

Bureau of the Census Statistical Brief

Home Sweet Home —

America's Housing, 1973 to 1993

Between 1973 and 1993, the Nation added 31 million homes.

The national housing inventory reached 107 million units in 1993. Over the course of the past two decades, housing growth has been concentrated in the South and West. Nearly 7 of every 10 homes constructed since 1975 were located in these two regions. Twenty years ago, 32 and 18 percent, respectively, of the homes in the United States were located in the South and West. By 1993, these respective regional shares had grown to 36 and 21 percent.

The condition of our housing improved.

Between 1973 and 1993, U.S. households became more likely to have —

- G Complete kitchens.
- G Complete plumbing facilities.
- G Central heat.
- G Central air conditioning.



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G Adequate elbow room. As occupied housing units grew larger (from a median of 5.1 to 5.5 rooms), the typical household became smaller (dropping from 2.5 to 2.3 persons). Consequently, the proportion of homes that were crowded (more than one person per room) was cut in half, from 6 to 3 percent.

At the same time, they became less likely to have interior problems, such as —

- G Peeling paint
- G Open cracks.

The graph below illustrates these improvements.

Homes grew older.

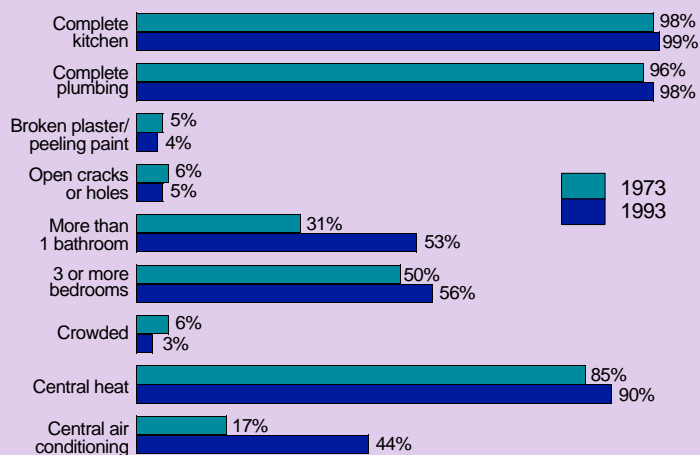
In 1973, American homes were a median of 22 years old; 20 years later, the typical home was 28 years of age.

More and more homes were heated by electricity.

In 1973, piped gas was the main heating fuel for the majority (55 percent) of the Nation's occupied homes. Fuel oil and electricity, at 25 and 10 percent, respectively, followed. Twenty years later, piped gas was still tops (51 percent), but electricity and fuel oil had traded places (27 and 12 percent, respectively). Electricity's jump may be

In Most Respects, the Quality of Our Homes Improved

Percent of occupied housing units with selected characteristics: 1973 and 1993



Note: A home has complete kitchen facilities if it contains a sink with piped water, a range or cookstove, and a refrigerator; it has complete plumbing facilities if it has hot and cold piped water, a flush toilet, and a bathtub or shower. Crowded means more than one person per room.

Our Homes Are Still Our Castles!

On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the best), 82 percent of owners and 60 percent of renters in 1993 rated their home at least an 8. Using the same scale, 77 percent of owners and 59 percent of renters gave their neighborhood a comparable rating.

due to the increasing popularity of the heat pump. In 1993, 9 percent of all households — and 21 percent of occupied homes constructed since 1989 — used them. In 1973, by comparison, heat pumps were so rare that we didn't even ask respondents whether they had one!

Homeownership rate remained practically unchanged.

About 65 percent of homes in 1973 and 1993 were occupied by their owners. As in 1973, homeownership rates were higher in the Midwest and South than in the Northeast and West.

Housing became less affordable.

In constant 1993 dollars, the median income of families and primary individuals who owned their homes slipped 2 percent from 1973 to 1993 — from \$37,400 to \$36,500. Renters suffered an even

We're Crazy About Our Comforts

There are a lot of amenities that a homeowner doesn't absolutely need, but would probably agree they're nice to have. Fortunately, in 1993, many owners *did* have conveniences such as dishwashers (61 percent), usable fireplaces (42 percent), separate dining rooms (55 percent), multiple living/ recreation rooms (45 percent) and garages or carports (74 percent).

These amenities were even more prevalent in "new" homes — those built during the 4 years prior to the 1993 American Housing Survey. More than 8 in 10 owners in such homes (82 percent) had dishwashers, while 55 percent had usable fireplaces, 59 percent separate dining rooms, and 50 percent multiple living/ recreation rooms.

greater erosion in median income — \$23,400 to \$18,900, or a 19-percent drop.

While incomes were declining, home values and rents were rising. The median value of owner-occupied homes (in constant 1993 dollars) rose 10 percent — from \$78,400 to \$86,500. Likewise, the median monthly amount paid in rent and utilities rose 12 percent, to \$487.

Households became less likely to be maintained by married couples ...

In 1973, about 75 percent of all owner-occupied housing units were maintained by married couples; the same was true for 48 percent of all renter-occupied units. Twenty years later, the corresponding proportions had declined to 65 percent and 30 percent, respectively. At the same time, multi-person households maintained by single women became more common (a 1-in-8 chance in 1973, 1 in 5 in 1993).

... or contain children ...

In 1973, 43 percent of householders lived with their own children under age 18. Two decades later, the proportion had dipped to 37 percent.

... but more apt to be maintained by elderly persons.

Elderly persons maintained 19 percent of the Nation's households in 1973, and 22 percent in 1993.

More information:

American Housing Survey for the United States in 1993. Current Housing Reports. Series H150/93. Contact Customer Services (301-457-4100) for ordering information.

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Happy 20th, AHS!

Housing is often our biggest expense. And it's an important reflection of how we see ourselves. For these and many other reasons, analysts in business, government, and academia study the Nation's housing very closely. But until 1973, Census Bureau data on the U.S. housing inventory was rather sporadic, coming only from the once-a-decade Census of Population and Housing (which includes relatively few housing questions), periodic one-time sample surveys, and a survey of vacant housing units.

Enter the source of the data in this Brief — the *American Housing Survey (AHS)*. First conducted in 1973, it now takes place nationally every other year. Thus the 1993 AHS, the latest from which data are available, marked the survey's 20th anniversary. Conducted by the Census Bureau and sponsored by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the AHS is the most up-to-date, comprehensive source of information on our Nation's housing. Planners, policymakers, scholars, and other researchers have come to rely heavily on it.