

# Thinking About a Barndominium? Read This First

Steel vs Wood Framing, Real Costs in TN, NC & SC, and What to Expect Before You Build

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**Andrew Signature Homes**

Engineered for Strength. Designed for Legacy.

Tennessee · North Carolina · South Carolina

Made with **GAMMA**

# What Is a Barndominium?

## FOUNDATION

A barndominium is a fully custom home that blends the structural bones of an agricultural or industrial building with the design standards of a high-end modern residence. Today's barndominiums bear almost no resemblance to the rural utility buildings that inspired the name. They are architect-designed, engineer-stamped, and finished to the same — or higher — standard as any custom traditional home on the market.

What sets them apart is the combination of structural openness and design flexibility. Because the load is carried by the frame rather than interior walls, floor plans can be dramatically more open than conventional construction allows. Ceiling heights of 14 to 20 feet are common. Great rooms, lofted mezzanines, connected garages or workshop spaces, and seamless indoor-outdoor flow are all achievable within a single structure.

The building envelope is typically built using either red iron steel framing or heavy timber and wood framing — each with its own set of tradeoffs in cost, construction timeline, and long-term performance. What both share is the ability to achieve truly exceptional results when paired with the right builder, the right finishes, and a serious commitment to craftsmanship.

### Open-Concept Design

Load-bearing frames eliminate the need for interior bearing walls, enabling dramatic, uninterrupted living spaces.

### High Ceilings

Standard barndominium builds regularly achieve 14–20 ft ceilings, creating architectural presence few traditional homes can match.

### Fully Custom

Every floor plan, finish, and feature is designed from scratch around your land, lifestyle, and long-term vision.

### Dual-Use Potential

Integrate garages, shops, or equipment bays seamlessly into the same structure as your living space.

# Steel vs. Wood Framing

## THE CORE DECISION

One of the first and most consequential decisions in any barndominium build is the framing system. Both steel and wood can produce a luxury finished product — but they perform differently in the field, behave differently with lenders and appraisers, and suit different design goals. Understanding the distinction before you commit to a builder is essential.

### Steel Frame

Built with red iron or cold-formed steel structural members. Steel framing is the backbone of industrial and commercial construction — and increasingly, the gold standard for high-performance residential builds.

- Extremely durable and engineered for longevity
- Resistant to pests, rot, mold, and fire
- Ideal for wide-open layouts with minimal interior columns
- Performs exceptionally well in high-wind and severe weather regions
- Financing can be more complex — requires lenders experienced with steel construction

### Wood Frame

Built using dimensional lumber and traditional framing methods — the same system used in virtually every custom home built in America over the past century.

- Familiar to lenders, appraisers, and inspectors
- Easier to modify mid-construction if design changes arise
- Broader contractor availability in rural markets
- Slightly more flexible for last-minute structural adjustments
- Requires proper treatment and maintenance against moisture and pests

📌 **Key Takeaway:** Both systems can be built to the highest luxury standards. The right choice depends on your budget, your design goals, and your long-term vision for the property. A qualified builder will help you evaluate which system aligns with your land, your financing, and the home you have in mind.

# Real Cost to Build in TN, NC & SC

\$ 2024 PRICING REFERENCE

Pricing transparency is rare in this industry. Most figures circulating online — \$85 to \$130 per square foot — reflect shell builds, owner-supplied labor, or DIY kit packages. A fully finished, turnkey barndominium built by a professional custom home builder is a fundamentally different product. The numbers below reflect real-world, all-in pricing for complete builds in our core markets.

| Tier                  | Tennessee              | North Carolina         | South Carolina         |
|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Base / Entry Luxury   | \$180 – \$240 / sq ft  | \$190 – \$250 / sq ft  | \$170 – \$230 / sq ft  |
| Mid-Range             | \$240 – \$300 / sq ft  | \$250 – \$310 / sq ft  | \$230 – \$290 / sq ft  |
| Full Luxury / Premium | \$300 – \$400+ / sq ft | \$310 – \$420+ / sq ft | \$290 – \$380+ / sq ft |

These ranges account for foundation work, structural framing, exterior envelope, mechanical systems (HVAC, plumbing, electrical), and interior finishes at a quality level appropriate for a custom luxury home. What they do not include: land acquisition, septic and well systems, driveway installation, or site clearing — all of which can add \$30,000 to \$150,000+ depending on the property.

