

THE HOUSE OF THE WEEK

Plank and Beam Construction Saves on Labor and Materials

By DAVID L. BOWEN

Just like everyone else, architects know that prices are going up. They are particularly aware that home construction costs are rising.

Since their livelihood depends on people building houses, they're anxious to do everything possible in engineering a home to keep the cost down. One method becoming more popular in recent years is plank and beam construction.

This technique is not completely new. It has always been used in barns. It is becoming more widely used in residential home design because of the potential saving it offers in materials and labor.

Architect Caleb Hornbostel put the system to work in House of the Week X-90, a three-bedroom, two-bath ranch with clean, modern lines. He says that it could save as much as 11 per cent in total building cost.

What It Means

Generally speaking, plank and beam uses heavier structural members spaced wider apart than conventional construction. Ceiling beams are eliminated completely. There is a saving in lumber and an important saving in labor, since less pieces have to be cut and fitted. The method is approved by both FHA and VA regulations.

Strength is insured despite the absence of ceiling beams because the rooftruss is supported by the bearing partition which runs the width of the house directly below the roof peak.

Architects insist that plank and beam will be a common form of house construction 20 years from

now. At present, however, not all contractors are familiar with the system. Because of this, it may not be possible to realize the potential savings everywhere.

Additional Details

The wide spacing between floor joists and roof rafters demands a special material to insure firmness. The answer, says Architect Hornbostel, is steel decking — "light, strong, easy to install and inexpensive." On the roof the decking is covered by 1" thick rigid insulation board and then standard roofing shingles. On the floors, steel decking may be covered directly by tiles or other flooring material. The ceiling rafters are exposed from the inside and the underside of the steel decking serves as ceiling surface.

Because of the absence of conventional rafters, all ceilings except in the bath and closet rectangle in the bedroom section are

sloping. The habitable area is 1,495 square feet.

The living room, reached from a covered entrance porch, is well proportioned and features a corner fireplace wall. The dining room is shielded from the living room and has double windows looking out to the rear garden.

Location of closets and bathrooms serves to protect the bedrooms against the noises of the living end of the house. Bathrooms are back-to-back for economy with the family bathroom placed to make a powder room for guests unnecessary.

plan provides 1,495 square feet of living space and a total of six rooms.

Each bedroom has the sloping ceiling feature which makes every room in X-90 a decorator's delight. The master bedroom has a walk-in closet plus its own bath.

Well Planned Kitchen

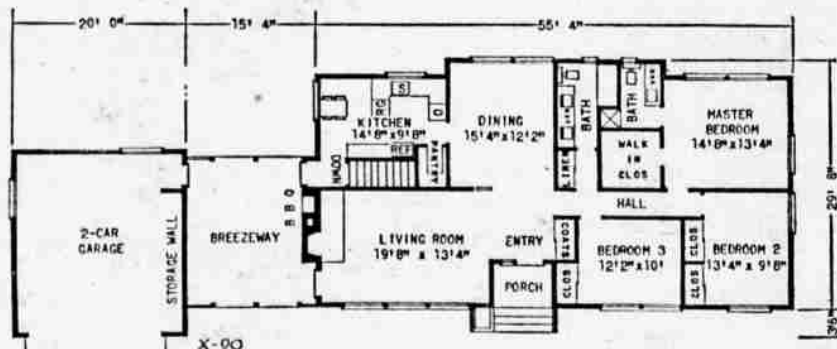
The U-shaped arrangement of kitchen counters and appliances puts the housewife right in the middle of her work territory, with all her tools within handy reach. There's a pantry closet as an extra surprise — every home needs one but few have it.

Service door is under the breezeway, so that the groceries will

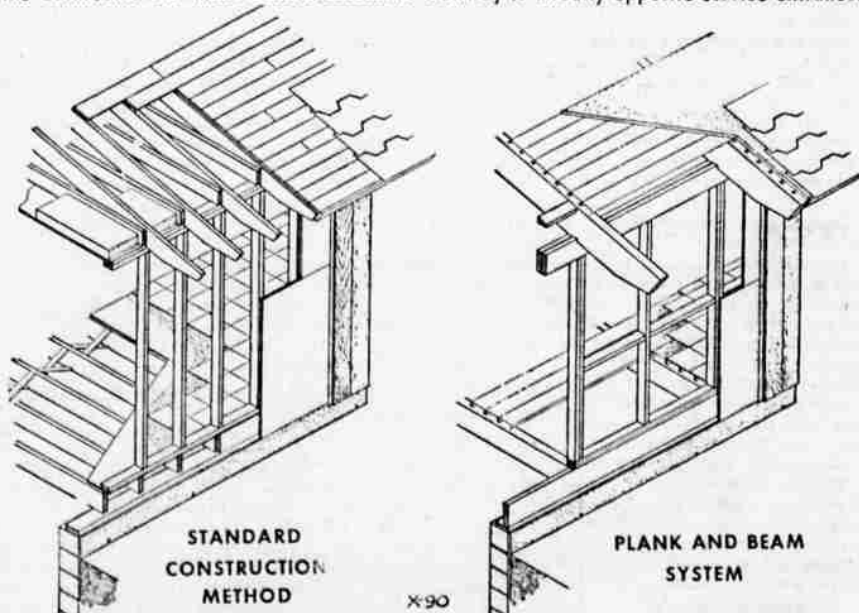
never get wet coming in from the garage in wet weather. Vestibule keeps dinette and kitchen draft-free.

This is a particularly good plan for those who regard basements as an expensive luxury. If the house is built on a slab, the heater room goes into the area shown as cellar stairs with the flue pipe running above head level to the fire place chimney.

Exterior surface is vertical siding. Excluding breezeway and garage, the house is 55' 4" by 29' 3". With these areas added, over all totals are 90' 8" and 33' 2"



FLOOR PLAN: Plank and beam construction provides sloping ceilings in all rooms except the bathrooms and most closets. Basement stairway is directly opposite service entrance.



SYSTEMS COMPARED: Cross-section at left shows the framework of the conventional house, with vertical studs, joists and rafters 16 inches on center. On the right, studs are 2 1/2 feet and rafters 5 feet on center. Plank and beam saves both materials and much cutting and fitting.

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