

Terms and Definitions

Note: This glossary contains nearly 800 construction definitions.

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Abrasives

Substances rubbed on wood to smooth the surface. Flint, garnet, aluminum oxide, and silicon carbide are common abrasives.

ABS pipe

A type of plastic pipe frequently used in plumbing. The letters "ABS" are an abbreviation for Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene. The plastic is black and is most frequently used in the form of schedule 40 pipe.

Access panel

A cover for a portal necessary to reach plumbing or other systems behind a wall.

Acre

A unit of measurement equal to 43,560 square feet.

Actual dimension

Size of boards or lumber, distinguished from "nominal dimensions". Term 2x4 is a nominal dimension.

Adapter

A fitting that joins pipes and other plumbing components not designed to connect directly.

Adhesive

A material capable of holding other materials together by surface attachment. Glues, cements, pastes, and mucilage are some common adhesives.

Adjustable rate mortgage (ARM)

A mortgage loan in which the interest rate is tied to a certain monetary index, and changes upward or downward to follow the index.

Aerator

A device screwed into a faucet spout that mixes air with the flow of water to reduce splashing.

Agent

A person (such as a real estate agent) authorized by a principal to transact or manage some business on his or her behalf.

Aggregate

Hard materials such as sand and crushed stone used to make concrete.

Air duct

A formed conduit that carries warm or cold air to rooms from the furnace or air-conditioner and back again.

Air-dried lumber

Lumber that has been dried by being stored in yards or sheds for any length of time.

Air-entrained

Concrete suffused with tiny air bubbles, making it more workable and better able to withstand frost.

Airway

A space between roof insulation and roof sheathing for movement of air.

Alligatoring

Coarse checking pattern characterized by a slipping of the new paint coating over the old coating to the extent that the old coating can be seen through the fissures.

Alternating current (AC)

Electrical current which reverses direction regularly (60 hertz, or cycles per second, in the US). As opposed to DC or direct current which does not reverse direction.

Amortized loan

A mortgage loan that is paid in periodic installments that include interest and part of the principal so that the principal will be paid in full at the end of the term of the loan.

Ampere

Also referred to as amp, the rate of flow of electricity through electric wires.

Anchor bolt

A bolt placed in the surface of concrete for attaching wood framing members.

Angle iron

L-shaped steel support used to support masonry over an opening.

Annual interest rate

The interest rate on a mortgage loan based on the nominal amount of the loan without deducting the points and finance charges.

Appraisal

An estimate of the market value of a property.

Appraiser

A professional trained to appraise properties.

Apron

The flat part of the inside trim of a window. It is placed against the wall directly beneath the window sill. Also, concrete slab at the approach to a driveway or garage door.

Apron

Concrete slab at the approach to a garage door- Also the wood trim below a window stool.

Arbitration

A procedure to settle differences or disputes between two parties through an impartial third party.

Arbor

A shaft or spindle on which a tool is mounted.

Asphalt

A brown to black bituminous substance. Most native asphalt is a residue from evaporated petroleum. Asphalt is used widely in building for such items as waterproofing roof coverings of many types, exterior wall coverings, and flooring tile.

Assessed value

A value placed on a property by a public officer or a board as a basis for taxation.

Assessment

A charge against real property made by a branch of government to cover the proportionate cost of an improvement such as street or sewer.

Assignee

A person to whom a right or property is transferred.

Astragal

A molding, attached to one of a pair of swinging doors, against which the other door strikes. French doors use this as the stop.

Attic

The accessible space located between the top of the ceiling and the underside of the sloped roof.

Attic ventilators

Openings in the roof or in gables for the purpose of allowing air to circulate.

Attorney-in-fact

A person who is given written authority by another person to sign documents on his or her behalf.

Awning

Shading device mounted above a window.

Awning window

A window that is hinged near the top so the bottom opens outward.

Backfill

The replacement of earth into a trench or pier excavation around and against a basement foundation.

Backhoe

An excavating machine with a bucket at one end and a hoe at the other end.

Backsplash

The raised lip on the back edge of a countertop to prevent water from running down the backs of the cabinets.

Ballast

Required in all fluorescent fixtures, it is an electrical component that limits the flow of electricity into a bulb.

Balloon framing

A system of framing a building in which all vertical structural elements of the bearing walls and partitions consist of single pieces. These pieces extend from the top of the foundation sill plate to the roofplate, and all floor joists are fastened to them.

Balusters

Usually small vertical members in a railing used between a top rail and the stair treads or a bottom rail.

Balustrade

A railing made up of balusters, top rail, and sometimes bottom rail, used on the edge of stairs, balconies, and porches.

Barge rafter

Outside roof rafter, usually on the overhang of a gable. This ends up being the fascia board for the gable.

Base shoe or shoe molding

A strip of wood next to the floor on interior baseboard. Similar to quarter round only 5/8" x 3/4" in size.

Base, baseboard

A board placed along the bottom of a wall next to the floor.

Batt insulation

Flexible, blanket like pieces, usually fiberglass used for thermal or sound insulation. As opposed to loose fill insulation which is blown in place.

Batten

Narrow strip of wood used to cover joints between boards of sheet material.

Batter boards

A pair of horizontal boards nailed to posts set at the corners of an excavation. They indicate the proper level and serve as a fastening place for stretched cord to show the outlines of foundation walls.

Bay window

Any window space projecting outward from the walls of a building. The bay must be square or polygonal in plan.

Beam

Any major horizontal structural member.

Beam pocket

A recessed area to hold the end of a beam in a concrete or masonry wall.

Bearing partition/wall

A partition that supports any vertical load in addition to its own weight.

Bed molding

A molding in an angle, as between the overhanging cornice, or eaves, of a building and the sidewalls.

Bedding sand

Coarse sand, like that added to concrete mixes, used to make the bed for setting pavers or bricks.

Belt course

A horizontal board carried at the same level across or around a building. It is usually made of a flat member and a molding.

Bench mark

A mark on a permanent object indicating a verified elevation, used by surveyors as a reference point.

Berm

A low, artificially made mound of earth which adds height and depth to a flat landscape; often used in rock gardens, landscaped with rocks and plants.

Bevel

An angular surface across an edge of a piece of stock.

Bevel siding (lap siding)

A type of finish siding used on the exterior of a house. It is usually manufactured by resawing a dry, squared, surfaced board diagonally to produce two wedge-shaped pieces.

Beveled cut

An angled cut.

Biscuit

Wooden wafer placed in a slot that bridges and strengthens the joining of two pieces of wood..

Bleaching

A method of lightening the color of wood by applying chemicals.

Bleeding

Seeping of a stain or lower coat through the top coat, spoiling the appearance of the top coat.

Blend

Mixture, as of two pigments, to obtain a desired color.

Blind nailing

Nails driven so nailheads are not visible. Nails driven at an angle through the tongue of hardwood flooring, so the groove of the adjoining board conceals the nailhead.

Blind stop

A rectangular molding, usually 3/4 by 1 3/8 inches or more in width, used in the assembly of a window frame. Serves as a stop for storm and screen or combination windows and to resist air infiltration.

Blisters

Cloudy or milky-looking raised spots on finished surfaces.

Block plane

A small hand tool used to shave off or smooth lumber.

Board

Lumber less than 2" thick and 1" or more wide.

Board foot

A unit of lumber equal to a board 12"x12"x1 inch thick.

Boiled linseed oil

Linseed oil to which enough lead, manganese, or cobalt salts have been added to make the oil harden more rapidly when spread in thin coatings.

Boston ridge

Applying asphalt or wood shingles at the ridge or at the hips of a roof as a finish.

Bottom chord

The bottom horizontal member in a truss.

Bottom or sole plate

The bottom framing member of a wall, usually either 2 x 4 or 2 x 6. The plate is nailed to the bottom of the studs and to the floor joist or sheathing below it.

Bow

The distortion in a board that is no longer flat lengthwise, but has remained flat across its faces.

Box sill

The header joist nailed across the ends of floor joists at the sill.

Bracket

A brace extending from a wall to support a weight, such as a shelf.

Brad

A fine finishing nail with a small head.

Breezeway

A covered and sometimes enclosed walkway from one point to another. Commonly used to connect a garage to a house.

Brick mold

Standard wood molding used as outside casing around doors and windows.

Brick veneer

A facing of brick laid against and fastened to the sheathing of a frame wall.

Bridging

Small wood or metal members inserted in a diagonal position between the floor joists. They brace the joists and spread the loads.

British thermal unit (Btu)

The amount of heat required to raise the temperature of one pound of water one degree Fahrenheit.

Broom finish

A slip-resistant texture created by running a stiff broom across fresh concrete.

Buck

Assembly of the framing that constitutes a rough door or window opening.

Builder-grade

A trade term meaning a product of average quality normally found in production-built housing.

Building codes

Municipal rules regulating safe building practices and procedures. The codes generally encompass structural, electrical, plumbing, and mechanical remodeling and new construction. Inspection may be required to confirm adherence to local codes.

Building restriction lines

The outside edge of the area on a property that can be built on.

Built-up roof

A roofing composed of three to five layers of asphalt felt laminated with coal tar, pitch, or asphalt. The top is finished with crushed slag or gravel. Generally used on flat or low-pitch roofs.

Bull float

A large, long handled float used for reaching into the center and smoothing a large slab of concrete.

Bulldozer

An excavating machine on tracks (crawler), with a steel blade that can be raised or lowered attached to its front. It is used to move earth from place to place and to shape the grade.

