

# Build Your Own Home

Think of it as a DIY project on a grand scale. A local New Hampshire company has everything you need to start building your own house, garage, barn, shed or cabin. *By Erica Thoits*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHELTER-KIT INC

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1. Shelter-Kits range from barns and homes to cabins and garages. The barn-house here — just like all Shelter-Kit structures — contains no pieces that can't be handled by two people. Construction equipment such as cranes aren't needed.

2. Homes like these do not require prior training. Each building comes with a detailed construction manual that is designed for people with no construction experience.

3. Like its name suggests, in addition to larger homes and barns, Shelter-Kit provides smaller shelters (Unit One Cabins) ideal for a camping spot in the woods or as a shed. [www.shelter-kit.com](http://www.shelter-kit.com)

# MAST ROAD

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Put on your tool belt and get ready to start building the garage you always wanted, that garden shed you've been intending to buy for years or even the new home you've been dreaming about.

A local New Hampshire company is taking the construction crew out of the equation. In the tradition of an old-fashioned New England barn raising, grab some family or neighbors and get to work with your own two hands.

As its name suggests, Shelter-Kit of Tilton specializes in custom designing kits for barns, homes, garages, cabins and more that can be built by you, even if you've never so much as considered picking up a hammer and nail.

Whether you need a studio, extra garage room or a new house, there's a kit for that. The basic packages include the energy-efficient Green Home kit (price varies), Unit One cabins (\$10,700 and above depending on size and options), post-and-beam Loft House kits (\$18,400 and above), the Barns, Garages and Workshops kit (\$9,950 and above) and the one-to-five bedroom cape-style Barn/House (\$27,400 and above).

Shipping costs depend on where you live and could range from \$300-\$600 in New Hampshire to \$3,000 for shipping across the country. When the kit arrives, you're responsible for getting it off the truck — Shelter-Kit recommends four adults be on hand to help unload.

For Shelter-Kit owner Dave Kimball, the reasons for eschewing traditional construction for one of his kits are tri-fold — you are actively participating in the building of your home, everything is custom designed and you will likely save money.

But, can someone with no experience really do this?

Since the company began 40 years ago, says Kimball, 85 percent of the Shelter-Kit buildings were completed by novices. Kimball attributes that number to the fact that the kits come with everything you need, a detailed instruction manual and



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The Shelter-Kit building pictured here is a well-known New England structure — a sugar house.

materials that are designed for two people to handle.

Each kit comes with all the items to create a complete, weather-tight building, including the frame, siding, sheathing, hardware, roofing and floors. After the basics, various extras are available, such as higher or cathedral ceilings, dormers, stairs, different window placement and more.

There's also no need to hit the gym or rent machinery for heavy lifting — the weight of each pre-cut and pre-drilled piece is limited to what two people can handle.

It's also relatively fast when compared to how long typical construction projects take. The turnaround on kits averages from about four to six weeks, and actual building time is three to 15 days depending on which model you choose.

Once your kit arrives, you aren't simply left alone amidst a pile of material. Each kit comes with a customized, detailed 45-50 page instruction manual (written in language intended for construction amateurs) that includes drawings and step-by-step instructions.

"The process is simple in that we take you through everything you do," says Kimball.

If you're clueless when it comes to the paperwork of permits and building codes, Shelter-Kit will help you obtain a building permit and, for a fee, will provide structural drawings bearing a structural engineer's signature (if required by your town officials).

Kimball adds that any of the buildings can be modified to meet various requirements, such as snow loads, wild fire hazards or even seismic conditions in areas such as California.

Some foundation is required, and can range from a series of concrete piers, a continuous concrete wall with a crawl space or full basement to a single concrete slab. A pier foundation has minimal impact and usually won't require heavy equipment — hand tools can often be used to dig the holes for and construct the piers. Like with everything else, Shelter-Kit will provide you with a detailed plan depending on the structure you're building.

Kimball encourages potential customers to come in and meet with the staff to work through ideas.

"People should be comfortable coming here without well-formed ideas," says Kimball. "They can come with ideas on a cocktail napkin and we'll do the drawings."

For those who are skeptical that they could truly handle the construction involved, Kimball and his staff recommend getting in touch with past customers. Some have even toured completed Shelter-Kit buildings and, in the past, Kimball has opened up his own Shelter-Kit home and barn to the curious.

Once begun, you might not stop at just one building. "People have fun doing this," says Kimball. He adds that many build one kit and return for more. Perhaps you'll start small with a backyard art studio and find yourself living in a Shelter-Kit home some day down the road.

**Shelter-Kit**  
22 Mill St.  
Tilton

The website, [www.shelter-kit.com](http://www.shelter-kit.com), has a list of general FAQs plus FAQs and information specific to each type of kit.