



Types of Residential Foundations

Most everyone knows the two main types of foundations here in Texas: slab, and pier-and-beam. But did you know there are two other types of foundation systems you may run across? Know how to identify each foundation type and you'll be the sharpest Realtor in your office!

Concrete Slab: We all know what a slab foundation is; it's the most prevalent of all foundations in the DFW Metroplex area. It is the fastest and cheapest of the foundation types, and can be quite stable if constructed right. In a slab, the floors of the home are usually only a few inches higher than the surrounding soil. Slabs are durable, but are very susceptible to settlement and must be watered regularly to maintain consistent soil moisture levels.

Pier-And-Beam: This is basically a wood deck built on top of piers (typically concrete), and often has a concrete grade beam (wall) around the perimeter to hold up the brick. A pier-and-beam has floors typically at least a foot or more above the level of the soil around the home, and should have foundation vents around the outside of the home just above the concrete grade beam. You will normally have to walk up several steps to reach floor level in this type of home. Pier-and-Beam foundations are traditionally more stable than are slabs, and are easy to re-model as plumbing and electrical can be easily relocated. However, due to the prevalence of wood in the supporting foundation structure, pier-and-beam homes are very susceptible to foundation problems resulting from compression, sagging, warping, rotting, and insect damage.

Block-And-Base: While very similar to a pier-and-beam in its basic construction, the block-and-base is mostly found on older and rural homes. The block-and-base foundation consists of blocks made of concrete, cinder block, or wood (most often Bois D-Arc stumps) sitting either on top of the ground or on somewhat larger concrete pads on top of the ground. A wood "deck" is built on top of these blocks or stumps and the house is constructed from there. These homes usually have wood or aluminum siding extending all the way down to ground level, and may or may not have foundation vents installed in the siding. You will normally have to walk up several steps to floor level in this type of home. This foundation type has the same detriments as a pier-and-beam, and is also more prone to experience the affects of shifting soils.

Screeded Slab: The last and most mysterious of the foundation types is the ever-elusive screeded slab. The screeded slab is a combination of both a slab and a pier-and-beam, in that it consists of a concrete slab foundation with a wood deck built on top. The house will appear to be a slab, but will have a slightly higher than normal floor height from the outside soil level. Also, the floors will be wood and have a hollow sound when tapped or when walking with heels. The house will usually not have foundation vents, although we have found a few with small, modified vent "slits" above slab level. The screeded slab, built to have the "stability of a slab with the warmth of a pier-and-beam" has inherited the worst traits of both primary foundations: the instability of a slab combined with the wood problems of a pier-and-beam, but without the access to be able to address these problems without removing the floors.