Burl

(1) A hard, woody outgrowth on a tree, more or less rounded in form, usually resulting from the entwined growth of a cluster of buds. Burls are the source of highly figured veneers used for ornamental purposes. (2) A localized distortion of the grain, found both in lumber and in veneer. Generally rounded in outline, it is usually the result of an overgrowth of dead branch stubs. Diameter may vary from 1/2" to several inches. A burl often includes one or more clusters, each usually having a core or pith but little end grain surrounding it.

Butt hinges

Standard hinges.

Butt joint

A square-cut joint where the ends of two pieces meet.

Butter

Applying mortar to stones or bricks.

Cabinet

A shop or job-built unit for kitchens or other rooms. Often includes combinations of drawers, doors, and the like.

Cantilever

To overhang such as a projecting beam supported at only one end.

Cap

The upper member of a column, pilaster, door cornice, molding, and the like.

Carpenter's glue

Yellow and white adhesives formulated specifically for woodworking.

Carriage

The supporting members for stair treads. Usually a 2" plank notched to receive the treads; sometimes termed a stringer.

Casement window

A window that is hinged at one side so the opposite side opens outward.

Casing

The trim around a door or window. A Cased opening is an open doorway with trim around it. A cased window is a window with trim around it.

Catch basin

In a man-made stream or watercourse, a small depression or basin designed to hold water.

Caulking

A waterproof, adhesive filler material that remains flexible so it will not pop or flake out of seams and cracks.

CDX plywood

An inexpensive, exterior-grade plywood. C grade on one side, D grade on the other, exterior glue used.

Ceiling joist

Structural members providing support for a second story floor and a nailing surface for a lower story's ceiling.

Cellulose

(1) The principal substance in the framework or walls of wood cells. (2) An organic substance obtained from the cotton plant and used as raw material in the manufacture of paints and other materials.

Cement

Usually refers to portland cement. A fine gray powder that produces a bonding paste when mixed with water. (Cement Siding...See Siding)

Centerline

An actual or imaginary line through the exact center of any object.

Certificate of occupancy

A certificate issued by the building department stating that the house has been built in accordance with the local building code and zoning ordinance, and may be occupied.

Chair rail

A horizontal strip of molding mounted at the proper height and protruding enough to prevent the top of a chair back from touching a wall surface. (See also Wainscoting.)

Chalk line

An instrument with colored chalk and string used to mark a straight line between two points.

Chamfer

A beveled surface cut on the corner of a piece of wood.

Chamfered edge

Molding with pared-off corners.

Change order

A term applied to a written agreement allowing a change from previously agreed-to plans.

Chase

An opening made in a wall or through a floor to accommodate pipes or ducts.

Circuit

The electrical path that connects one or more outlets and/or lighting fixtures to a single circuit breaker or fuse on the control panel.

Circuit breaker

A protective device that opens a circuit, cutting off the power automatically when an overcurrent or short-circuit occurs.

Clamp

A device that holds things together; often used to hold pieces together while the glue dries.

Clapboard

A type of siding. It consists of narrow boards which are usually thicker at one edge than the other.

Cleanout

A plug in a trap or drainpipe that provides access to blockages inside.

Clearance

The amount of space needed for the proper and/or safe use of various installations- for opening appliance and cabinet doors and drawers, for example.

Cleat

A strip of material, such as wood, fastened to another piece to strengthen it or to furnish a grip.

Clinch

To bend the point of a nail after it has passed through both pieces that it is to fasten, thereby locking it together.

Close-grained wood

Woods with narrow, inconspicuous annual rings. The term is sometimes used for wood having small and closely spaced pores.

Closet bend

An elbow-shape fitting beneath a toilet that carries the waste to the main drain.

Closing costs

Expenses incurred to settle a loan transaction. They can include: legal fees, appraisal fees, survey fees, insurance, and other related expenses.

Coarse-grained wood

Wood with wide, conspicuous annual rings, indicating considerable difference between springwood and summerwood. The term is sometimes used for wood with large pores such as oak, ash, chestnut, and walnut.

Cobblestones

Naturally rounded stones with dimensions between two and 12 inches; used in paths, terraces, xeriscapes, and water features.

Code enforcement officer

An authorized representative of the building code enforcement office. The individual responsible for the approval or denial of code inspections and the party responsible for issuing a certificate of occupancy.

Collar tie

A horizontal piece of lumber that connects rafters opposite each other and prevents them from spreading apart.

Column

A vertical support (often square, rectangular, or cylindrical), as for roofs or ceilings.

Combination doors or windows

Doors or windows with self-storing or removable glass and screen inserts. The need for handling a different unit each season is thus eliminated.

Common nail

Large-diameter nail for rough framing.

Common rafter

A rafter extending from the top of the wall to the ridge.

Compression fitting

A type of fitting used to make a plumbing connection. Typically utilizes a brass body and nut with a ferrule to compress over the pipe, preventing water or air from leaking.

Compressor

The part of an air conditioning or heat pump unit that compresses the refrigerant gas so that it can absorb heat.

Concrete

A combination of cement and sand, broken stone, or gravel. It is used for foundations, building construction, walks, and many other purposes.

Concrete apron

The section of concrete where a garage floor joins the driveway. Aprons allow for a smooth transition from a lower driveway to an elevated garage floor.

Concrete pavers

Preformed concrete units commonly used for driveways, patios, and sidewalks. Pavers are designed to be laid in a sand base. They come in many shapes and colors and may interlock in repeating patterns.

Condensation

In a building, beads or drops of water that accumulate on the inside of the exterior covering of the building. Condensation occurs when warm, moisture-laden air from the interior reaches a point where the temperature no longer permits the air to sustain the moisture it holds.

Conduit

Metal or plastic tubing designed to enclose electrical wires.

Conifer

A cone-bearing tree.

Contact cement

Rubber-based glue which adheres on contact.

Contour lines

Lines on a topographic map or site plan to describe the contour of the land.

Control joints

Grooves that are tooled or cut into the surface of wet concrete to make it crack in straight lines at planned locations, rather than cracking randomly.

Coped cut

A profile cut on a piece of molding that allows it to be butted tightly against the face of another piece in an inside corner.

Coping

The final horizontal layer of stones that cap and waterproof a stone wall; usually wide and shallow, coping stones are often mortared into place.

Corbel out

To build out one or more courses of brick or stone from the face of a wall in order to form a support for timbers.

Core

In plywood, the center of the panel. It may be either veneer or lumber.

Corner bead

A light-weight metal angle used to shape and reinforce outside corners in drywall, or sheetrock, construction.

Corner block

A large triangular piece of wood or metal used for added strength at the corners of frames or where legs and rails join.

Corner boards

Boards used as trim for the external corners of a house or other frame structure and against which the ends of the siding are finished.

Corner braces

Diagonal braces at the corners of a frame structure to stiffen and strengthen the wall.

Cornice

(1) Overhang of a pitched roof at the eave line, usually consisting of a fascia board, a soffit for a closed cornice, and appropriate moldings. (2) A decorative member, usually molded, placed at or near the top of a wall.

Cornice return

That portion of the cornice that returns on the gable end of a house.

Counterboring

Enlarging a hole so that the head of a screw or bolt inserted can be completely covered.

Counterflashing

A flashing usually used on chimneys at the roofline to cover shingle flashing and to prevent moisture entry.

Countersinking

To sink a nail or screw even with or below the surface.

Coupling

A fitting that connects two lengths of pipe in a straight run.

Course

A single row of building units such as concrete blocks bricks or shingles.

Cove lighting

Concealed light sources, placed behind cornice or other horizontal recess, that direct the light on a reflecting ceiling.

Cove mold

Concave molding used to trim an inside corner.

Crawl space

A shallow, unfinished space beneath the first floor of a house that has no basement. Used for visual inspection and access to pipes and ducts.

Cricket

A small drainage-diverting roof structure of single or double slope placed at the junction of larger surfaces that meet at an angle, such as above a chimney. Also called a saddle.

Cripple stud

A short framing stud that is cut off to make an opening for a door or window.

Cripple Stud

Short stud over a window or door between the top of the header and the bottom of the top plate. Also, the short stud between the top of the bottom plate and the underside of a window frame.

Cross-bridging

Diagonal bracing between adjacent floor joists, placed near the center of the joist span to prevent joists from twisting.

Crushed rock

Stones approximately 1/4 inch to two inches in size which have been mechanically crushed.

Cup

Distortion or warping of a board so that it is no longer flat across its width.

Curb appeal

A term used in real estate sales referring to the exterior appearance of a property.

Curing

The process of aging a new concrete slab with proper moisture to reduce cracking and shrinkage and to develop strength.

Cut-in-brace

Bracing cut into each stud at an angle to provide lateral support.

Dado

A rectangular groove across the grain in a board.

Dado joint

A joint in which one piece is grooved to receive the piece which forms the other part of the joint.

Damper

Valve designed to control the flow of air or smoke.

Dampproofing

Vapor barrier or coating on foundation walls or under concrete slabs to prevent moisture from entering the house.

Darby

A tool with a long sole made of smooth wood or metal, used for smoothing the surface of a concrete slab after initial leveling.

Datum

A reference point from which elevations are measured.

Dead load

The weight of the walls, permanent partitions, framing, roofs, and all other permanent stationary construction in a building, not counting the occupants and furnishings and movement.

Decay

Disintegration of wood or other substance through the action of fungi or bacteria.

Decibel (db)

Logarithmic measure of sound intensity. An increase of 6 db is the same as doubling the sound pressure.

