



The Ultimate New-Build Decision Checklist

A Step-by-Step Guide to Every Major
Decision From Groundbreaking to Move-In

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Building a home from the ground up involves hundreds of decisions–

many of which need to happen
earlier than most homeowners
expect.

This guide walks through the major
decisions in the order they typically
need to be made, while also helping
homeowners understand when to
hire professionals, what trades will
need information from them, and
what selections impact future
phases.

**Use this checklist as a
planning guide throughout
your build process.**

Vision, Budget & Team Assembly

Before Purchasing Plans or Breaking Ground

This phase lays the foundation for every future decision. The clearer your vision is upfront, the smoother the process will be later.

Lifestyle & Vision Questions

- What style of home do you want?
If you aren't sure, GHC can help you define your style, based on your preferences and create a look you love.

- Modern
- Transitional
- Traditional
- Organic modern
- European-inspired
- Farmhouse
- Coastal



Vision, Budget & Team Assembly

Lifestyle & Vision Questions

- How do you want your home to feel?
 - Cozy
 - Minimal
 - Luxurious
 - Family-friendly
 - Entertaining-focused
- What is most important to you?
 - Functionality
 - Resale value
 - Custom details
 - Low maintenance
 - Energy efficiency
 - Luxury finishes
- How long do you plan to live in the home?
- What spaces matter most to your lifestyle?
- What spaces do you use the least in your current home?
- What frustrations are you hoping to solve in this build?
- Do you entertain often?
- Will you work from home?
- Will aging-in-place features matter?
- Will your family size change in the future?
- What are your non-negotiables?
- What are your nice-to-haves?

GHC also has a complete New Build Questionnaire that covers these questions and more



Budget Planning



- What is your total all-in budget?
- What portion is allocated to each of the following?
 - Land
 - Construction
 - Furnishings (& decor!)
 - Landscaping
 - Window treatments
 - Appliances
 - Lighting
 - Contingency funds
 - Plumbing
 - Finishes (flooring, wallpaper or wall treatments, etc.)
 - Exterior Materials/roof
 -
- What upgrades are worth splurging on?
- Where are you willing to simplify?
- Have you accounted for:
 - Change orders
 - Permit fees
 - Utility hookups
 - Engineering
 - Design fees
 - Storage costs
 - Temporary housing
 - Moving expenses



Professionals to Hire Early

Architect / Draftsperson

Questions to address:

- Do the plans support your lifestyle?
- Is the layout functional?
- Are ceiling heights appropriate?
- Is furniture placement considered?
- Is natural light optimized?
- Are there unnecessary square footage areas/areas that can be better utilized?
- Is the dining room large enough to sit the amount of people you need at the table and still move around them when they are all seated?
- Is the lighting centered on where the furniture will be placed or the general center of the "room" or "Space"

Hint: there is a correct answer and most architects get it wrong.

Professionals to Hire Early

Interior Designer

Ideal time to hire to help save costs on change orders and redoing work is before groundbreaking, but there is no such thing as too late.

Questions to Ask:

- Do the architects plans match how I want to live my life/how I want my space to feel?
- What would you change based on the information I've given you about my lifestyle?
- Will you look at electrical placement, cabinet layout and general floorplans, and suggest possibilities I didn't already think of?
- Will you assist with furnishings and stylings?
- What is your billing structure?
- Have you worked with this Architect/Builder before and what are your thoughts?



Professionals to Hire Early

Builder / General Contractor

Questions to ask:

- What is included in the base price?
- What allowances are included?
- How are change orders handled?
- What is the estimated timeline?
- Who will be my main point of contact?
- What is the communication process?
- Are your subs licensed?

Additional Professionals to Consider

- Structural engineer
- Landscape designer
- Pool Company
- Audio/visual specialist
- Smart home consultant
- Cabinet Shop
- Organizer/storage consultant



Lot, Site & Exterior Planning

Before Finalizing Architectural Plans

Lot & Site Decisions

- Which direction does the lot face?
- Where will natural light enter?
- What views should be highlighted?
- What views should be blocked?
- Where is the driveway best positioned?
- What grading or retaining walls are needed?
- Is there HOA approval required?
- Are there easements or setback limitations?
- Will the yard require extensive landscaping?
- Is drainage being addressed properly?



Exterior Architecture Decisions



- What exterior style do you want?
- What rooflines do you prefer?
- What exterior materials will be used?
 - Brick
 - Stucco
 - Stone
 - Siding
 - Wood accents
 - Etc.
- What exterior color palette do you want?
- What window style best fits the home?
- What front elevation details matter most?
- What level of exterior maintenance are you comfortable with?

