

Houses in the UK and USA

■ Introduction

House building is a major industry in the Western world. Every year banks and loan associations lend huge amounts of money to people who want to buy a house. **Real-estate agencies** make buying and selling easier because they have lists of houses for sale. Architects and designers plan the house to fit the needs of the future owners. Construction workers make these plans come to life. Interior decorators and designers make rooms attractive and pleasant to live in. Styles of houses vary widely according to the region and period: here is an outline of the most common house styles in the industrialized world.

■ Housing in the UK

A **terraced** or **row house** is a style that began in Europe in the late 17th century, where a row of identical houses shared side walls. The term terrace was borrowed from garden terraces by English architects of the late Georgian period to describe streets of houses whose uniform fronts and uniform height created an elegant ensemble. By the early Victorian period, a *terrace* denoted any style of housing where individual houses repeating one design are joined together into rows. The style was used for workers' housing in industrial districts during the great industrial boom following the Industrial Revolution.

Semi-detached housing consists of pairs of houses built side by side as units sharing a **party wall** and usually in such a way that each house's layout is a mirror image of its twin. This type of houses can be considered a half-way state between terraced housing and single-family detached homes. In the British housing boom of the 1920s and 1930s, semi-detached houses **sprang up** in the suburbs of large cities and were popular with middle class home owners who preferred them to terraced houses.

A **single-family detached home** is a free-standing residential building. Most single-family homes are built on **allotments** larger than the structure itself, adding an area surrounding the house (a *yard* in American English or a

garden in British English). Garages are usually beside the house. There are advantages and disadvantages to single-detached homes. Advantages are that the entire space around the building is private and there are generally no **property management fees** such as those associated with blocks of flats. On the other hand, all maintenance, repair costs and lawn **upkeep** costs are at the owner's expense.

A **block of flats** is a building that contains more than one **dwelling unit**, most of which are designed for domestic use, but sometimes includes shops or offices. The apartment house, as it is known today, first appeared in Paris and other large European cities in the 18th century, when tall blocks of flats for middle-class residents began appearing. By the mid-19th century, large numbers of low-cost apartments were under construction **to house** the growing number of industrial workers in cities and towns across Europe and in the United States. These buildings were often **shabby**, poorly designed, unhealthy, and overcrowded. Since World War II the demand for apartment housing has continued to grow as a result of continued urbanization. In 21st century high-rise buildings, hundreds of flats are packed together saving precious land, but totally losing the concept of a "good neighbourhood".

■ Housing in the USA

70% of Americans live in single-family homes. Most detached single-family homes are located in suburbs throughout North America. The single-family type of home exploded after World War 2. During this time, a mass migration to the suburbs took place as soldiers returned home and **settled down** into family life. Before WW2, only 13% of people lived in suburbs. In the last decades, most people seek to live in single-family homes, although with the baby boomer generation decreasing in size, demand for alternatives to single-family homes is rapidly growing. Some of these alternatives include condominiums (condos), apartments, and town homes.

allotment: *appezzamento di terreno*

dwelling unit: *unità abitativa*

to house: *alloggiare*

party wall: *muro divisorio*

property management fees: *spese condominiali*

real estate agency: *agenzia immobiliare*

to settle down: *stabilirsi*

shabby: *squallido*

to spring up: *sorgere*

upkeep: *manutenzione*

■ Types of American houses

Bungalow – A bungalow is a small, square single-story home with front porch. Often, a single dormer window is built into the pitched roof of the attic. These types of homes began being built in the USA in the early 20th century. Bungalows are found all over the USA nowadays.

Rancher – A ranch-style home is also a single-story home. However, a rancher has a larger, more rectangular form than a bungalow does. The rancher home derives from the wide Spanish farm style of home. Ranchers grew in popularity during the 1950s when large areas of land turned into urban suburbs. This type of house has plenty of open outdoor spaces, given that they require larger-than normal lots.

Town home – A townhome is similar to a row home because it shares one or two walls with other homes. Townhomes are usually two or three stories tall, but some stand even taller. The owners of a townhome own both the interior and exterior of the unit, and are therefore financially responsible for maintenance of the exterior as well as the interior.

Mobile Home – A mobile home is a mobile structure that can be towed, but isn't designed for frequent towing the way a recreational vehicle is. Mobile homes are built in factories, towed to a lot, and remain in place. These homes are inexpensive. Mobile home parks exist where the mobile home is owned by a person or family, but they rent the lot where it sits. In other cases, people live in mobile homes on property they own.

1 Read the passage and check whether the following sentences are true (T) or false (F).

1. A lot of people work to build a house.
2. A terraced house is a house with a large terrace.
3. Terraced houses were used as workers' housing.
4. A semi-detached house shares a wall with another house.
5. Semi-detached houses are popular with middle class owners.
6. A single-family detached house has a garage, but not a garden.
7. The maintenance costs of a detached house are totally charged to the owner.
8. A block of flats only contains offices.
9. The first blocks of flats appeared in Paris.
10. The urbanisation is not the cause of the increasing demand of apartment housing.

T	F
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2 Read the text **Housing in the USA** and answer the questions.

1. When and why did the request for single-family homes explode?
2. What are the alternatives to single-family homes?
3. What are the characteristics of a bungalow?
4. When did bungalows start to be built?
5. What does a ranch-style home derive from?
6. When did ranchers grow in popularity?
7. What is the townhome owner responsible for?
8. What is a mobile home?
9. Where are they produced?
10. Are people who live in mobile homes the real owners of the land?



Ranch House

3 Are there houses similar to those described in the text in the area where you live? Share your opinion with your classmates.