Deciduous

Trees which annually lose their leaves.

Deck paint

An enamel with a high degree of resistance to mechanical wear; designed for use on such surfaces as porch floors.

Decking

The term decking can apply to the material used to build an exterior deck or the material used to build interior flooring systems.

Defect

Any imperfection occurring in or on wood that may lower its quality.

Delamination

The separation of layers of plies through the failure of adhesive bond.

Detail

A drawing showing special information about a particular part of the construction- Details are usually drawn to a larger scale than the other views and are sometimes section views.

Dewpoint

Temperature at which a vapor begins to condense. Applies especially to moisture in the air.

Dimension lumber

Lumber at least 2" but less than 5" thick, and 2" or more wide. Includes joists, rafters, studding, planks, and small timbers. (see also Dimension stock.)

Dimension stock

Today it is commonly known as hardwood dimension lumber.

Direct current (DC)

Electrical current that flows in a single direction.

Doorjamb

The surrounding case into which and out of which a door closes and opens. It consists of two upright pieces, called side jambs, and a horizontal head jamb. Exterior doorjamb also have thresholds.

Dormer

A projection in a sloping roof, the framing of which forms a vertical wall suitable for windows or other openings.

Double glazing

An insulating windowpane formed of two thickness' of glass with a sealed air space between them.

Double-hung windows

A window consisting of two sashes that can slide vertically.

Dovetail joint

A joint in which one piece has dovetail-shaped pins or tenons which fit into corresponding openings on the other piece.

Dowel

A small wooden pin used to strengthen a joint.

Downspout

A pipe, usually metal, for carrying rainwater from roof gutters.

Dressed size

The dimension of lumber after being surfaced. A 2" x 4" stud actually measures 1 1/2" x 3 1/2" .

Drier

A solution added to drying oils in paint to quicken the drying.

Drip

(1) A member of a cornice or other horizontal exterior-finish course that has a projection beyond the other parts for throwing off water. (2) A groove in the underside of a sill or drip cap to cause water to drop off on the outer edge instead of drawing back and running down the face of the building.

Drip cap

A molding placed above the exterior of a door or window frame, causing water to drip beyond the outside of the frame.

Drip edge

Metal trim installed at the edge of a roof to stop water from running back under the edge of the roof deck.

Dry rot

A term loosely applied to any crumbly decay of wood, but especially to that which, when in an advanced stage, allows the wood to be crushed easily to a dry powder. The term does not accurately describe decay. Since fungi which cause the rot require considerable moisture for growth.

Dry stack wall

A stone wall constructed without mortar, which depends on gravity and the fit between the stones for its stability.

Drying oil

Drying oils are used in the manufacture of paints and varnishes. Linseed oil is a common drying oil.

Drywall

Also known as wallboard, gypsum board, plasterboard, and by the trade name Sheetrock, a wall-surfacing material composed of sheets of gypsum plaster sandwiched between a low-grade backing paper and a smooth-finish front surface paper that can be painted.

Dry-wall returns

A type of construction in which the windows have drywall installed from the interior wall surface to the window unit. Another method of trimming windows is to have wood returns from the window to the wall surface. With wood returns you need window casing to frame the inside of the window. With drywall returns you have a cornerbead drywall corner and no window casing.

Drywall mud

Joint compound; the substance used to hide seams and nail or screw heads in the finished walls of a home.

Ducts

Pipes which carry air from a furnace or an air conditioner to the rooms of a building. Usually they are round or rectangular and made of metal, although they may be made of asbestos and composition materials.

Earnest money

A cash deposit paid by the prospective buyer of real property as evidence of his good-faith intention to complete the sale.

Easement

A right or privilege that one party has in the property of another that entitles the holder to a specific limited use of the property.

Eaves

The overhang of a roof projecting over the walls.

Edging

The rounded edges of a concrete slab that are resistant to cracking.

Egress window

Window whose clear dimensions are large enough that it can serve as a fire exit.

Elbow

Also known as an ell, this fitting is used to change the direction of a water supply line.

Elbow

Right-angle bend in stovepipe.

Elevation

A drawing that shows vertical dimensions- it may also be the height of a point, usually in feet above sea level.

Eminent domain

The right of the federal and state governments or public service organizations to acquire all or part of a privately owned property for public use.

Enamel

A kind of paint in which the vehicle is a drying oil or combination of drying oil and resin. The paint dries to an even, hard finish.

Equity

The appraised market value of a property less all debts owed against it.

Excavate

To remove earth from a basement site or utility trench, by means of a bulldozer or backhoe (a backhoe is a tractor with a scoop bucket attached).

Expansion joint

A bituminous fiber strip used to separate blocks or units of concrete to prevent cracking due to expansion caused by temperature changes.

Exposed aggregate

A decorative treatment that exposes a layer of stones embedded in the surface of concrete.

Extension jamb

Addition to a door or window jamb to bring the jamb up to full wall thickness. Also known as jamb extender.

Exterior plywood

Plywood in which the plies are bonded together using exterior or waterproof glue.

Face-nailing

To nail perpendicular to the surface or to the junction of the pieces joined. Also termed direct nailing.

Fall

The slope of a drain line, ensuring proper flow. Minimum fall is 1/4 inch per foot.

False ceiling

A drop or suspended ceiling, hung on metal or wood grids, to permit covering exposed ducts, pipes, or beams.

Fascia

The part of a cornice that covers the ends of the rafters, where a gutter would be attached. Interior use is the vertical face of a cornice, etc.

Fascia board

A board nailed to the ends of the rafters, below the roof edge.

Faucet - 4 inch

Also known as a close coupled faucet. These faucets are produced as an integral, one-piece unit. (The handles and the spout are molded from the same material, producing a faucet with all working parts molded together.)

Filler, wood

A heavily pigmented preparation used for filling and leveling off the pores in open-grained woods.

Fill-type insulation

Loose insulating material that is applied by hand or mechanically blown into wall spaces.

Finish screws

A small headed screw, usually square drive. The screw head is designed to be countersunk.

Finish grade

Final ground level around a building.

Fire blocks (fire stops)

Short horizontal members nailed between the studs to prevent the spread of fire and smoke from one level to another.

Fire bricks

Heat resistant bricks used for lining fireplaces.

Fire-retardant chemical

A chemical preparation used to reduce flammability or to retard the spread of flame.

Firestop

Blocking or noncombustible material between wall studs to prevent vertical draft and flamespread. Same as Fire Blocking.

Fish tape

Flexible metal strip used to draw wires and cable through walls, raceways, and conduit.

Fitting

Any pipe connector other than a valve.

Fixture

Any device that provides a flow of water or sanitary disposal of wastes. Examples include tubs, showers, sinks, and toilets.

Flagstone

Any kind of stone which splits into shallow slabs suitable for paving.

Flashed

A trade term applying to the attachment of articles to houses or roofs and the penetration of roofs by pipes. When these conditions exist, they are flashed to seal the area from water infiltration. Plumbing pipes exiting through a roof are flashed with neoprene or some other material to prevent leaks around the pipes. Where decks or bay windows are attached to a house, they are flashed with lightweight metal to prevent water damage behind the point of attachment.

Flashing

Material used to prevent seepage of water around any intersection or projection in a roof, including vent pipes, chimneys, skylights, dormers, and roof valleys.

Flat paint

An interior paint with a high proportion of pigment, It dries to a flat, or lusterless, finish.

Flatwork Concrete

Any concrete work that is horizontal such as driveway, slabs and walks. Different than concrete walls or other formed concrete.

Flitch

(1) Portion of a log sawed on two or more sides and intended for manufacture into lumber or veneer.
(2) The term is also applied to the sheets of veneer laid together in sequence of cutting.

Flitch plate

Usually a metal plate sandwiched between wood beams with bolts running through all members, to increase the strength of the total product.

Float

To level concrete before it begins to cure- floating is done with a tool called a float.

Floor joists

Framing pieces that rest on outer foundation walls or interior beams or girders, to support the floor.

Floor plan

A drawing showing the arrangement of rooms, the locations of windows and doors, and complete dimensions- A floor plan is actually a horizontal section through the entire building.

Flue

The opening in a chimney through which smoke can pass.

Flue lining

Fireclay or terra-cotta pipe, round or square. It is used for the inner lining of chimneys, with brick or masonry work around the outside.

Flush

Even, or in the same plane (with reference to adjacent surfaces of two materials).

Flush door

A door having flat surfaces.

Fly rafter

End rafter of the gable overhang supported by roof sheathing and lookouts.

Footing

A masonry section, usually concrete, in a rectangular form wider than the bottom of the foundation wall or pier it supports. It can be level, stepped level, or follow the contour of the ground.

Footing drain

An underground drain pipe around the footings to carry ground water away from the building.

Formica

A plastic material available in different colors that is used to veneer plywood or particle wood vanities, kitchen cabinets, and countertops. (A trade name.)

Formwork

The wooden forms that shape wet concrete.

Foundation

The part of a building or wall which supports the superstructure.

Frame

(1) The surrounding or enclosing woodwork, as around windows or doors. (2) The skeleton of a building; that is, the rough structure of a building, including interior and exterior walls, floor, roof, and ceilings.

Frame construction

Construction in which the structural parts are of wood or depend on a wood frame for support.

Framing

The rough structure of a building, including interior and exterior walls, floor, roof, and ceilings.

Framing square

A large L-shaped metal measuring tool used when marking boards for framing.

