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BUILD IT YOUR WAY

A slew of new websites allow buyers to design homes themselves – from floor plans and the structure to interiors and furnishings. Doing it yourself could save both time and money, say experts

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For Mumbai resident and high-school teacher Amolisha Phadke, 37, it wasn't about the cost of hiring a professional architect. It was about using her savings to build the home she had always visualised. "When we bought a plot for our farmhouse in Shahpur, I knew exactly what I wanted it to be," says Phadke. "However, I spoke with a few architects who were all trying to sell me mundane ideas. Instead, I used an online tool to design the home myself, and it turned out exactly as I had pictured." Phadke learned about four-month-old BuildMyGhar.com through a friend – a website where you can customise floor plans and homes. "I wanted a porch and a patio, in European style," she adds. "The home experts helped me with the technicalities." As in Phadke's case, many new online tools are empowering buyers to design homes themselves – from the floor plan and structure, to the interiors and furnishings – with little or no professional help. "The idea is to involve buyers in the process of home-

making right from Day 1," says Puneet Mittal, CEO and founder of BuildMyGhar. "With increasingly erratic work hours and social obligations, it is more convenient to approach an online service than to set up frequent meetings with an architect," says Raj Iyer, founder and chief managing director, iCustomModel.com, a website that lets you design furniture and furnishings. "While you have full control on the design, a skilled team of professionals will vet each, and offer multiple solutions to any roadblock you face. You can choose from a list of creative experts to guide you until the product is made. You can track the product's progress online."

Make sure the do-it-yourself approach works for you. It will require commitment, and hours of making sure the decisions are in place. You will also have to be persistent to make sure the task is finished properly.

SS SAHU, chief content engineer, VSM Group



However, while the process saves a large amount of time and money, it is a risk to not have professionals directly overseeing the project. Also, determine early on whether the do-it-yourself approach is the right one for you. "It will require a lot of commitment, and hours of making sure you have permissions in place," says SS Sahu, chief construction engineer at engineering consultancy firm, VSM Consultants. "You will also have to be persistent to make sure the task is finished, and finished as you envisioned it."

Isn't as easy as it looks. "If making homes were so easy, every developer would take this route. Also, prefabricated construction is quick, but expensive. So, buyers must keep tabs on the expenses." Here's a look at the websites championing the do-it-yourself ways.

BUILDMYGHAR.COM
Launched in November 2015, Buildmyghar.com is an online platform where home buyers can design architectural plans and have them constructed on a plot they own. You can also buy plots on the platform.

plans, and modify it to suit your requirements. "We plan to launch approximately 500 such plans over the next six months," says Puneet Mittal, founder and CEO. Once the plan is in place, the construction typically takes place within 60 days, using prefabrication construction technology, at the company's Smart factory. Deepak Adhikari, a 58-year-old government employee has bought a two-acre plot in Odhavindan. With retirement only two years away, he needs to move in with his family soon and can't depend

on his parents' aid, and I can't afford to come down to India every few months to supervise construction," says Lakshmi. "With Charplanner, I could remotely design a home best suited to my parents' requirements and my children's interests, and track its progress online from here."

constructing online and he is overseeing the floor plans," says Adhikari. "We find it very convenient – initially we chose a plan with three rooms, but with just a few clicks, modified it to accommodate a fourth one." Cost: Starts at Rs 1,011 per square foot for the exterior structure; Rs 1,600 per square foot for interiors.

CHARPLANNER.COM
Charplanner.com, launched in August 2014, is an online platform for buyers to connect with architects, civil engineers, interior designers and marketing professionals to shape their 'dream homes.' Buyers can choose from a range of existing plans – for duplex, bungalows, villas, small houses, farm houses, etc – or, with help from certified architects in their vicinity, make a whole new plan. "Once the floor plan receives the necessary approvals, we can deliver the drawing in 15 working days," says Pratyaksh, founder, Charplanner. Once the plan is ready, users can either hire local contractors to execute them, or work with Charplanner's contractors. If you choose the latter, you can track construction progress online. Charplanner is seeing a large number of NRI enquiries, their most recent customers coming from Germany, South Africa, Muscat and Oman. Sahir Lakshmi, 41, general manager at a hotel in Muscat used Charplanner's services last year to build a bungalow in Wada, in Maharashtra's Palghar district. "My parents are old, and I can't afford to come down to India every few months to supervise construction," says Lakshmi. "With Charplanner, I could remotely design a home best suited to my parents' requirements and my children's interests, and track its progress online from here."

DESIGN YOUR OWN HOME ACCESSORIES



A coffee table with pull-out panels, designed by a user.

Kustanmaki.com
Say you want to revamp your home to be forest-themed. The next step is to look for elements to fit the theme – green furniture, appropriate decors, ceramic pots with leafy motifs, earthy eggs and so on. On a website called Kustanmaki.com, users can customise furniture, wall decors, upholstery and accessories themselves. Aahana Pareek, a 32-year-old fashion designer recently used the website to create a wall decal for her grandmother. "It was her 75th birthday and I customised a decal to look like her paternal home in Jaipur. She was thrilled," says Pareek.

Currently under construction, Lakshmi's design has more open spaces for fresh air, and play areas for the kids. Cost: Rs 28,000 for a plan for a 4,000-sq-ft home

FOYR.COM
Been scouting around Pinterest for interior designs, but can't find someone to execute them for you? Foyr.com, launched in July 2015, helps customers create their designs, and execute them. Using 3D technology, buyers can experiment with various patterns, colours, textures and product options, to get a feel of space utilisation.

"A lot of websites inspire you with ideas, but few help you execute them," says Vikas Kumbhar, head-marketing and strategic growth, Foyr. "That's where we come in." As your design progresses, a real-time rate card will help keep tabs of your expenses. When 30-year-old lawyer Sandeep Deshmukh bought a flat in Pune, he had a clear idea of what the interiors should be like. "Since the project is on a hilltop, we wanted it to have a very earthy feel. Therefore, I wanted

a contemporary look with subtle hues and a lot of wood," says Deshmukh. He adds, "While the website offered many good ideas, we used our own for the bar area, balcony and my daughter's room." Cost: Rs 3 lakh to Rs 12 lakh; prices may vary according to customisation and size of the flat.

PIXELTEK
How gloomy will your room get if it rains outside? Will the curtains look different in the day from the night? Will white light look better, or should you go with yellow? Using a virtual reality headset, Oculus Rift, you can play around with each room design and then choose the colour you want on the walls, and any other customisation. "Pixeltek helps you customise your home on the fly and closely mimics the real-world helping you take wise decisions. It also helps you save an immense amount of time and cost," says Viteek Goyal, founder, Pixeltek. Cost: Anywhere between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 10 lakh; price depends on the city and size of the home.