PHASE 2

Exterior Selections

These decisions usually need to happen earlier than homeowners expect.

Roofing

- Roof material
- Roof color
- Metal accent locations
- Gutters and downspouts

Garage Planning

- Garage size
- Number of bays
- Extra storage space
- EV charging needs
- Workshop area
- Garage door style
- Garage door material/color

Windows & Doors

- Window material
- Window color
- Grille style
- Window operation style
- Front door style
- Front door stain/paint color
- Sliding or bifold doors
- Patio door configurations

Professionals/Trades Involved During This Phase

- Architect
- Builder
- Structural engineer
- Window supplier
- Roofing contractor
- Exterior material suppliers
- Landscape designer

Interior designers can help choose window and door styles, colors of finishes and where to place on exterior, and electrical plan for exterior and garage.





Floor Plan & Space Planning

Before Framing Begins

This phase impacts how your home functions long term.

Overall Layout Decisions

- Open concept or defined rooms?
- Single-story or multi-story?
- Primary suite location?
- Guest room placement?
- Children's bedroom layout?
- Flex spaces needed?
- Storage needs?
- Future expansion plans?
- Specialty rooms like homework room, playroom, music room, theater, offices, butler's pantry or second kitchen, craft room?

Room-by-Room Planning Questions

Kitchen

- How many people cook regularly?
- Do you entertain frequently?
- Do you want:
 - Double islands?
 - Butler's pantry?
 - Walk-in pantry?
 - Hidden prep kitchen?
 - Beverage station?
 - Coffee bar?
 - Pot filler?
- Gas or induction range?
- Double ovens?
- Refrigerator/freezer columns?
additional fridge or freezers?
- Any specialty appliances like built in coffee maker, window fridge, steam oven, etc?
- Ice maker?
- Appliance garage?
- What storage frustrations do you currently have?
- Where should trash/recycling be located?
- What countertop maintenance level are you comfortable with?
- Are you going to have a dedicated dining room or eat in kitchen? How many people do you need to sit?

Living Room

- What size furniture do you plan to use?
- Are you keeping any existing furniture that needs to be planned for? (this goes for all spaces or overall furnishings)
- Is a fireplace important?
- TV placement?
- Built-ins needed?
- How much storage do you need?
- How much natural light do you want?
- How will traffic flow through the room?



Room-by-Room Planning Questions

Dining Area

- Formal or casual dining?
- Seating capacity needs?
- Buffet or built-in storage needed?
- Lighting focal point?
- Can you walk around if people are sitting in chairs?
- Is there exterior access here? If so, will it affect your furniture placement therefore making your furniture off center?

Laundry Room

- Sink needed?
- Hanging space?
- Folding area?
- Pet wash station?
- Additional storage?
- Steamer or ironing board built in?

Primary Suite

- Preferred bed wall placement?
- Seating area needed?
- Access to outdoor spaces?
- Separate vanities?
- Makeup vanity?
- Tub vs larger shower?
- Steam shower?
- Heated floors?
- Closet organization needs?
- Laundry access from closet?
- Additional AV or fireplace needs?
- Additional blocking needed for towel holders, grab bars?

Secondary Bathrooms

- Tub/shower combo or walk-in showers?
- Shared or private bathrooms?
- Double vanities?
- Linen storage?
- Additional blocking needed for towel holders, grab bars?



Room-by-Room Planning Questions

Mudroom

- Lockers needed?
- Backpack/shoe storage?
- Charging station?
- Drop zone location?
- Cleaning cabinet/closet?

Office

- Multiple workstations?
- Video call background considerations?
- Built-ins?
- Sound privacy?
- Equipment storage?

Outdoor Living

- Outdoor kitchen?
- Covered patio?
- Fireplace/firepit?
- Pool?
- Shade considerations?
- Outdoor dining space?

Professionals/Trades Involved During This Phase

- Architect
- Interior designer
- Carpenter
- Builder
- Landscape designer



Appliances & Final Functional Details

Before Final Installations

Appliances affect cabinetry, electrical, plumbing, and ventilation.

Appliance Decisions

- Appliance package/style
- Paneled vs exposed appliances
- Range size
- Gas vs induction
- Double dishwasher?
- Beverage fridge?
- Wine storage?
- Ice machine?
- Washer/dryer configuration?