Frieze board

The highest board directly above the siding and below the soffit.

Frost heave

Movement or upheaval of the ground when there is alternate freezing and thawing of water in the soil. This is one reason concrete slabs crack, making control joints necessary.

Frost line

The lowest depth at which the ground will freeze. It determines the code-required depth for footings.

Fungicide

A chemical that is poisonous to fungi.

Furring

Narrow strips of wood attached to a surface for the purpose of creating a plumb or level surface for attaching the wall, ceiling, or floor surface.

Fuse

A short plug in an electric panel box that opens (breaks) an electrical circuit when it becomes overloaded.

Gable

A vertical, triangular part of a building, contained between the slopes of a double-sloped roof.

Gable end

The triangular wall between the sloping ends of a roof.

Gable studs

The studs placed between the end rafters and the top plates of the end walls.

Galvanized

A zinc coating used to prevent rusting.

Gambrel roof

A two-sloped roof with its lower parts steeper than its upper parts. This type of roof is identified with the Dutch Colonial house style.

Gauge

A standard unit of measurement for the diameter of wire or the thickness of sheet metal.

General contractor

A person who contracts to build a house or building, or a part of it, for another person.

Girder

A beam which supports floor joists.

Glazing

Fitting glass into windows or doors.

Glazing compound

Caulking compound used especially for holding window glass in place because it remains soft underneath the surface.

Gloss

A shiny, lustrous finish which reflects light.

Glue block

A small piece of wood used to strengthen and support two pieces of wood joined at an angle.

Grade

The designation of quality, as of logs or plywood.

Grade

The ground level or elevation. Also the slope of the surface of a lot or a road.

Grain

The direction, size, arrangement, and appearance of wood or veneer fibers.

Granite

A fine to medium-coarse grained igneous stone; dense and water-resistant, it is often used in garden walls, and as stepping stones and specimen rocks.

Gravel

Naturally rounded or mechanically crushed stones ranging in size from 1/4 inch to 1 1/2 inches. Often used in gravel gardens, terraces, and water features.

Green

Freshly sawed lumber, or lumber that has had no intentional drying; unseasoned.

Groove

A long, hollow channel, cut by a tool, into which a piece fits or in which it works. Carpenters have given special names to certain forms of grooves, such as dadoes and housings.

Ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI)

A safety circuit breaker that compares the amount of current entering a receptacle on the hot wire with the amount leaving on the white wire. If there is a discrepancy of 0.005 volt, the GFCI breaks the circuit in a fraction of a second.

Grout

Mortar made of such consistency (by adding water) that it will just flow into the joints and cavities of the masonry work and fill them solid.

Gum

A sticky substance obtained from the sap of certain trees and plants, and used in making varnishes and paints.

Gusset

A triangular or trapezoidal piece of wood or metal fastened to the exterior of a joint to strengthen it. Most commonly used on wood trusses.

Gutter

A shallow channel or conduit of metal or wood set below and along the eaves of a house to catch and carry off rainwater from the roof.

Gypsum plaster

Gypsum made to be used with sand and water for base-coat plaster.

Gypsum wallboard

Drywall materials made of gypsum encased in paper to form boards.

Hard water

Water rich in calcium.

Hardboard (masonite)

A brown sheet of building material made of compressed wood fibers.

Hardware cloth

A woven steel mesh of fine wire.

Hardwood

The close-grained wood from broad-leaved trees such as oak or maple.

Headers

Double wood pieces supporting joists in a floor or double wood members placed on edge over windows and doors to transfer the roof and floor weight above the openings to the studs at the side.

Hearth

The floor of a fireplace, usually made of brick, tile, or stone.

Heartwood

In a tree, the wood extending from the pith to the sapwood, more decay-resistant than sapwood.

Heat pump

An electric unit that cools the house during hot weather by absorbing heat from inside and discharging it to the outside. In cold weather, it absorbs heat from outside and discharges it inside.

Heated Square Feet

The square feet of a building that is climate controlled as opposed to square feet under roof which includes garage and porches.

Heel (of a rafter)

The end, or foot, that rests on the wall plate.

Hip

Outside corner formed by intersecting roofs.

Hip rafter

The rafter extending from the corner of a building to the ridge at a hip.

Hip roof

A roof which slopes up toward the center from all sides, requiring a hip rafter at each corner.

Hose bibb

An outside faucet to which a hose can be attached.

House Wrap

A brand name is "Tyvek" A fabric like material that lets moisture pass through but stops air from passing. It is installed on the outside of houses under the siding or brick to slow air infiltration and therefore make them more energy efficient.

HVAC

Heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning.

I-beam

A steel beam whose section resembles the letter I.

Igneous rock

Rock formed from solidified minerals and gases originally found within the earth's crust.

Inflammable

Easily set on fire.

Inlay

A decoration in which the design is set into the surface.

Insulated foam sheathing

A type of sheathing made from compressed foam and covered by a foil or other substance allowing its use as a wall sheathing with increased insulating value.

Insulated glazing

Two or more pieces of glass in a single sash with air space between them for the purpose of insulation.

Insulation

Any material which resists the transfer of electricity, heat, or sound. For example, thermal insulation is placed in the walls, ceilings, or floors of a home to reduce the rate of heat flow.

Insulation board (fiberboard)

A low-density board made of wood, sugar cane, cornstalks, or similar material. It is dried and usually pressed to a thickness of 1/2" or 25/32".

Isometric

A kind of drawing in which horizontal lines are 30 degrees from true horizontal and vertical lines are vertical.

Jack rafter

Rafter between the outside wall and a hip rafter or the ridge and a valley rafter.

Jack Stud

Shorter stud in window or door framing that supports the header over the opening

Jalousies

Windows with movable, horizontal glass slats angled to admit ventilation and keep out rain; also, outside shutters of wood constructed in this way.

Jamb

Side members of a door or window frame.

Jig

A device that simplifies a hand or machine operation, usually by guiding a tool or serving as a template.

Jigsaw

An electric table or portable saw used to make curved cuts. Sometimes referred to as a sabre saw.

Jigsaw (or saber saw)

Maneuverable power saw with a thin saberlike blade.

Joint

The junction of two pieces, as of wood or veneer.

Joint compound

A pre-mixed gypsum-based material with the consistency of mortar used to fill the seams in gypsum-board construction. Also called gypsum compound.

Jointing

(1) Smoothing and straightening the edge of a board. A jointer is a machine which does this automatically. (2) Grinding or filing the teeth or knives of power tools to the correct height. Circular saws are jointed so that there are no high or low teeth. Knives of planers and jointers are jointed so that each knife makes the same depth of cut as all others.

Jointing sand

Often called Mason's sand.

Joist

One in a series of parallel framing members that supports a floor or ceiling load. Joists are supported by beams or bearing walls.

Joist hanger

Metal device, shaped like a "U", used to connect two joists or a joist and beam at right angles to each other.

Joist support

A horizontal beam that supports the floor joists.

Kerf

The void created by the width of a saw blade as it cuts.

Kiln-dried

Artificially dried lumber, a method that produces lumber superior to the more commonly air-dried product.

Kilowatt

1,000 watts. Abbreviated kW.

Kilowatt-hour

Unit of electrical energy consumed. One thousand watts of power for a 1 hour duration. Abbreviated kWh.

Kneewall

A wall that extends from the floor of an attic to the underside of the rafters. Kneewalls are short (usually 48" high) and often non-bearing.

Knot

A hard, irregular lump formed at the point where a branch grows out from the trunk or a large limb of a tree. A

Knurled

Having a surface covered with small knobs or beads, as a nail which may have such a surface for greater holding power.

Lacquer

A varnish-type solution used for finishing wood, metal, porcelain, and similar materials. Lacquers dry quickly and leave a tough, durable, flexible, light-weight film. They should not be used over oil-base paints because they contain solvents that will cut such paints. There are several types of lacquers. Cellulose lacquers have a base of nitrocellulose or pyroxylin; others have a resin base.

Lag screw or bolt

Heavy-duty screw with a bolt head for attaching structural members to a wall or to material too thick for a machine bolt to go through.

Laminate

To form a product by bonding together two or more layers of materials. Also, the product so formed, such as plastic laminate. Brand name is Formica

Laminated wood

A product made by bonding layers of veneer or lumber with an adhesive so that the grains of all layers are generally parallel.

Landing

A platform between flights of stairs or at the termination of a flight of stairs.

Lap joint

A joint composed of two pieces, one overlapping the other.

Lath

A building material of wood, metal, gypsum, or insulating board that is fastened to the frame of a building to act as a plaster base.

Lattice

A framework of crossed wood or metal strips.

Layout

A full-sized drawing showing arrangement and structural features.

Ledger strip

A strip of lumber nailed along the bottom of the side of a girder on which joists rest.

Let-in brace

Nominal 1" thick boards applied into notched studs diagonally.

Level

- (1) A term describing the position of a line or plane which is parallel to the surface of still water.
(2) An instrument or tool used in testing for horizontal and vertical surfaces and in determining differences in elevation.

Light

In builder's terminology, space in a window sash for a single pane of glass; also, a pane of glass. As in 9 light window pane.

Limestone

A fine to coarse-grained sedimentary rock; often used as ashlar or flagstone because it splits easily, limestone also serves as the preferred rock for constructing rock gardens.

Linear feet

A term used to describe a unit of measure, measuring the distance between two points in a straight line.

Linear measure

Measurement along a line.

Linseed oil

Yellowish drying oil made from flaxseed, widely used as a vehicle for lead-based paints.

