



What's a House Made Of?

Someday, when historians look back at us and try to summarize the Eighties with a catchy phrase or two, it won't surprise us if they label it the Decade of Statistics. You want 'em, we got 'em—just name your category. We even came across one study that concluded that the average person entering a room takes three or four steps before touching an object—and that this all takes place in less than two seconds. (The study was for a company selling static-free carpeting.)

...Ah, but at long last, here are some statistics we can really sink our teeth into. Researchers at the National Association of Home Builders, who always are unearthing new morsels of knowledge for our nourishment, figured out how many pieces of this and that go into a typical 1,700-square-foot house.

Then the U.S. Department of Commerce estimated the price tag—roughly \$19,000, say the feds. You'll notice that the number-crunchers overlooked a few items (duct tape, for instance, not to mention flooring and carpeting, interior trim and shelving, lighting fixtures, bathroom vanities, medicine cabinets, and other niceties?)

A glance at the prices suggests that the feds buy top-flight refrigerators, but bargain-basement doors and windows. Anyway, here's what they found:

9,726 board feet of lumber: \$3,500	750 feet of copper wiring, 100 copper fittings, and 280 linear feet of copper pipe for the water line: \$75
4,614 square feet of sheathing (including roof, wall, and floor sheathing) plus 243 square feet of plywood: \$1,820	170 feet of plastic pipe and 70 plastic fittings drain, waste and vent piping: \$85
55 cubic yards of concrete, (3/4 poured; the rest concrete block): \$2,750	12 windows: \$800
2,528 square feet of exterior finish (either aluminum siding, brick or wood): \$1,500	10 interior doors: \$300
1,192 square feet of asphalt shingles for roofing: \$440	4 exterior doors and 1 sliding glass door: \$700
2,500 square feet of insulation: \$365	2 bathtubs (or 1 tub and a shower stall): \$300
6,484 square feet of drywall: \$1,425"	2 toilets: \$120
90 linear feet of ducting: \$395	3 sinks: \$90
55 gallons of paint: \$460	15 kitchen cabinets: \$1,500
302 pounds of nails: \$150	1 range and one range hood: \$650
	1 refrigerator: \$1,000
	1 dishwasher: \$350
	1 disposal: \$125
	smoke detectors are extra at \$12 each.

To bring us closer to reality, we contacted the R.S. Means Co. of Kingston, Mass. Nationwide, the average cost per square-foot for single-family housing, said a Means spokesman, ranges from \$58 for "good" construction to \$65 for the "best." This figure covers design (about \$500), overhead and profit, and all hard costs except landscaping. Labor and materials split the total bill roughly 50/50 for a typical home, says Means. On custom work, the materials side of the ledger would be higher—say, 55 percent. (Cost figures are quoted from the 1986 edition of *Means Square Foot Costs*.)

At these prices, the materials shopping list for a new 1,700-square-foot home rings up at \$49,000 to \$55,000. Clearly, we're better off shopping for building supplies in our nation's capital. ■

