

# Step by step

PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY CHRIS THWAITES



Pieter Venema,  
Co-Owner of Royal Homes

## Pre-fab construction helps organize your custom home into manageable steps

**W**hen you first contemplate building a custom home or cottage on your lot, the work can seem overwhelming. The solution, as with any large task, is to break it down into manageable chunks.

“We divide it into simple steps,” says Pieter Venema, co-owner of Royal Homes. “And some of those don’t actually require any work on the part of the homeowner. It helps make the whole project much more comprehensible.”

### Start with the design

The first step is one of the hardest: designing the layout. “There’s a lot to think about in a custom design,” says Pieter. “Your desires and dreams, of course, but also future plans – children, empty nest, retirement... a lot of big life changes will affect how you live in your new home. You want to consider all of these things

when putting together a floor plan and elevations.”

Working with an experienced designer is the best way to work through these questions. While your home will be unique, many of the challenges and questions you face are not. “If

you’re concerned with future-proofing your home, for example, our designers can often suggest ways to build flexibility into your home, allowing it to change as your life changes,” says Pieter.

Even if you don’t intend to change the layout at all, your designer can provide a wealth of ideas. “We’re a completely custom builder, but we also have display models that you can walk through,” says Pieter. “Being able to sit in a space can really help you picture what you like, what you don’t, and what you really want to build.”

### Choose the finishes

This is another area where homeowners need to make some decisions. From flooring to cabinets, paint to trim, there are so many choices to make, and so many options available.

“We assign a design team to work with each customer to walk them through the process,” says Pieter. “We talk about the styles they like and the overall feel they want, and then we can start to select the various options.”

Royal Homes has a large showroom and an even bigger online selection. And if that isn’t enough options, the company will work with any other finishing materials their clients find. “We have clients come to us with a particular flooring they love, or a custom cabinet, and say ‘can we get this?’” says Pieter. “And we say ‘of course we can, and now let’s look for the rest of the finishes that will match.’”

“It’s so much easier than standing in a showroom by yourself, trying to decide it all on your own.”

### Stakes, permits and foundations

Each property is unique, and each municipality has its own set of rules. Locating the home on the site and navigating the permitting process can be daunting. Working with the right builder can make that seamless.

“We will submit plans to the municipality, help the homeowner get the various approvals, and work with them to decide exactly where the building will go,” says Pieter.

Once those steps have been completed, it’s time to dig and construct the foundation. “This is one area where there’s very little flexibility: we simply refuse to put a home on a foundation that we didn’t build ourselves,” says Pieter. “It’s a critical part of the home, and there’s no room for error.” Royal Homes usually builds poured cement foundations, and offers a five year guarantee against leaks.

### Factory-built prefab

Watching your custom home come together before your eyes is the fulfillment of months or even years of planning. Royal Homes customers get to see all that happening indoors. “We build everything in our factory – it’s really quite a remarkable process, particularly when you’re seeing it for the first time,” says Pieter.

The work is done by skilled craftsmen – from carpenters to plumbers, electricians to drywallers and painters – but using some ingenious machinery and methods. Walls are built on a table so that they’re perfectly flat and level; under-the-floor mechanical systems are installed while the floor is suspended six feet above the shop floor, allowing tradespeople to walk beneath it; in-wall electrical systems are installed from outside so that the home’s air barrier isn’t compromised.

Best of all, materials are always dry and protected from the elements.

### From delivery to warranty

Delivery day is usually the most exciting part of the process. A series of trucks pull up at the job site, and a crane lifts the house into position.

Within hours, the property has been transformed.

The work isn’t complete yet, however. “There are always some things that are better constructed on-site,” says Pieter. Exterior brickwork and decking, for example, is built on-site.

Other components depend on the design of the house. “If it makes more sense to build the roof on-site, then that’s how we do it,” says Pieter. “Each house is unique.”

Even after moving day, Royal Homes keeps in touch. “We offer warranties up to ten years, and we do regular follow-up visits just to check that everything is as it should be,” says Pieter. **DS**

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