



EXPERIENCE, EXPERTISE AND ENERGY!

Beach House Construction

Home construction on the Outer Banks differs from construction in other areas in several ways. Homes here are designed to withstand coastal elements—wind, water, and sand—that may not be relevant in other places. This article highlights some of the important differences. If you are considering investing in a home here, this may provide you with a foundation of knowledge so that you can ask your Realtor and home inspector important questions.

Foundation

Pilings are common here because they allow homes to be constructed so that flood waters do not damage the home. Taller structures also take advantage of views and breezes.

Water is the most damaging element to most types of siding and the walls they protect.

Most Outer Banks homes are constructed on a piling foundation. Typically, 8" x 8" pilings are placed at least 8 feet in the ground (16 feet in the ground for homes closer to the ocean). The pilings are set by injecting water into the ground and are held in place by the pressure of the sand.

Older homes are often resting on 6" pilings. Round pilings are sometimes used as well. A home resting on pilings may sway with a strong wind more than a home built on a traditional foundation. Because of the nature of sand, Outer Banks homes may also settle over time.

If settling is a problem or if a home needs to be moved because of erosion or the owner's plans, a home on pilings can be raised up and reset or loaded onto a truck and moved fairly easily.

It is not uncommon for a home with a piling foundation to have a living area on the ground level. This floor is supported by a concrete slab that is at least 4" thick.

While most Outer Banks homes are on pilings, some are built entirely on a slab foundation. These homes may also have a concrete block footer underneath the perimeter of the slab to stabilize and anchor the structure.

In some year-round residential neighborhoods, traditional concrete block foundations are used.

Roof

Most Outer Banks homes have asphalt shingles. This type of roof is affordable and easily repaired if damaged by wind. Architectural shingles tend to perform better than less expensive shingles. Shingle damage is the most common damage after a large storm.

Metal roofs are becoming more common and do well in the coastal environment, but they generally cost much more initially than an asphalt shingle roof. In some neighborhoods cedar shingles are required or preferred by owners for their appearance.

Siding

Siding options are varied on the Outer Banks and the choice depends on the owner's tastes and budget. Cedar shakes are the most traditional option and have protected homes here for years. Cedar is naturally resistant to rot and withstands the wind, sun and sand well. As shakes age, they may turn a darker color that is typical of our historic homes. Treating shakes with a sealer may slow the darkening process and prolong the life of shakes by preventing them

from drying and cracking. Untreated shakes may last for years, and sealed shakes usually last longer, depending on the exposure to the elements and maintenance.

Cement fiberboard is a fairly new product, also known as the brand name "Hardiplank," that performs well here. Because it is a cement product it will not rot, although it will deteriorate if it is in constant contact with water. Cement fiberboard needs to be painted, but typically does not need to be repainted as often as wood. Since it does not rot and will not deteriorate, cement fiberboard may be the most permanent option.

Vinyl siding is an affordable and attractive option for many homes. It comes in a variety of styles, colors and prices. While it is often touted as "maintenance free," it is not uncommon for strips of vinyl to blow off one or more walls of a home here during a strong storm.

Wood lap siding is also a good option for homes here. Wood may be sealed, painted, or left natural. Like cedar shakes its longevity is dependent upon its exposure and maintenance. In some older homes wood sheet siding is painted or left untreated.

Asbestos shingles are also common in older homes. They continue to perform well here, although they should not be disturbed so that harmful particles are not released.

Water is the most damaging element to most types of siding and the walls they protect. If roofs and windows are maintained so that water is not allowed to enter, then rot can be prevented.

Windows

In new construction, windows are required to be rated to withstand wind and water penetration. Windows must have a DP rating of 45 or 50. This rating is based on the amount of expected water penetration during high winds. It is not a measure of the wind speed that the window can handle. Large windows maximize views and light, but may be more likely to be damaged in a storm.

Landscaping

Many yards at the beach are left natural. This may be the least expensive and most environmentally friendly option for landscaping. Many owners do not want to spend their time at the beach doing yard work.

The harsh conditions at the beach make it difficult to grow some types of plants that thrive inland. While irrigation and fertilizer can be used to make most plants grow here, using ground water on an island that has a very limited supply of fresh water for a vacation home is a poor choice for the environment. Smart owners who want more landscaping options use decorative grasses, cacti, and other drought and salt tolerant plants to create an attractive landscape without the need for excessive water.

If you are considering investing in a home at the beach, learn as much about the home as possible. The construction materials and the level of maintenance a home has received over time are very important indicators to determine how well it will continue to stand up to the elements in the future.

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