**Important:** If a builder quotes you \$100–\$130 per square foot for a "turnkey" barndominium, ask exactly what is included. Low bids almost always exclude critical site work, interior finish allowances are inadequate, or the builder lacks the experience to deliver at a luxury standard.

# What Drives the Cost of Your Build

## COST FACTORS

Every build is different, and the variables that move the needle on price are rarely what buyers expect. Understanding the primary cost drivers before you select a site — let alone a builder — gives you the leverage to make smarter decisions and avoid the budget overruns that plague buyers who skip this step.

### Land Conditions

Clearing, grading, rock removal, and access road installation are site-specific costs that vary wildly. A heavily wooded or sloped lot can add \$40,000–\$80,000 before a single wall is framed. Always commission a site evaluation before finalizing your budget.

### Foundation Type

Slab-on-grade is the most common and cost-effective choice for barndominiums. Pier-and-beam or full basement options are available but increase cost and complexity significantly. Soil bearing capacity and frost depth requirements drive the engineering spec.

### Size and Layout Complexity

A straightforward rectangular footprint is the most efficient to build. L-shaped or multi-wing floor plans increase perimeter-to-area ratios, add framing complexity, and drive up roofline costs. Larger builds benefit from per-square-foot cost efficiency, but complex shapes offset that advantage.

### Interior Finishes & Upgrades

Flooring, cabinetry, countertops, lighting packages, plumbing fixtures, and trim details are where the gap between a \$220/sq ft build and a \$380/sq ft build is made. Finish allowances are the single most common source of budget overruns in custom home contracts.

### Utilities & Site Work

Well drilling, septic system design and installation, electric service runs, and propane infrastructure are often excluded from base price quotes. In rural TN, NC, and SC, utility costs alone can range from \$25,000 to over \$80,000 depending on the site.

### Permitting & Local Requirements

County-by-county permitting requirements, engineered drawings, energy code compliance, and inspections all carry real costs. Some rural counties move efficiently; others add months and thousands of dollars in fees and revisions to the process.

# The Honest Pros & Cons

## UNFILTERED ASSESSMENT

No sales pitch. Below is a straightforward assessment of what barndominiums do exceptionally well — and where they fall short. Knowing both sides before you commit is the difference between a successful build and an expensive lesson.

### Strengths

- Dramatic open floor plans with soaring ceiling heights
- Structural flexibility — fewer interior bearing walls
- Steel builds offer exceptional resistance to pests, rot, and fire
- Faster build timelines in many cases vs. traditional custom homes
- Unique modern-industrial aesthetic that stands apart
- Seamless integration of garage, shop, or utility space
- Well-suited to rural and acreage settings where HOAs are absent