Appliances & Final Functional Details

Ventilation Planning

- Hood style
- Hood insert size
- Venting route
- Makeup air requirements

Final Hardware Decisions

- Cabinet hardware
- Door hardware
- Plumbing hardware coordination
- Towel bars/hooks
- Mirror styles

Functional Walkthrough Questions

- Are there enough outlets?
- Does furniture fit correctly?
- Is lighting layered properly?
- Are storage spaces functional?
- Is traffic flow comfortable?
- Are switch locations convenient?
- Are plumbing fixtures centered correctly?
- Do the doors swing the right direction?

Professionals/Trades Involved During This Phase

- Appliance supplier
- Electrician
- Plumber
- Interior designer
- Builder



Cabinetry, Built-Ins & Millwork

Before Finish Selections Are Finalized

Cabinet decisions impact countertops, plumbing, lighting, appliances, and storage.

Cabinetry Decisions

- Cabinet style
- Cabinet layout
- Full overlay or inset?
- Cabinet wood species
- Paint or stain?
- Custom or semi-custom?
- Cabinet color palette
- Upper cabinet height
- Glass-front cabinets?
- Open shelving?
- Appliance paneling?
- Where are cabinets going? Kitchen, Pantry, Mudroom, offices, living room, built ins, laundry, kitchenette, garage, closets, reading nooks, hallways, bathrooms?



Cabinetry, Built-In's & Millwork

Interior Trim & Millwork

- Interior door style
- Door hardware style/finish
- Baseboards
- Crown molding
- Wall paneling
- Wainscoting
- Beams
- Stair details
- Handrail style
- Picture rail
- Box moulding
- Cove ceiling
- Specialty ceiling details

Professionals/Trades Involved During This Phase

- Cabinet maker
- Millworker
- Interior designer
- Builder
- Countertop fabricator



Cabinetry, Built-In's & Millwork



Storage Planning

- Drawer organization
- Spice storage
- Trash pull-outs
- Vertical tray storage
- Pantry systems
- Charging drawers
- Hidden storage solutions
- Linen storage
- Cleaning supply storage

Built-In Features

- Fireplace built-ins
- Mudroom lockers
- Office built-ins
- Media cabinetry
- Bench seating
- Bookshelves
- Bar areas

Structural & Pre-Wire Decisions

Before Electrical, Plumbing & HVAC Rough-Ins

Many homeowners underestimate how many decisions need to happen before drywall.

Ceiling & Architectural Details

- Ceiling heights by room
- Vaulted ceilings?
- Beams?
- Ceiling treatments?
- Archways?
- Trim styles?
- Baseboard height?
- Door height?
- Interior arch details?



Electrical Planning

One of the most overlooked phases.

Outlet & Switch Planning

- Outlet locations
- Floor outlets
- USB outlets
- Hidden appliance outlets
- Christmas light outlets
- Exterior outlet placement
- Smart switches?
- Dimmer switches?
- Three-way switches for additional ease?

Technology & Smart Home Planning

- Wi-Fi router locations
- Hardwired internet locations
- Security system
- Cameras
- Speakers/audio zones
- Home automation systems
- Motorized window treatments
- Doorbell system
- TV mounting locations

Lighting Planning

- Recessed lighting layout
- Decorative fixture locations
- Under-cabinet lighting
- Toe-kick lighting
- Stair lighting
- Accent lighting
- Exterior lighting
- Landscape lighting
- Closet lighting
- Art lighting
- Smart lighting systems
- Motion detection lighting



Structural & Pre-Wire Decisions

HVAC Decisions

- Number of HVAC zones
- Thermostat locations
- Humidifier/dehumidifier needs
- Vent placement
- Linear vents vs standard vents
- Air purification systems

Framing

- Can add blocking requirements here instead? For bathrooms and any additional special needs like hanging chairs, ninja rooms, heavy art or TVs. All stone fireplaces or walls.

Plumbing Decisions

- Tankless or traditional water heater?
- Recirculating hot water system?
- Water softener?
- Filtration system?
- Pot filler?
- Refrigerator water line?
- Outdoor plumbing?
- Utility sink locations?

Professionals/Trades Involved During This Phase

- Electrician
- HVAC contractor
- Plumber
- Low-voltage contractor
- Audio/visual specialist
- Interior designer
- Builder



Hard Finish Selections

Before Installation Ordering Deadlines

These selections should feel cohesive as a whole, not chosen individually.