Lintel

A horizontal structural member, usually made of stone, wood, or metal, which supports the load over an opening; a header.

Live load

Weight of materials that are not part of the house, as furniture and appliances; also weight (combined) of occupants of house; as opposed to "dead load," the weight of the house itself.

Load-bearing wall

A wall that is used to support the house structure and transfer weight to the foundation.

Lock set

Complete set of hardware including the lock, knobs, screws, and strikeplate.

Louver

Slanted slat of wood, plastic, or metal. Used to admit air but block rain and visibility.

Lumber

The product of the sawmill and planing mill by sawing, planing, cutting to length, and grading. 1" stock is sawed to 1" thickness then finished (planed) to final size of 3/4", 5/4" stock finishes out to 1" thickness, and 2"x stock finishes out to 1 1/2".

Lumen

Measure of total light output. A wax candle gives off about 13 lumens, a 100 watt incandescent bulb about 1,200 lumens.

Mansard roof

A roof style of Italian origin, popularized in France.

Mantel

The shelf above a fireplace. Originally it referred to the beam or lintel which supports the arch above the fireplace opening.

Marble

A fine-grained metamorphic rock that is strong and weather-resistant; more often used in indoor than outdoor paving and walls because of its cost and its slickness when wet.

Market analysis

A study of real estate market conditions used to establish an estimated fair market value for the sale of a home.

Mason

A professional who builds brick, stone, or concrete work.

Masonry

Anything constructed of stone, brick, concrete, hollow tile, concrete blocks, gypsum blocks, or similar materials, or a combination of them.

Masonry cement

Cement which is specially prepared for making mortar.

Mason's line

Twine used to lay out posts, patios, footings, and structures. Preferred because it will not stretch and sag, as regular string does.

Mastic

The thick adhesive used to hold wall and floor tiles in place.

Matte knife

A small, sharp-bladed, pointed knife often used to cut paper and cardboard.

MDF

Medium Density Fiberboard. Used in interior trim pieces. Similar to a lightweight Masonite.

Mechanic's lien

A right given to laborers, material suppliers, contractors, and their subcontractors to secure payment for either work performed or material furnished where the value or condition of the property has been improved and the workers and material suppliers have not been paid.

Medium-density fiberboard MDF

A man-made constructional board formed by bonding wood fibers together with resins. Exterior-grade board is essential if used for outdoor play structures.

Membrane roof

Roofing consisting of a single waterproof sheet.

Metal lath

Sheets of metal slit and drawn out to form openings. Used as a plaster base for walls and ceilings and as reinforcing over other plaster bases.

Metamorphic rock

Igneous, sedimentary, or other metamorphic rocks that have been transformed by heat, pressure, or chemical action into other kinds of stone.

Microlam or Lambeam

Heavy plywood beams usually 1 3/4" x various heights so that when two are sandwiched together they equal the thickness of a 2x4 framed wall.

Mil

One-thousandth of an inch.

Millwork

Generally, all wood materials manufactured in millwork plants and planing mills. Includes such items as inside and outside doors, window and door frames.

Miter

A joint in which the ends of two pieces of wood are cut at equal angles (typically 45°) to form a corner.

Miter box

Box with no top and slits on each side to allow a saw blade to pass through the box and cut wood laid in the box.

Miter joint

A joint formed by fitting together two panels or pieces of wood that have been cut at the same angle.

Mobile home

Complete factory-made home, constructed on a chassis and wheels for instant mobility.

Modular unit

A factory-built, transportable building unit designed to be used by itself or with other, similar units. It is built with standard-size materials.

Modulus of elasticity

A measure of the stiffness of a board.

Moisture barrier

Treated paper or metal that retards or bars moisture from passing into walls or floors.

Molding (moulding)

In building construction, a strip of wood, often decorative, such as that on top of a baseboard or around windows and doors.

Mortar

Cement and aggregate mixture for bonding masonry units together.

Mortise-and-tenon joint

A joint made by cutting a hole or mortise in one piece, and a tenon, or piece to fit the hole, in the other.

Mullion

The vertical bar between the window in a frame which holds 2 or more windows.

Muntin

Small vertical and horizontal strips that separate the individual panes of glass in a window sash.

Nail pops

Caused by shrinkage of framing members after wallboard is installed.

Nail set

A small tool used to hammer nail heads beneath the surface.

Nailer

A piece of wood used in any of several places to provide a nailing surface for other framing members.

Naptha

Naptha is used as a solvent or thinner in varnish and as a fuel. Petroleum naptha is also known as benzine.

Newel

The chief post at the foot of a staircase for the railing to end in. Also, the central support for the railing of a winding flight of stairs.

Nominal dimension

The stated size of lumber, such as 2x4.

Nominal size

The size by which a material is specified- The actual size is often slightly smaller.

Nonbearing wall

A wall supporting no load other than its own weight.

Non-conforming

A house or improvement dissimilar to surrounding properties in age, size, use, or style. An example would be a one-level ranch-style house in a neighborhood of two-story Colonial-style homes.

Nosing

(1) The part of a stair tread which projects over the riser; any similar projection. (2) A term applied to the rounded edge of a board.

Notch

A crosswise rabbet at the end of a board.

O.C. (on center)

The measurement of spacing for studs, rafters, joists, and similar members in a building from the center of one member to the center of the next.

O.G. (ogee)

In building construction, a molding with a profile in the form of a letter S; having the outline of a reversed curve.

Offset

Ledge of recess where there is a change in material or wall thickness.

Oil paint

A paint in which the vehicle is oil.

Oil varnish

A varnish consisting of a hard resin combined with a drying oil and a drier thinned with a volatile solvent. After application, the solvent dries first by evaporation; then the oil dries by oxidation.

Open-grained wood

Common term for woods with large pores such as oak, ash, chestnut, and walnut. Also known as "coarse textured."

OSB

Oriented Strand Board. The newest chipboard that has the long axis of the strands of the wood chips aligned with the long dimension of the materials (such as the 8 foot measurement in a 4x8 sheet of osb) The old chip board was not structural while OSB is structural just like plywood.

Outcrops

Bare rock formations protruding from the surrounding soil.

Outlet plate

A trade term describing the cover placed over an electrical outlet and screwed to the center of the outlet.

Outrigger

An extension of a rafter beyond the wall line. Usually a smaller member nailed to a larger rafter to form a cornice or roof overhand.

Over-building

A term describing the practice of investing money in a home that is unlikely to be recovered, due to surrounding properties. An example would be adding three bedrooms to a home, for a total of six bedrooms, when surrounding homes only have three bedrooms.

Oxidation

The process of combining with oxygen.

Paint

A combination of pigments with suitable thinners or oils to provide decorative and protective coatings.

Panel

(1) A large, thin board or sheet of lumber, plywood, or other material. (2) A thin board with all its edges inserted in a groove of a surrounding frame of thick material. (3) A section of floor, wall, ceiling, or roof, usually prefabricated and of large size, handled as a single unit in the operations of assembly and erection.

Panel door

A door made up of panels held in place by rails and stiles.

Panel siding

Large sheets of plywood or hardboard which may serve as both sheathing and siding.

Paneling

Planks or sheets used as a finish wall or ceiling surface; often with a wood or simulated wood finish.

Parging

A thin coat of portland cement plaster used to smooth masonry walls.

Parquet floor

A floor made of short pieces of hardwood laid in different design patterns.

Particleboard

A structural sheet material composed of compressed wood chips, flakes, or small wood particles such as sawdust, held together with special glues.

Parting stop or strip

A small wood piece used in the side and head jambs of double-hung windows to separate upper and lower sash.

Partition wall

A wall that divides space but plays no part in a building's structural integrity.

Party wall

Common wall that separates two properties

Patio

A recreational area constructed on the ground.

Pavers

Preformed concrete or brick units commonly used for driveways, patios, and sidewalks. Designed to be laid in a sand base. They come in many shapes and colors and may interlock in repeating patterns.

Pea gravel

A fine grade of naturally rounded stones approximately 1/4 inch in diameter; used in gravel gardens and as flooring for children's play areas.

Pedestal sink

A bathroom sink with a china bowl hung on the wall and supported by a china pedestal.

Pennsylvania bluestone

A flagstone used to make attractive, durable paving for terraces and paths.

Penny

As applied to nails, it originally indicated the price per hundred. The term now serves as a measure of nail length and is abbreviated by the letter d.

Pergola

A garden passageway made of stone, brick, or wooden columns that support an overhead trellis on which vines are trained.

Perimeter drain

An underground drain pipe around the footings to carry ground water away from the building.

Permits

Documents issued by the code enforcement office allowing work to be legally performed.

Phillips head screwdriver

Shaped in the form of a cross with a point

Pier

A masonry column.

Pigment

A substance which gives color, as in paint, enamel, dye, or lacquer.

Pilaster

A masonry or concrete pier built as an integral part of a wall.

Piles

Long posts driven into the soil in swampy locations or wherever it is difficult to secure a firm foundation.

Pilot hole

A small hole used as the guide for a drill point when making a larger hole.

Pitch

The incline of a roof. It is the ratio of the total rise to the total width of a house. For example, an 8' rise and a 24' width make a 1/3 pitch roof.

Plank

A broad board, usually more than 1" thick; especially, one laid with its wide dimension horizontal and used as a bearing surface.

Plaster

A mixture of lime, sand, and water, used to cover outside and inside wall surfaces.

Plastic concrete

Concrete that has not hardened.

