

PARADE OF HOMES

What's In A House:
Foundation, Basement

By Central Mortgage
and Housing Corporation
(first of a
four-part series)

Many people don't know exactly what goes into the building of a house. They know there is a roof, and a basement and walls, but they don't know how or why they are built as they are.

This first in a series of articles is intended to give you, the home buyer, an insight into the basics of house construction. Whether you are having a home built to your specifications or are buying one ready made, you should know something about the construction methods.

The first phase of construction is the excavation work. Foundation work is started soon after.

The first parts of the foundation are the footings, the wider sections at the base of the foundation wall. They are designed to support the weight of the house. The size of the footings is determined by the weight of the finished house and the prevailing soil conditions. For example, a house built on a rock base could have narrower footings than one built on soft ground.

Once the footings are in place, the foundation walls are erected usually using concrete blocks or concrete placed into forms. Next, to keep water from seeping into the basement the foundation walls are damp-proofed.

A tar-like liquid is spread on the outside surface of the foundation from the footings to ground level. To carry excess ground water away from the foundation, drain tiles are laid next to the footings at the bottom of the excavation hole. These "weeping tiles" carry excess ground water to the sewer system.

It is also important that the elevation of the house is such that surface water will drain away from the structure.

When all these steps are completed, material from the excavation is replaced against the foundation walls in a process called back-filling. However, back-filling should not be done until the floor joists are installed over the basement. This

floor structure braces the foundation walls against the inward pressure of the fill.

Backfilling must be done with care since a haphazard job could damage the damp-proofing of the walls, or misalign the weeping tiles. The soil used for the backfilling should be free of debris and should be compacted in layers. Frozen soil should never be used because the ground will settle too much when it thaws.

Most people like the added space a basement provides and for this reason most houses are built on this way. The floor is the last part of a basement to be constructed. It is laid once the roof is in place so the concrete can cure, protected from the elements. Sewer and water lines linking the house to the mains servicing the neighborhood are put in prior to the laying of the basement floor.

Not all houses have basements though. Some houses are built on a concrete slab or over a crawl space.

Houses built on a slab have all services for the plumbing, such as sewer and water pipes, electrical and heating systems, built directly into the slab. Before the concrete for the slab is poured, several inches of gravel is spread over the entire area to be covered by concrete. Electrical conduits, plumbing pipes and heating ducts are then set in place.

This work is inspected and, if the work is satisfactory, the concrete is poured. The ends of pipes and conduits will be sticking out of the concrete for the final service connections to the house. Slab foundations are protected from moisture by tough plastic material laid on the ground just before the concrete is poured.

A house over a crawl space has a foundation constructed in a similar way to a house with a basement but, there are three basic differences. Access to a crawl space is generally through a hatch in the floor, the crawl space is well ventilated and the floor is provided with a ground cover.

When the foundations are completed and have acquired enough strength to support major loads, the framing of the house begins. Next in this series, we will discuss the construction of the upper floors.

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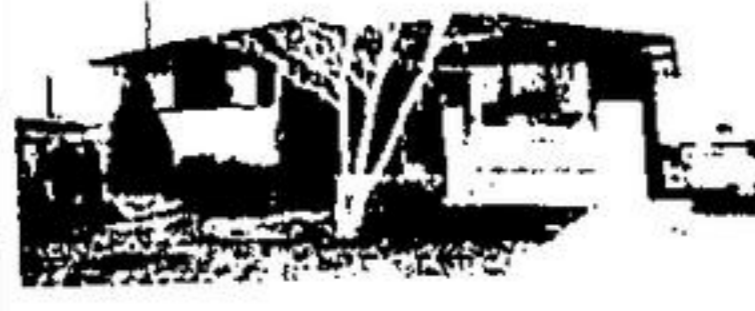
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