### Limitations to Know

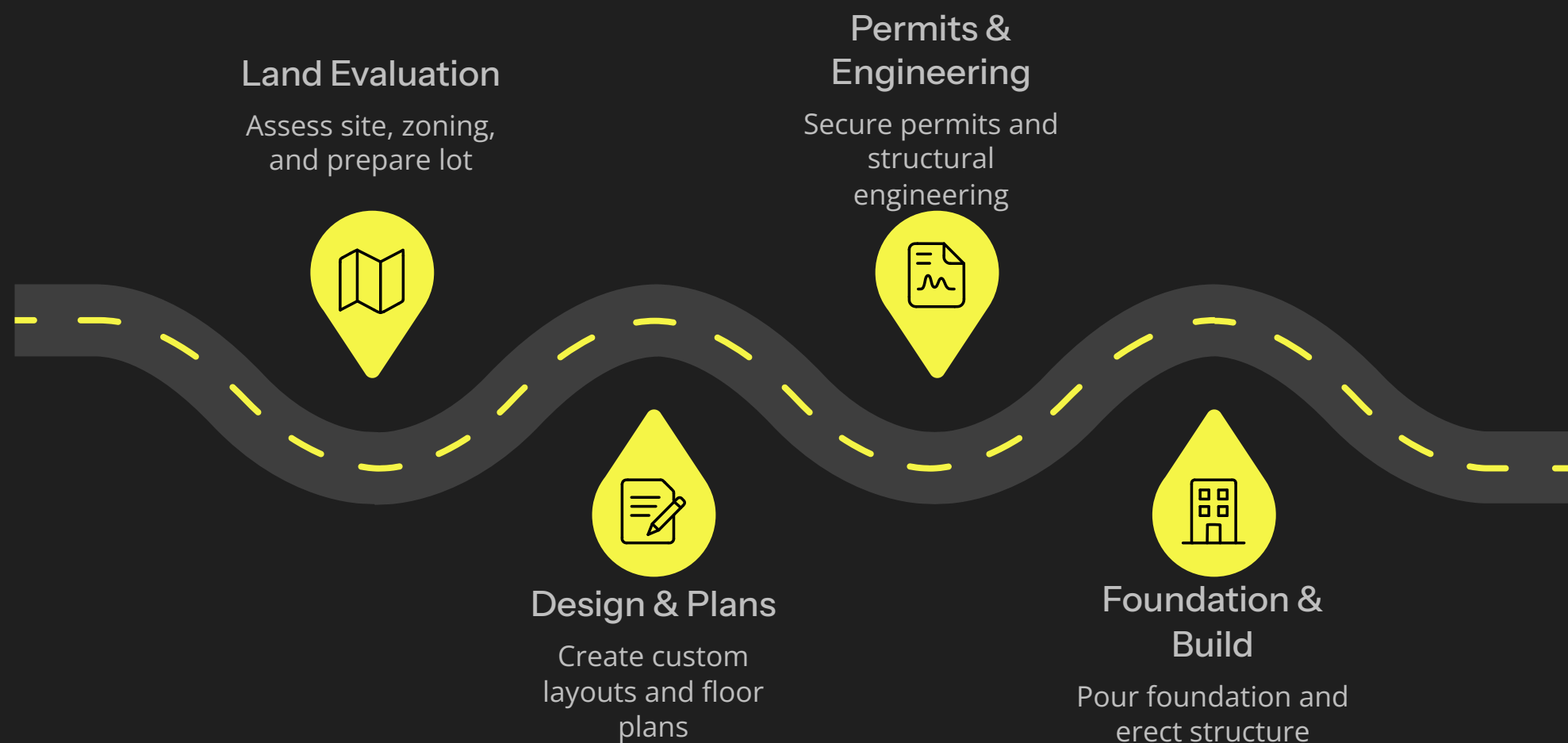
- Not always cheaper than a traditionally framed custom home at comparable finish levels
- Steel construction financing is more complex — fewer lenders are experienced with it
- Appraisal challenges exist in markets with limited comparable sales
- Low-budget builds produce low-quality results — the aesthetic falls apart without quality finishes
- Site work and utility costs are chronically underestimated in online cost guides
- Not appropriate for neighborhoods with restrictive HOA covenants

A barndominium built right — with engineered framing, quality finishes, and an experienced builder — is a remarkable home. A barndominium built cheap is one of the costliest mistakes in residential construction.

# The Build Process, Start to Finish

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Understanding the sequence of a custom barndominium build helps you ask better questions, set realistic expectations, and hold your builder accountable at every phase. From raw land to move-in day, here is how a well-managed build should unfold when working with an experienced design-build firm.



Each phase has its own timeline, cost exposure, and decision points. The most critical — and most often rushed — phases are the first two. Buyers who commit to a site without a thorough evaluation, or who proceed to construction with an incomplete design, account for the majority of costly mid-build changes and overruns. Invest the time upfront. It pays back at every subsequent phase.

01

## Land Evaluation & Preparation

Soil testing, topographic survey, clearing and grading assessment, utility feasibility, and access road planning. This phase defines what your site will cost and whether it is suitable for your target floor plan.

03

## Engineering & Permitting

Structural engineering, energy code compliance, permit applications, and county approvals. Timeline varies significantly by county and project complexity.