Plat of subdivision

A map of a subdivision indicating the block numbers; the location, boundary lines, dimensions and number of each lot; and the location and names of the existing and planned streets.

Plate

The horizontal framing members at the top and bottom of the wall studs.

Platform framing

A method of framing in which each level is framed separately- The subfloor is laid for each floor before the walls above it are formed.

Plumb

Exactly perpendicular; vertical.

Plumb bob

A weight hung from a string to indicate vertical.

Plumber's putty

A pliable sealer often used around fixtures.

Ply

A term used to denote a layer or thickness, as of building or roofing paper, or a layer of wood in plywood.

Plywood

A wood product made by fastening together layers of veneer or a combination of veneer layers and a lumber core. The layers are joined with an adhesive. Adjoining plies are usually laid with grains at right angles to each other, and almost always an odd number of plies are used.

Plywood A/C or A/D

Plywood that is clear or knot-free on one side only.

Points

Also known as discount points, these are fees paid to a lender to increase the yield of a loan being offered by the lender.

Polybutylene pipe

A modern type of flexible plastic pipe used for the distribution of potable water in a building.

Polyurethane finish

A clear finish used for coating stained wood to provide it with protection and shine. It is durable and highly resistant to water.

Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)

A type of plastic formulation. Thin, flexible sheets of PVC plastic are used for pond liners. Rigid PVC plastic pipe is used for water supply lines.

Porch

A floor extending beyond the exterior walls of a building. It may be covered and enclosed or open.

Portico

A covered entrance to a house, usually supported by decorative columns.

Portland cement

Finely powdered limestone material used to bond the aggregate together in concrete and mortar.

Post

A timber set on end to support a wall, girder, or other structural member.

Powder room

A trade term referring to a room containing a toilet and a lavatory, without a bathtub or shower.

Prehung door

A door that is purchased as an assembled unit, already installed with hinges in a frame and pre-bored to receive the lockset.

Preservative

Any substance that, for a reasonable length of time, is effective in preventing the development and action of wood-rotting fungi, borers of various kinds, and insects that cause deterioration in wood.

Pressed wood products

A group of materials used in construction that are made from wood veneers, particles, or fibers bonded with an adhesive under heat and pressure.

Pressure balance control

A trade term used to describe a type of plumbing faucet. These faucets are considered a safety feature because they prevent the user from being scalded by hot water if there is a fluctuation in the cold water pressure.

Pressure treated lumber

A process of forcing preservatives into wood. One commonly used pressure treatment is waterborne chromated copper arsenate (CCA). CCA specified for above ground use is labeled LP-2 or .25. CCA rated for ground contact is labeled LP-22 or .40.

Primer

The first coat of paint in a job that consists of two or more coats; also, the paint used for such a coat.

Progress payments

Periodic payments made as work progresses into defined stages, such as rough-in and final.

Pulls

A knob or other form attached to the front of a drawer by which the drawer can be opened.

Pumice

An extremely light and porous material used in powder form to smooth and polish surfaces.

Punch-out

A trade term referring to the process of correcting deficiencies and making minor adjustments at the end of the job.

Purlin

In a roof, a horizontal timber which supports rafters, or one that supports the roof sheathing directly.

Putty

A soft, pliable type of cement, having nearly the consistency of dough. Used in sealing glass in sash, filling small holes and crevices in wood, and for similar purposes.

PVC pipe

Poly Vinyl Chloride, a type of plastic pipe used in plumbing. Frequently used for drains and vents and occasionally used for cold water piping.

Quarter-round

A molding which, in profile, appears as a quarter-circle.

Quotes

Firm prices given by contractors and suppliers for labor and materials.

Rabbet

An L-shaped groove cut into the edge of a board to receive the edge of another board and form a corner joint.

Radial

Extending out from the center, as the rays in a tree.

Radiant heating

(1) A method of heating consisting of a forced hot water system with pipes placed in the floor, wall, or ceiling. (2) A method of heating with electrically heated panels.

Radon

A colorless, odorless, radioactive gas that comes from the natural breakdown of uranium in soil, rock, and water.

Rafter

One of a series of structural members of a roof, designed to support roof loads. The rafters of a flat roof are sometimes called roof joists.

Rafter cuts

A trade term for the angles cut on rafter boards when stick-building a roofing system.

Rail

The horizontal top, bottom, and middle framing pieces of a panel door. A top or middle bar extending over or between posts.

Raised grain

A roughened condition of the surface of dressed lumber in which the hard summerwood is raised above the softer springwood but not torn loose from it.

Rake

The inclined edge of a gable roof. (The trim member is a rake molding.)

Rake

The angle on a gable roof design

Rasp

A rough-edged file used to shape wood.

Ready-mix concrete

Wet concrete that is ready to pour, transported in a truck from a concrete supplier.

Rebar (reinforcing bar)

Steel rods for reinforcing concrete.

Reflective insulation

Sheet material in which one or both surfaces will conduct comparatively little heat. When used with the surfaces facing air spaces, such material reduces the heat radiation across the air space.

Rehab

Reconstruction or restoration of an existing rundown building.

Reinforcing

Steel rods or metal fabric placed in concrete slabs, beams, or columns to increase their strength.

Reinforcing mesh

Steel wires welded into a grid of 6 or 10 inch squares and embedded in concrete. Ties a concrete pad together in the event of cracking.

Relief valve

A type of valve designed to open if it senses excess pressure or temperature.

Remodeling

The practice of altering existing conditions and adding new space to existing structures.

Resawing

Sawing lumber again after the first sawing; specifically, sawing into boards or dimension lumber.

Resilient flooring

Vinyl, vinyl-asbestos, and other man-made floor coverings that are flexible yet provide a smooth surface.

Resin

A sticky material obtained from the sap of certain trees and plants (natural resin) or made synthetically from coal-tar products and other organic substances (synthetic resin). Resins are widely used in making varnishes and paints.

Retaining wall

A wall that holds earth in place vertically; a retaining wall can either be mortared or dry stacked.

Reveal

A term used for doors and windows that means the amount of space (gap) between the door and its frame. The reveal should be equal all around if the unit is installed properly.

Ribbon

A narrow board let into the studding to add support to joists.

Ridge

The horizontal line at which two roof planes slope down from that line.

Ridge board

The board placed on edge at the ridge of the roof to support the upper ends of the rafters.

Ridgeboard/Ridgepole

The horizontal framing piece to which the rafters attach at the roof ridge.

Ripping

Sawing wood along the grain.

Rise

The vertical dimension of a roof or stair.

Riser

Each of the vertical boards closing the spaces between the treads of stairways.

Rock wool

Insulation made from silica or other rock material.

Roll roofing

Roof covering consisting of felt impregnated with asphalt.

Roof

The covering or upper part of a building.

Roof sheathing

Boards or sheet material, fastened to the roof rafters, on which the shingles or other roof covering is laid.

Roofing

Material put on a roof to protect it from wind and water.

Roofing felt

A black, paper-like product applied between the roof sheathing and the shingles.

Rosin

A hard resin used in making certain varnishes.

Rotary cutting

A way of cutting veneer from a log. The log is fastened in a large lathe and a sharp knife cuts the veneer, much as a paper is unwrapped from a roll.

Rough lumber

Lumber as it comes from the saw.

Rough-in

A trade term referring to the installation of material prior to enclosing the stud walls. Examples would be for plumbing, heating, and electrical systems. The bulk of these systems must be installed before the wall coverings are applied, so this is considered rough-in work.

Rout

To gouge out or make a furrow in, as in wood.

Router

An electric tool used to cut grooves and shape lumber into various moldings.

Rowlock

Position of bricks in which the bricks are laid on edge.

RPM

Revolutions per minute.

Rubber-emulsion paint

Paint with a vehicle of fine droplets of natural or synthetic rubber dispersed in water.

Rubbing compound

An abrasive material used to produce a smoothly finished wood surface.

Rubble

Uncut stone.

Run

The horizontal distance covered by an inclined surface such as a rafter or stair.

Run

A line of pipes or cabinets.

Runoff

Water traveling across the ground surface, caused by heavy rains or irrigation.

R-value

The ability of a material to resist the flow of heat.

Saddle

Two sloping surfaces meeting in a horizontal ridge, used between the back side of a chimney or other vertical surface and a sloping roof. Also called a cricket.

Salt box roof

A side gable with one side long and extending down to the first floor and the other side short covering the second floor.

Sanding

Rubbing sandpaper or similar abrasive over a surface before applying a finish.

Sandstone

A fine to coarse-grained sedimentary rock that splits easily; often used in the construction of garden walls and paths.

Sanitary fitting

Any of several connectors linking drain-waste-vent lines and designed to direct wastes downward.

Sap

Most of the fluids in a tree. Certain secretions and excretions, such as oleoresin, are excepted.

Sapwood

The living wood, usually of a pale color, near the outside of the tree. Generally, the sapwood is more susceptible to decay than the heartwood.

Sash

The frame holding the glass in a window.

Saturated felt

Paperlike felt which has been treated with asphalt to make it water resistant.

Scab

A short piece of wood or plywood fastened to two abutting timbers to splice them together.

Scaffold

A temporary structure or platform for workers to sit or stand on when working at a height above the floor or ground.

Scarfig

A joint between two pieces of wood which allows them to be spliced lengthwise.

Schedule 40 pipe

This is a rating for the thickness and strength of a pipe; it is the standard weight of plastic pipe used for residential drainage and vent plumbing systems.