Flooring Decisions

- Hardwood species
- Hardwood stain color
- Engineered vs solid hardwood
- Tile locations
- Tile sizes
- Tile patterns
- Carpet locations
- Heated flooring areas
- Floor transition details



Hard Finish Selections

Countertop Decisions

- Quartz, marble, quartzite, granite, etc.
- Edge profile
- Countertop thickness
- Full-height backsplash?
- Waterfall island?
- Honed or polished finish?

Plumbing Fixture Selections

- Faucet styles
- Faucet finishes
- Sink styles
- Tub style
- Shower system details
- Toilet selections
- Pot filler finish

Tile Selections

- Shower tile
- Floor tile
- Backsplash tile
- Accent tile
- Grout color
- Tile layout patterns
- Niche details
- Finishing edge of tile

Paint Decisions

- Interior paint colors
- Trim paint color
- Ceiling paint color
- Sheen levels
- Accents



Hard Finish Selections



Lighting Fixture Selections

- Chandeliers
- Pendants
- Sconces
- Vanity lighting
- Exterior lighting fixtures
- Ceiling fans
- Recessed
- Under cabinet mount
- Stair or hallway floor lights
- Motion sensors
- Dimmers

Professionals/Trades Involved During This Phase

- Interior designer
- Flooring supplier
- Tile installer
- Paint contractor
- Plumbing supplier
- Lighting supplier
- Countertop fabricator

Furnishing, Styling & Move-In Prep

Final Phase Before Living In The Home

Many homeowners underestimate how much furnishing impacts how finished a home feels.

Furnishing Planning

- What existing furniture is being reused?
- What rooms need fully new furnishings?
- Rug sizes
- Window treatments
- Bedding
- Dining seating
- Accent chairs
- Styling accessories
- Artwork placement
- TV concealment solutions



Furnishing, Styling & Move-In Prep

Window Treatment

- Drapery
- Shades
- Motorized treatments
- Privacy needs
- Blackout needs

Styling & Decor

- Styling shelves
- Entry styling
- Layered lighting
- Decorative pillows/textiles
- Plants/greenery
- Accessories

Exterior Completion

- Landscaping installation
- Irrigation
- Exterior lighting
- Pool completion
- Fencing
- Outdoor furniture
- Address numbers/mailbox

Move-In Preparation

- Deep cleaning
- Punch list completion
- Warranty walkthrough
- Smart home setup
- Utility setup
- Security setup
- Change of address

Professionals/Trades Involved During This Phase

- Interior designer
- Landscape contractor
- Window treatment specialist
- Professional organizer
- Cleaning crew
- Builder



BONUS

Questions to Ask Before Approving Any Selection



Before making final decisions, ask:

- Does this align with the overall vision of the home?
- Is this timeless or trend-driven?
- Will this require high maintenance?
- Does this fit within budget priorities?
- Does this coordinate with adjacent selections?
- Is this functional for everyday life?
- Have I seen this material in person?
- What is the lead time?
- Is this durable for my lifestyle?
- Is this decision impacting another trade or timeline?

BONUS

Biggest New-Build Mistakes to Avoid

- Waiting too long to hire an interior designer
- Making selections in isolation instead of holistically
- Underestimating lighting importance
- Forgetting furniture layout during planning
- Not planning enough storage
- Ignoring outlet placement
- Choosing aesthetics over functionality
- Not accounting for lead times
- Skipping detailed electrical walkthroughs
- Making rushed decisions under construction pressure
- Spending heavily on visible finishes while neglecting foundational items
- Not budgeting for furnishings at the end
- Not trusting the process - the in between phases can look messy! Don't judge a space until it's fully executed.



BONUS

Ideal New-Build Timeline



Early Planning Phase

- Hire builder
- Hire designer
- Establish budget
- Finalize plans
- Begin exterior selections

Pre-Construction

- Space planning
- Cabinet planning
- Electrical planning
- Plumbing planning
- HVAC planning
- Appliance Planning

Mid-Construction

- Finalize hard finishes
- Tile layouts
- Order lighting
- Confirm millwork details

Final Construction

- Paint
- Flooring
- Fixtures
- Final walkthroughs
- Furnishings
- Landscaping



We hope you enjoyed this guide!

The earlier decisions are made thoughtfully and cohesively, the smoother the building process becomes. A well-planned home not only looks beautiful, but functions beautifully for years to come.

The goal is not simply to finish a home — it's to create a home that supports your lifestyle, feels elevated and intentional, and minimizes regret after move-in.

You don't have to do this alone!
Schedule a free discovery call with us to
talk about your upcoming project.

SCHEDULE HERE