



# The El Paso Custom Home Building Checklist

Everything You Need to Know Before Breaking Ground

# Welcome

Building a custom home is one of the most exciting decisions you will ever make. It is also one of the biggest investments of your life — which is why going in prepared makes all the difference.

This checklist was created by the team at FireFox Homes to help El Paso families navigate the custom home building process with confidence. Whether you end up building with us or another builder, this guide will help you ask the right questions, avoid the most common pitfalls, and feel prepared at every stage.

Let's get started.

# 1. Setting a Realistic Budget

The most common regret we hear from homeowners is not understanding their true total cost before signing with a builder. Here is how to avoid that.

## Understanding Total Cost

Your custom home budget is not just the building cost. It includes land, site preparation, permits, utility connections, landscaping, and furnishings. A realistic budget accounts for all of these.

### Typical Cost Breakdown for El Paso Custom Homes

**Land:** 10–25% of total budget (varies significantly by location)

**Site Preparation:** 3–8% (grading, utilities, retaining walls if needed)

**Construction:** 60–75% (structure, finishes, systems, labor)

**Permits & Fees:** 1–3% (building permits, inspections, impact fees)

**Contingency:** 5–10% (always budget for the unexpected)

## The #1 Budget Mistake

Choosing your finishes and floor plan before understanding your lot. A beautiful design means nothing if the land underneath it requires \$30,000 in unexpected grading or utility work. Always start with a site evaluation.

## 2. Choosing the Right Lot in El Paso

Your lot is the foundation of everything — literally. Here is what to evaluate before buying.

- **Topography:** Flat lots are cheaper to build on. Sloped lots require grading and potentially retaining walls, which add cost but can offer better views.
- **Soil Conditions:** El Paso's desert soil can be expansive clay in some areas. A geotechnical report (usually \$1,500–\$3,000) can prevent expensive foundation issues.
- **Utility Access:** Confirm water, sewer, electric, and gas connections. Running utilities to a remote lot can cost \$10,000+.
- **Flood Zones:** Check the FEMA flood map for your lot. Flood zone properties require additional insurance and may have building restrictions.
- **HOA Restrictions:** If the lot is in an HOA, check for architectural guidelines, setback requirements, and minimum square footage mandates.
- **Orientation:** Consider sun exposure for energy efficiency and natural light. In El Paso, western exposure means intense afternoon sun.

## 3. 10 Questions to Ask Every Builder

Before signing with any builder, ask these questions. The answers will tell you everything you need to know about how they operate.

1. Can I see a detailed, line-item cost breakdown before I sign a contract?
2. What is your communication process during the build? How often will I receive updates?
3. What happens when an unexpected cost comes up? How is it handled?
4. Can I speak with your last three clients? (Not hand-picked references — the last three.)
5. What is included in your warranty? How long does it last?
6. Do you use allowances in your pricing? If so, how realistic are they?
7. What is your typical build timeline for a home of my size and scope?
8. Who will be my main point of contact during the build? Will I have direct access?
9. How do you handle change orders? Is there a markup?
10. Can I visit the job site? How often?

### What to Look For in the Answers

A great builder will answer every question directly and confidently. Watch for vagueness, deflection, or discomfort — these are signals that the builder may not be transparent about costs, timelines, or communication during your build.

## 4. Understanding the Custom Home Timeline

A typical custom home build in El Paso takes 8 to 14 months from design to move-in, depending on size and complexity. Here is a general breakdown of what to expect.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>What Happens</b>
Design & Planning	4-8 weeks	Floor plan, selections, permits, engineering
Site Preparation	2-4 weeks	Grading, foundation, utility connections
Framing & Rough-In	6-8 weeks	Structure, electrical, plumbing, HVAC
Interior Finishes	6-8 weeks	Drywall, paint, flooring, cabinets, fixtures
Final Details	2-4 weeks	Landscaping, punch list, final inspections
Walkthrough & Close	1-2 weeks	Final walkthrough, corrections, handover

## 5. Your Pre-Build Checklist

Print this page and use it as your planning companion. Check off each item as you complete it.

### ✓ Pre-Build Task

- Determine your total budget (including land, site prep, and contingency)
- Get pre-approved for construction financing
- Research lots and check flood zones, soil conditions, and utilities
- Get a geotechnical soil report on your preferred lot
- Research at least 3 custom home builders in El Paso
- Ask each builder the 10 questions from Section 3 of this guide
- Contact each builder's last 3 clients for references
- Review a detailed, line-item cost estimate from your preferred builder
- Understand the allowance structure and what is included
- Review the proposed timeline and communication plan
- Read and understand the full contract before signing
- Have an attorney review the contract if budget allows
- Confirm the warranty terms and what is covered
- Set up a dedicated email folder or binder for build documents
- Schedule your first design consultation

# Ready to Take the Next Step?

Schedule a free, no-pressure consultation with FireFox Homes. We'll walk your lot, discuss your vision, and give you an honest idea of what your dream home will cost.

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