Scotia

A hollow molding used as a part of a cornice, and often under the nosing of a stair tread.

Scratch coat

The first coat of plaster, which is scratched to form a bond for the second coat.

Screed

A straight board used to level concrete immediately after it is placed.

Screeding

Dragging a straight 2 x 4 across wet concrete to strike off excess concrete.

Scribing

Cutting and marking wood or other materials so its edge matches the surface it butts up to, as the edge of a cabinet or paneling against a wall.

Sealer

A finishing material, either clear or pigmented, that is usually applied directly over uncoated wood. It prevents subsequent coats of paint or varnish from seeping into the wood.

Seasoning

Removing moisture from green wood in order to improve its serviceability.

Seat cut (plate cut)

The cut at the bottom end of a rafter to allow it to fit on the top plate.

Second growth

New timber that has grown after the removal, whether by cutting, fire, or other agent, of all or a large part of the previous stand.

Second mortgage

A mortgage to a property that already has a first mortgage. It is also called a junior or subordinate mortgage.

Section

A drawing that shows the "cut-through" view of a building or object.

Section view

A drawing showing what would be seen by cutting through a building or part.

Sedimentary rock

Rock composed from the consolidated debris of igneous, metamorphic, and other sedimentary rock; because they split easily, sedimentary stones such as limestone and sandstone are used extensively in garden constructions.

Selvaged edge

A fabric edge that is finished to prevent unraveling.

Septic tank

A settling tank in which the sludge in the household sewage settles and the effluent discharges into an absorption field or seepage pit.

Setback

The distance from a street or front property line to the front of a building.

Shakes

Hand-split cedar shingles with a rough surface.

Sheathing

The wooden covering on the exterior of walls and the roof. Typically made of 1/2 inch construction-grade plywood; older homes may have shiplap boards or planks.

Sheathing paper

A building material, generally paper or felt, used in wall and roof construction to retard the passage of air and sometimes moisture.

SheetRock

A brand name for drywall.

Shim

A thin, tapered piece of wood used for leveling purposes.

Shingles

A covering applied in overlapping layers, for the roof or sides of a building. Shingles can be made of wood, asphalt, asbestos, tile, or slate, among other materials. Standard 3 Tab Shingle is a term used for common asphalt or fiberglass shingles vs Architectural shingles which vary in their laying pattern.

Shiplap

Boards which are rabbeted to fit into each other.

Shutters

Lightweight, louvered or flush, wood or nonwood covers located at each side of a window. Some are made to close over windows to shut out light or give protection from the weather. Others are fastened to the wall and used as decoration.

Siding

The finish covering of the outside wall of a frame building. It may be made of horizontal weatherboards, vertical boards and battens, shingles, or other material.

Cement Siding is the newest material, which is very resistant to decay. It needs to be painted. It comes in lap and shake patterns. Hardi-Plank and Hardi-Shake are brand names of cement siding.

Sill

The framing member in contact with a masonry or concrete foundation.

Sill sealer

Compressible material used under the sill to seal any gaps.

Single-family house

A house that is designed and certified for occupancy by one family only.

Sistering

The process of reinforcing a framing member by joining another piece of lumber alongside it.

Site conditions

A term used when describing the conditions of a construction site. Examples would be: level, sloping, rocky, wet.

Site constructed

Built on the job.

Site plan

The drawing that shows the boundaries of the building, its location, site utilities.

Site work

Normally includes excavation, but always refers to the preparation of a site for construction.

Sizing

(1) Working material to the desired size. (2) A coating of glue, shellac, or other material applied to a surface to prepare it for paint or other finish.

Skylight

An opening in the roof covered with thick glass the function of which is to light the area below.

Slab

A concrete floor placed directly on earth or on a gravel base; usually about 4 inches thick.

Slate

A fine-grained metamorphic stone that is highly weather-resistant; sometimes used as flagstone in constructing garden paths and terraces.

Sleeper

A strip of wood laid over a concrete floor to which the finished floor is nailed or glued.

Sliding window

A window with two or more sash that slide horizontally past one another.

Slope

The incline of a roof, expressed as inches of rise per foot of run.

Soffit

The underside of the roof overhang.

Soft costs

Expenses incurred in a project that are not directly related to construction or remodeling in the strictest sense. Examples are: loan, fees, surveys, legal fees, and professional fees.

Softwood

One of the botanical groups of trees that, in most cases, have needlelike or scalelike growths rather than broad leaves. (These trees are known as conifers.) The term softwood also applies to the wood produced by such trees.

Soil

The loose upper layer of earth. The bearing soil is the layer of soil on which the footings are poured.

Soil stack

Vertical plumbing pipe for waste water.

Soldier

Brick position in which the bricks are stood on end.

Solid bridging

A solid member placed between adjacent floor joists near the center of the span to prevent joists from twisting.

Soluble

Capable of being dissolved.

Solvent

A liquid in which things can be dissolved.

Sound deadening

Construction intended to prevent the passage of sound.

Span

The horizontal dimension between vertical supports- The span of a beam is the distance between the posts that support it.

Spar varnish

A varnish consisting mainly of drying oil and the harder types of resin. It is waterproof and strongly resistant to the damaging effects of moisture and sunlight.

Specific gravity

A measure of the relative density of a substance. For woods it is expressed as the ratio of the weight of a body to the weight of an equal volume of water at 40C or other specified temperature.

Specifications

Detailed, precise engineering instructions that include the kinds of materials to be used and the method of construction.

Speed square

A triangular-shaped metal tool used as a guide for cutting lumber at right angles with an electric saw.

Splash block

A small masonry block laid with the top close to the ground surface to receive drainage from downspouts and to carry it away from the building.

Spline

A thin strip of wood used to reinforce joists. Also known as a "feather" or "tongue".

Square

The amount of siding or roofing materials required to cover 100 square feet.

Square yards

This term is a unit of measure most commonly used in floor coverings. To obtain square yardage you must take the square footage of an area and divide it by nine.

Stack effect

Buoyancy of warm gases within a chimney

Stain

A die used for finishing wood surfaces.

Stair carriage

The supporting framework under a stair.

Stakes

Pieces of wood inserted in the ground at the corners and along the boundary lines of a piece of property to precisely define its boundaries.

Staking

Marking the corners and boundary lines of a property and the corners and building lines of a house by means of stakes.

Steam bending

The process of forming curved wood members by steaming or boiling the wood and bending it to the desired shape

Stick-build

A trade term meaning to build a structure on-site with conventional construction methods.

Stiffness

The resistance of a piece of wood to bending.

Stile

The vertical members in a sash, door, or other panel construction.

Stool

The flat, narrow shelf which forms the top member of the interior trim at the bottom of a window (windowsill).

Stop (molding)

Thin molding for stopping doors on closure or holding window sash in place.

Storm sash (storm window)

An extra window usually placed on the outside of an existing window as additional protection against cold weather.

Story

That part of a building which is between any floor and the floor or roof next above.

Strata

Horizontal layers of rock.

Stress-grade lumber

Structural lumber that has been graded and stamped with information to indicate the specific load it will support.

Stringer

Diagonal boards that support stair treads, usually one on each side and one in the middle of a staircase.

Strip flooring

Wood flooring consisting of narrow, matched strips.

Structural lumber

Lumber that is 2" or more thick and 4" or more wide; intended for use where strength is required. The grading of structural lumber is based on the strength of the piece and its use.

Structural sandwich construction

A construction in which layers of relatively high-strength facing materials are tightly bonded to, and act integrally with, a low-density core material.

Structural timbers

Pieces of wood of relatively large size (with a cross section greater than 4" x 6"), the strength of which is the controlling element in their selection and use. Framing for buildings, and crossarms for posts are examples of structural timbers.

Stucco

Most commonly refers to an outside plaster made with portland cement as it's base.

Stud

Vertical member of a frame wall, placed at both ends and most often every 16" on center.

Stud finder

Electronic or magnetic tool that locates studs within a finished wall.

Subcontractor

A contractor working for a general contractor. Examples could be: plumbers, electricians, or hvac contractors. Called "subs" for short.

Subdivision

Land that is divided or designated to be divided into two or more lots.

Subfloor

Boards or sheet material laid on joists, and over which a finish floor is to be laid.

Subfloor

The first layer of rough flooring applied to the floor joists.

Subflooring

Plywood or boards nailed directly to the floor joists to form a base for the finish flooring.

Subsurface water

Water below ground that is caused by heavy rainfall.

Sump

A square, rectangular, or circular pit used to collect water, usually from a wet basement. The collected water is subsequently discharged by a pump.

Sump pump

A device that draws water beneath the slab and pumps it away from the house.

Support columns

Vertical columns used for structural support. An example could be the columns found in basements or garages, supporting the main girder.

Survey

A drawing made to scale showing the lengths and directions of the boundary lines of the lot; the surrounding lots and streets; the position of the house and all exterior improvements such as walkways, driveways, decks and porticos within the lot; and any existing encroachments.

Suspended ceiling

A ceiling system supported by hanging it from the overhead structural framing.

Swale

A broad, shallow ditch or depression in the ground, either occurring naturally, or excavated for the purpose of directing water runoff.

T & G

Tongued and grooved.

Tack rag

A piece of cheesecloth or cotton rag moistened with thinned varnish. It is used to pick up small particles of dust.

Tail beam

A relatively short beam or joist supported in a wall on one end and by a header on the other.

Tailpiece

Short drainpipe between a fixture drain and a trap; also, the inlet tubes on a faucet that connect it to water supply lines.

