

Buy or build a house: why building to measure makes sense

Many clients hesitate between retrofitting an old house and building a new one. At PAPIK Group we review, calmly, the reasons that make bespoke construction a sound decision.

The question comes up regularly: buy an already built home and adapt it, or build from scratch a very high energy efficiency house designed to measure. There is no single answer valid for every family, but there is a set of reasons that, examined in order, explain why at PAPIK Group we recommend building a bespoke sustainable house when circumstances allow.

Building a house is a process not everyone is willing to manage. In exchange for that involvement, however, the result fits the real needs of whoever will live there, both present needs and foreseeable future ones. Below we set out the main considerations worth weighing before deciding.

Personalisation and fit to real life

Building your own house means it can be fully personalised to each family's tastes and needs. This is a decisive factor: finding an existing sustainable home on the market that fits exactly the needs of the moment and the prospects for the future is very difficult. When it is the client who decides the design, the layout and the priorities, the result suits their way of living.

Society has evolved, and that evolution has carried over into the space we live in. An old house may therefore not quite fit current needs and can create friction in daily routines. Window seats are a clear example: an element that makes little sense today and that in many homes has been reworked into reading nooks. Starting from scratch allows these mismatches to be resolved before they arise.

Quality control and control of the process

When you buy an existing home, control over how it was built is limited. Several factors are at play. The first is the passage of time: the construction sector has kept incorporating new materials, new techniques and new priorities, and changes in climate and society have been reflected in regulations that in recent years have raised energy efficiency requirements. The second is the purpose for which the home was built, because the priorities of a developer who wants to sell at an attractive margin are very different from those of someone building their own home.

Bespoke construction, by contrast, lets you decide how involved to be. Those who want to oversee every phase can have the information and propose solutions when needed. Those who prefer fewer headaches can rely on turnkey services or a project manager to handle everything, and move into the house exactly as planned.

Energy efficiency as the central axis

Energy efficiency is, without any doubt, the key aspect. Although the housing sector is evolving in this direction, building to measure with efficiency as the focus lets you choose a company specialised in very high efficiency houses, ensuring the best possible result on the chosen plot. On the property market it is hard to find products that certify efficiency with a seal such as Passivhaus; outside these certifications, being certain of a house's energy performance is difficult.

To this technical control we can add technological improvements. Home automation systems can also be fitted in an old house, but integrating them is far more complex than planning them from the design stage, when their relationship with the rest of the home's elements can be properly ordered.

Sustainable materials and ecological construction

Building to measure opens the door to choosing low environmental impact materials. Building with timber certified under the FSC seal is a non-extractive system that maintains forest mass and encourages an industry that fixes more CO₂ than it emits, favouring the growth of managed forests. The Eskimohaus houses we build at PAPIK Group act as CO₂ sinks and are a good starting point for anyone who wants to live in a healthier environment. The sector and its regulations increasingly prioritise ecological products, while toxic ones are gradually disappearing.

For those who especially value this dimension, the honest comparison is less with buying a flat than with what it means to retrofit an existing home against the coherence of a new build conceived from day one under sustainability criteria.

Cost, maintenance and the long-term horizon

The savings opportunities for a self-developer are broad. There are no intermediaries between builder and final client, so added costs are avoided. In projects with limited resources it is common for the client to take on some tasks that do not affect the structure or energy efficiency, such as painting, filling or laying the parquet, thereby reducing the cost. In addition, because the house is built to measure, nothing unnecessary is paid for.

Building new also removes the worry of short-term remodelling or replacing worn elements, a frequent expense right after buying an old house. A result planned from scratch is hard to match with a later adaptation. Choosing a company committed to quality saves significant short-term repairs, and planning low-maintenance strategies from the design stage minimises tasks that are otherwise routine. It is also worth bearing in mind that in a new build some elements carry a warranty of 2, 5 or 10 years depending on the type.

Buying solves the present; building to measure orders the future. The difference is not one of price, but of control over how a house will live for decades.