



Glossary of Building Terms

Here are some of the common terms you may encounter as you become familiar with the construction methods and features of your home:

Arches	A curved symmetrical structure spanning an opening and typically supporting the weight of a bridge, roof, or wall above it.
Bearing Wall	A wall that supports any vertical load in addition to its own weight.
Breaker Panel	The electrical box that distributes electric power entering the home to each branch circuit (each plug and switch) and composed of circuit breakers.
Brush Coating	A cement coating that is applied to the exterior surface of the foundation wall for aesthetic purposes.
Caulking	Sealant applied to the edges of windows, doorframes, and in areas to create a waterproof seal.
Damper	Slats on a floor register or flap inside ductwork that can be moved to allow airflow to be adjusted.
Downspouts	A pipe, usually of metal, for carrying rainwater down from the roof's horizontal gutters.
Eavestrough	Gutter on the bottom edge of roof to collect and convey rainwater to the ground.
Fascia	Horizontal boards attached to rafter/truss ends at the eaves and along gables. Roof drain gutters are attached to the fascia.
Flashing	Plastic or metal liner behind brickwork conducting water to the outside of the wall.
Float Rod	Metal or plastic rod in toilet to which float is attached; it is adjustable and used to regulate water levels in the tank.
Flush Ball	Flush lever lifts this device on the toilet to allow water to flow from the tank into the bowl.
Flush Ball Valve	This is an opening in which water flows from the toilet tank to the bowl.
G.F.I. Outlet	A Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI, GFI) is an ultra sensitive plug designed to shut off all electric current. Used in bathrooms, kitchens, exterior waterproof outlets, garage outlets, and "wet areas". Has a small reset button on the plug.



Hose Bib	Exterior faucet.
Ice Dam	This is a build up of ice under your roof shingles at the eave causing shingles to lift.
Insulation R Rating	R-values and their metric equivalent, RSI values, are a way of labeling the effectiveness of insulating materials. The higher the R-value or RSI value, the more resistance the material has to the movement of heat. Insulation products sold in Canada are labeled with R and RSI values. Provincial building codes specify minimum R (or RSI) values for new construction, with different values for different applications.
Joists	Main supporting wood structure beneath the sub-floor.
Keystone	A central stone at the summit of an arch, locking the whole together.
Load-Bearing	This is a wall in the house that directly supports the rest of the structure.
Low E Argon	Low-E argon windows are designed to minimize the effects of the outside climate on the interior temperature. Between each pane of glass, low-E argon windows contain argon gas, which is considerably more effective at reflecting heat than regular air. This means that unwanted heat is deterred from entering the home and interior heat is prevented from leaving.
Muriatic Acid	Cleaning agent that can be purchased at most hardware stores.
Overflow Pipe	Tube in the toilet tank that sits upright to prevent the tank from overflowing if the float rod is not adjusted properly.
Plastic Laminate	Plastic sheeting that is laminated to particleboard.
Quarter Round	A small trim molding that has the cross section of a quarter circle.
Re-pointing	Reapplying mortar between bricks.
Register	Plastic or metal grate connected to heating system, where warm air is sent into a room.
Risers	Each of the vertical boards closing the spaces between the treads of stairways.
Shakes	A wood roofing material, normally cedar or redwood, produced by splitting a block of the wood along the grain line.



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Soldier Course	A soldier course is a row of bricks all oriented in the same direction which have been placed on their sides so that the long, narrow side of the brick shows.
Soffit	The underside of an architectural structure such as an arch or overhanging eaves.
String, Stringer	A timber or other support for cross members in floors or ceilings. In stairs, the supporting member for stair treads, usually a notched 2 X 12 inch plank.
Subfloor	Plywood or particleboard placed over floor joists as a surface for application of the finished floor.
Survey Pin	Metal spikes driven into the ground to mark exactly where the corners of a property are located.
Thermopane	A "thermopane" or double-paned window has two panes of glass, separated by a trapped air space. The trapped air acts as an insulator, reducing heat loss through the glass.
Tie-Rod Hole	A hole that remains in the foundation once the form tie rods are removed.
Transom	A crosspiece separating a door or the like from a window or fan light above it.
Tub Skirt	An upward or downward vertical extension of a bathroom fixture.
Weatherstripping	Rubber strips used around all exterior doors producing a weatherproof seal.
Weeping Tile	A porous pipe used for underground drainage.