Take-off

A trade term meaning an estimate of the materials and labor required to do a job. Take-offs are generally associated more with materials than with labor.

Tambour door

A door, made of narrow slats, that opens by rolling up rather than opening out. It has no hinges.

Taper

A gradual and uniform decrease in size, as of a round or rectangular piece or hole.

Taping

The process of covering the drywall joints with paper tapes and glossing over them with several coats of joint compound to produce a continuous smooth surface.

Temperature-controlled foundation vents

Modern foundation vents able to sense temperature and open or close automatically. These vents allow for better foundation ventilation throughout the year.

Tempered glass

Glass that has been cooled rapidly to produce surface tension. The result is a stronger-than-normal glass that shatters into relatively harmless cubical fragments when broken.

Template

A full-sized pattern from which structural layouts are made. Templates may be of paper, cardboard, plywood, or metal.

Termite shield

Sheet-metal shield installed at the top of a foundation to prevent termites from entering the wood superstructure.

Termites

Insects that resemble ants in size, general appearance, and habit of living in colonies. Hence they are frequently called "white ants." About 56 species of termites are known in the United States. The two major species, classified from the manner in which they attack wood, are (1) ground-inhabiting or subterranean termites, the most common, and (2) drywood termites, found in the United States chiefly along the extreme southern border and the Gulf of Mexico.

Thermal-break window

Window with a metal frame that has the interior and exterior separated by a material with a higher R-value.

Thermostat

An electrical switch that is activated by changes in temperature.

Thinner

A volatile liquid added to finishing material to make it flow more easily and smoothly.

Threshold

A strip of wood or metal beveled on each edge and used above the finished floor under outside doors.

Tie beam

A beam so situated that it holds the principal rafters of a roof together and prevents them from thrusting the plate out of line.

Tie stones

Long stones laid across the width of the wall to add lateral stability.

Tint

A color produced by adding white pigment or paint, with the amount of white greater than the amount of colored pigment.

Title

The right of ownership to real property.

Title insurance policy

A policy issued by a title insurance company after it searches the public record. It insures against losses resulting from undiscovered defects such as forged document, incompetent grantor, incorrect marital status, or improperly recorded deed.

Title search

The examination of the public records to discover the names of the parties who have interest in a real property and to detect any defects that may affect the quality of the title.

Toe kick

Indentation at the bottom of a floor-based cabinet.

Toenail

To drive a nail through a surface at an angle.

Toilet - 12 inch rough

A standard toilet with the center of the drain pipe located 12 inches from the finished wall behind the toilet. Other sizes are available.

Tongue

A projecting edge, as on a board, that fits into a groove on another piece.

Tongue & groove

Boards in which the tongue of one board fits into the groove of another.

Top chord

The top horizontal member of a truss.

Top plate

Piece of lumber laid horizontally on top of the studs to tie them together and form a base for the framing above which may be a floor or a roof.

Topography

A drawing that indicates the configuration of the earth's surface and the locations of the natural or man-made monuments.

Total run

The overall horizontal measurement of a stair.

Tract housing

A trade term describing production or subdivision housing. The term refers to houses built on a tract of land.

Transom

A transverse structural member, such as a lintel, or the horizontal crossbar in a window.

Trap

A bend in drainpipe that creates a water seal to prevent sewer gases from escaping through fixtures.

Tread

The horizontal board in a stairway; the part on which the person walks.

Trellis

A panel of open latticework fastened to a supporting framework and used for privacy and supporting climbing plants.

Trim

Finish materials, such as moldings, applied around openings (window trim, door trim)

Trim

Unmolded strips of wood used alone or in combination with molding.

Trimmers

The double framing members at the sides of an opening.

Troweling

Giving concrete a smooth final finish with a steel trowel. This step is for interior applications, as it creates an extremely smooth and possibly slippery surface.

Truss

A manufactured assembly used to support a load over a long span.

Truth-in-lending act

See regulation Z.

Tung oil

A yellow drying oil obtained from the seed pods of tung trees and widely used in water-resistant varnishes, lacquers, and high-gloss paints.

Turnkey

Projects that include materials and labor, as well as necessary permits, drawings, inspections, etc. .
A builder that gives you a turnkey job does everything from initial drawings to handing you the keys to move in.

Turpentine

A volatile oil used as a thinner in paints and as a solvent in varnishes.

Type "L" Copper tubing

The type of copper refers to the thickness of the wall of the tubing. Type "L" copper is marked with a blue stripe and is approved for use underground and has a thicker sidewall than type "M" copper.

Ultraviolet light (UV)

Invisible rays at the extreme violet end of the sun's light spectrum, which causes color fading and deterioration of certain materials, such as plastics. Most pond liners have chemical additives to inhibit the effects of UV rays.

Undercoat

A coating applied prior to the final or top coat of a paint job.

Underlayment

Any material installed over the subfloor to provide a smooth surface over which floor covering will be installed.

Utility knife

A razorlike blade, generally retractable into a handle, for slicing thin materials.

Valance

A short curtain forming a border between a window and the ceiling or a short trim board connecting the top of kitchen cabinets to the ceiling.

Valley

The inside corner formed by intersecting roofs.

Valley rafter

A rafter which runs from a wall plate to the ridge, along the valley of a roof. It is usually made of doubled 2" thick members.

Vanity

A trade term describing a base cabinet for a bathroom lavatory or sink.

Vapor barrier

Sheet material used to prevent water vapor from passing through a building surface.

Varnish

A thickened preparation of drying oil or drying oil and resin. When applied to a surface, it leaves a hard, glossy, transparent coating. It may also be mixed with pigments to make enamels. Clear varnish is a slightly yellow, semitransparent liquid.

Vehicle

The liquid portion of a finishing material. It consists of the binder (nonvolatile) and thinners (volatile).

Veneer

A thin layer of sheets of wood; usually one that has beauty or value and is intended to be overlaid on an inferior surface.

Veneer

A course of stone added to the surface of a wall as decoration.

Vent pipe

A pipe that allows gas to escape from plumbing systems.

Vergeboard

Decorative gable trim.

Vermiculite

A mineral closely related to mica. When heated, it expands to form lightweight material with insulation quality.

Vinyl siding

A type of exterior siding made of plastic requiring little to no maintenance with a life expectancy of twenty-years. The color is a part of the molded vinyl and will not fade or wear off under normal conditions.

Virgin growth

The original growth of trees on a piece of land. (to be distinguished from Second growth.)

Vise-grip pliers

Adjustable locking pliers.

Volt

A unit that measures electrical pressure. Common voltages used in houses are 120 and 240.

Volume ceiling

A ceiling that is higher than the standard 8 feet. It can be angled or arched or simply horizontal.

Wainscoting

Matched boarding or panel work covering the lower portion of a wall.

Wall sheathing

Sheets of plywood, gypsum board, or other material nailed to the outside face of studs as a base for exterior siding.

Wallboard

Large, rigid sheets of wood pulp, gypsum, or similar materials that may be fastened to the frame of a building, usually to form the interior walls.

Wall-hung lavatory

A bathroom lavatory designed to hang on the wall with no other support.

Wane

A defect in lumber in which there is bark or lack of wood at a corner or edge.

Warp

A variation from a true or plane surface, as in a piece of lumber. Warp includes bow, crook, cup, twist, and any combination thereof.

Warranty deed

Warrants that the grantor (seller) has a good title free and clear of all liens and encumbrances; defends the grantee (buyer) against all claims.

Washer outlet box

A metal or plastic box designed to be recessed in an interior wall, allowing the connection of washing machine water hoses and providing an indirect waste for the washing machine discharge hose.

Water based paint

A paint in which the vehicle is a water emulsion.

Water closet

A plumbing fixture commonly called toilet.

Water hammer

Sound made by supply pipes when water is suddenly stopped by the quick closing of a valve.

Water repellent

A liquid designed to penetrate into wood to make it resist water.

Water saver toilet

A toilet using three gallons of water or less each time the toilet is flushed.

Water stain

A colored dye that is soluble in water.

Water table

The top level of the natural underground water resulting from a nearby stream, drain, or shallow rock formation.

Watercourse

An artificial channel for a stream; constructed most often in formal gardens.

Watt

Unit of electrical power. Watts equal volts across the circuit times amps flowing through it.

Wattage

The measure of the rate at which electricity works. To determine watts, multiply volts by amperes.

Wax

A fatty material obtained from the honeycombs of bees or from similar plant, animal, or mineral substances.

Weather stripping

Metal, wood, plastic, or other strips installed around door and window openings to prevent air infiltration.

Weep holes

Through-wall drainage holes used to prevent water from backing up behind retaining walls and brick veneers on framed houses.

Western framing

A method of framing in which each level is framed separately- The subfloor is laid for each floor before the walls above it are formed.

Wet wall

A wall framed to enclose a building's main drain/vent stack, water lines, and drain-waste-vent lines. Sometimes referred to as a plumbing wall.

Whalers

The lumber used to stiffen concrete forms, either vertical or horizontal.

Whirlpool

A trade term describing a bathing tub with whirlpool jets.

Wood preservative

A clear or semitransparent coating used on wood to show the grain.

Workability

The ease with which wood can be smoothly cut and shaped with hand or machine tools.

Wythes

Vertical stacks of stones in a wall that are one stone wide.

Zoning ordinances

Local regulations affecting property uses and type of construction. They set forth the minimum lot sizes; number of family units in each dwelling; the maximum height of a building; and the minimum setbacks and sideyards.