05

## Interior Construction & Finishes

Mechanical rough-ins, insulation, drywall, flooring, cabinetry, trim, fixtures, and all interior finish work. This phase consumes the majority of total build time and budget.

02

## Custom Design & Floor Plan

Architectural drawings, interior layout, ceiling height decisions, exterior envelope selection, and finish-level planning. Everything downstream is priced from a complete and finalized design.

04

## Foundation & Structural Build

Foundation installation, framing erection, roof system, and exterior sheathing. The structural phase moves quickly on a steel build — often 6–10 weeks from permit to dry-in.

06

## Final Walkthrough & Move-In

Punch list completion, final inspections, certificate of occupancy, and buyer orientation. A thorough pre-close walkthrough protects both parties and ensures every detail is addressed before keys are transferred.

# Is a Barndominium Right for You?

## DECISION FRAMEWORK

A barndominium is not the right choice for every buyer — and the worst outcome in this industry is a buyer who commits to the wrong building type because the marketing was compelling. Below is an honest framework to help you assess whether a custom barndominium aligns with your situation, your land, and your goals.

### A Barndominium Is Likely the Right Fit If:

- You want dramatic open-concept living with high ceilings and flexible interior layouts
- You are building on your own land in a rural or semi-rural setting
- You value structural durability and long-term low maintenance
- You want to integrate a garage, shop, or equipment bay into the main structure
- You are working with a builder experienced in design-build barndominium construction
- You are prepared for a custom process that requires active decision-making throughout

### A Traditional Custom Home May Be a Better Fit If:

- You prefer a neighborhood setting with established comparable sales for appraisal purposes
- You need straightforward conventional financing with minimal complexity
- Your community has HOA covenants that restrict non-traditional architectural styles
- You want maximum design flexibility in a traditional floor plan configuration
- Your priority is resale liquidity in a well-established residential market

The most successful barndominium buyers share a common profile: they own their land, they have a clear vision for how they want to live in the space, and they approach the build as a long-term investment rather than a short-term transaction. If that describes you, a custom barndominium built by the right team is one of the most remarkable homes you can build.

# Why Andrew Signature Homes

☆ DESIGN-BUILD SPECIALISTS

Not every builder who will take your deposit has built a luxury barndominium. The skill set required — managing steel erection, coordinating engineered systems, delivering high-end finishes in non-traditional structural envelopes — is a distinct competency that most general contractors have not developed. Andrew Signature Homes was built specifically around this type of work.



## Fully Custom Design-Build

We manage the entire process — from initial site evaluation and architectural design through construction and final walkthrough. One team, one contract, complete accountability.



## Steel & Wood Framing Options

We are equally experienced with red iron steel and traditional wood framing. We help you evaluate which system is right for your land, your budget, and your long-term goals — without bias toward either option.



## Build on Your Land

We specialize in rural and acreage builds. Site evaluation, utility planning, and access coordination are core competencies — not afterthoughts. We know what it takes to build where others won't.



## Trusted Lender Relationships

We maintain established relationships with construction lenders experienced in barndominium financing — including steel construction loans. We help you navigate the financing process with confidence.



## Serving TN, NC & SC

We build across Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Deep regional knowledge means we understand local permitting timelines, material availability, and county-specific requirements.

# Ready to Start Your Build?

 NEXT STEP

Building a custom home is one of the most significant financial and personal decisions you will make. It deserves a builder who will be honest with you from the first conversation — about costs, timelines, tradeoffs, and what your specific site and goals actually require. That is how we operate.

"We don't sell barndominiums. We build the home you've been designing in your head — and we do it right."

— **Andrew Signature Homes**

Schedule a consultation with our team. We will review your land, discuss your design goals, and give you a straightforward assessment of what your build will require. No obligation. No sales pressure. Just an honest conversation with people who know how to build.

## Step 1

Schedule your consultation — free, no obligation, focused on your specific project.

## Step 2

We evaluate your land, review your vision, and outline a realistic path to your build.

## Step 3

We develop a custom design-build proposal with transparent pricing and a clear timeline.

## Step 4

We build your home — on your land, to your standard, with no compromises on quality.

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