. Most households continue to report grocery or similar stores within a mile of their homes (about 95 percent), but fewer households report being close to public transportation (65% of those living in homes built before the 1960s compared to just half of those living in homes built in the 1980s to one-third of residents of homes built between 2005 and 2009). The decline in access to public transportation might be attributed to where the homes are located. More

than half the homes built after the 1960s (56%) are located in the suburbs compared to 42% of those built in the 1960s and earlier, and homes in suburbs generally are less likely to have access to amenities such as public transportation (see Table 4).

Additionally, as Table 4 shows, fewer homes built in recent years are on a golf course, have daycare centers or shuttle buses, though a similar share since the 1980s are close to a beach, park or shoreline, and residents of homes built in the 2000s are more likely to live near walking or jogging trails and have community centers or clubhouses.

**Table 4: Neighborhood Characteristics (Percent of All Occupied Homes With Each Neighborhood Characteristic)**

Neighborhood Characteristic	1960s & Earlier	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000-2004	2005-2009
Grocery or similar stores within one mile	95.8	95.8	95.3	95.0	94.8	95.5
Public transportation	65.2	53.7	50.2	38.1	35.1	32.5
Beach, park or shoreline	22.2	17.4	16.0	16.6	17.5	16.0
Community Center/Clubhouse	17.6	23.8	26.6	23.4	27.1	27.2
Walking/Jogging trails	19.0	18.1	18.4	20.3	22.5	21.9
Daycare centers	19.4	12.8	9.9	9.1	8.2	6.9
Golf course	17.6	14.9	12.3	14.0	13.9	8.4
Shuttle bus	10.9	8.9	8.0	6.3	6.1	4.1

**Safety Features in the Home**

Homes built in the 2000s have more safety features than are present today in homes that were built earlier. The presence of safety features (smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and carbon monoxide detectors), as shown in Table 5, reached an all-time high among homes built between 2000 and 2004 and declined somewhat for homes built between 2005 and 2009. The presence of sprinkler systems has, however, been steadily increasing and is most prevalent among homes built between 2005 and 2009

(18% compared to 13% in homes built between 2000 and 2004 and less than 10% among homes built earlier). It should be noted that residents of the homes report the presence of these safety features; and in the case of older homes, some of these features may have been more recent installations and did not come with the home when it was originally built.

**Table 5: Safety Features (Percent of All Homes With Each Safety Feature)**

Safety Features	1960s & Earlier	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000-2004	2005-2009
Smoke detector	86.0	89.1	91.5	93.5	95.2	93.8
Fire extinguisher	37.2	37.5	39.2	41.2	41.8	38.1
Carbon monoxide detector	37.4	28.6	26.2	31.8	36.0	35.1
Sprinkler system	1.9	2.8	5.5	7.9	12.8	17.7

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the 2009 American Housing Survey shows that homes being built today are bigger than those built in earlier decades. In addition, homes built today have almost more of everything – different types of rooms such as more bedrooms and bathrooms, more amenities such as washers and dryers, garbage disposals and fireplaces, and more safety features such as smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and sprinkler systems. But homes built in the 2000s are less likely to have neighborhood amenities such as proximity to public transportation and access to community amenities such as daycare and shuttle buses, though they are more likely to be near walking or jogging trails and have access to a community center or clubhouse.

**Data Source and Methodology**

All data presented in this fact sheet were collected as a part of the American Housing Survey, which is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The survey data were collected between May and August of 2009. More than 60,000 households were interviewed, either in-person or by telephone, for this survey for a response rate of 89%. Further details on the methodology of the survey and the survey questionnaire are available at: <http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/ahs.html>.