

AUSTRALIA & USA HAVE LARGEST HOUSES

According to national reporting agencies, the average new house constructed in Australia or the United States is approximately 2,200 square feet (over 200 square meters), including both detached houses and multiple units. New house sizes are nearly as large in New Zealand (1,900 square feet or 175 square meters), while new detached houses average 1,900 square feet (175 square meters) in Canada.¹ However, new average house sizes are less than one-half that size in United Kingdom, (815 square feet or 76 square meters). This is only 15 percent larger than the hundreds of thousands of standardized flats built in tower blocks before 1990 by the East German government (700 square feet or 65 square meters).² Irish new house sizes are, like their UK counterparts, also comparatively small, at 945 square feet (88 square meters). Moreover, new UK houses are the smallest in the former EU-15, while new Irish houses rank ninth out of 15 (Figure 1).³

New house sizes have dropped more than 30 percent in the United Kingdom since 1920.⁴ Ireland's smallish houses are built at the same time that the nation emerges as the most affluent in the European Union excepting Luxembourg. At the same time, houses in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States have continued to increase in size. Meanwhile, over the last 20 years, the average new detached house in Australia and New Zealand has *increased* by an amount to the average *total* size of a house in United Kingdom.⁵

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, Australian Bureau of Statistics and Canadian Home Builders Association and Infometrics Consulting, Ltd (NZ).

² Christine Hanneman, *Architecture as Ideology*, Humboldt Universitat zu Berlin (1995), www2.hu-berlin.de/stadtsoz/mitin/ch/slab_of_gdr_eng.pdf cited in Randal O'Toole, *Smart Growth and the Ideal City* (2005), www.ti.org/vaupdate53.html. According to the Royal Institution of Surveyors, "around a around a million In East Germany tower block apartments have been abandoned by residents reunification reunification of Germany (Michael Ball, *RICS European Housing Review 2005*, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, (2005), www.rics.org/NR/rdonlyres/FE69252B-B62E-47BD-820E-471AA2072C65/0/ehr_2005_full_report.pdf, p. 17).

³ Department of Housing of the Direction General of Planning, Housing and Heritage, Walloon Region of Belgium, *Housing Statistics in the European Union 2002*, www.international.vrom.nl/Docs/internationaal/housingStats2002.pdf.

⁴ Focus DIY, *Houses Get that Shrinking Feeling* (2003), www.focusdiy.co.uk/stry/corporate20031015.

⁵ Calculated from U.S. Census Bureau, Australian Bureau of Statistics and Canadian Home Builders Association, and Infometrics Consulting, Ltd (NZ) data.

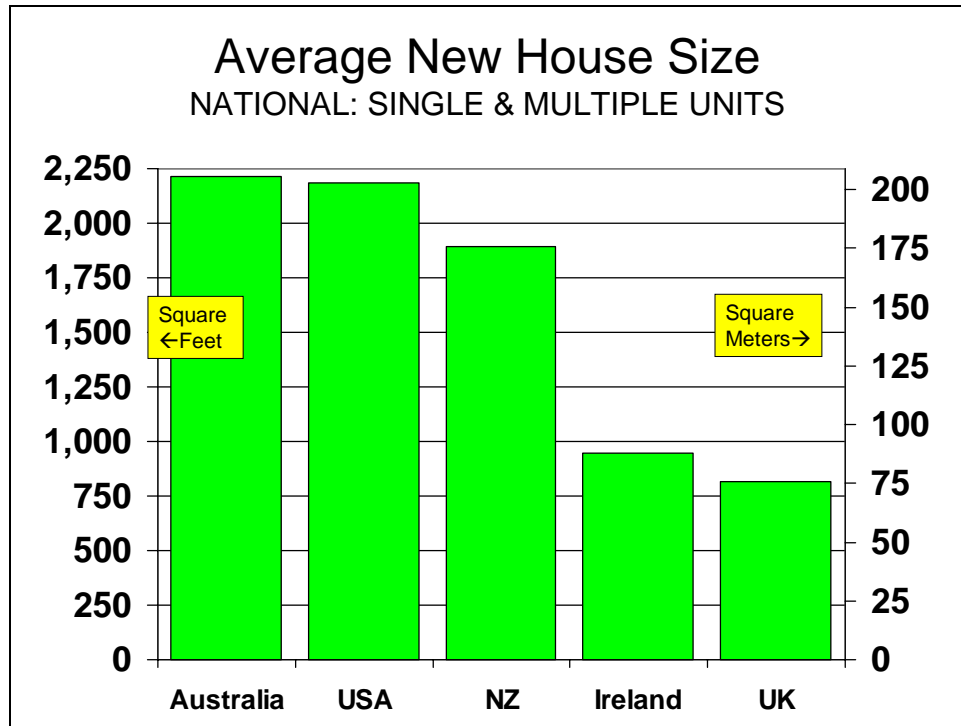


Figure 1

There appears to be a general unawareness of these differences, at least in the United Kingdom. For example, Richard (Lord) Rogers, who chaired the UK Government Urban Task Force has written:

*The British are extravagant with land. We insist on building as if we lived in the American Midwest or the Australian outback. The US builds on average 40 dwellings for every hectare ... in Britain, we erect 23 new buildings for every hectare ...*⁶

In fact, average house lots are much larger in the United States (and Australia, Canada and New Zealand) than in the United Kingdom. In the United States, new detached houses are built at 2.7 per acre (6.6 per hectare). In Australia, new detached houses are being built at 5.5 per acre (13.3 per hectare).⁷ By comparison, in the United Kingdom, new houses were built at an average of 16 per acre (40 per hectare) in 2005.⁸ Future lot sizes are likely to be even smaller in Dublin, where present zoning calls for 20 houses per acre (49 per hectare) an increase of 35 percent in just four years.⁹

⁶ Richard (Lord) Rogers, "Save Our Cities," *The Observer*, 13 February 2000, www.geog.le.ac.uk/ajs/gy342/rogers.htm.

⁷ United States data from Bureau of the Census www.census.gov/const/C25Ann/medavgsoldlotsize_cust.xls. Australia data from Australian Bureau of Statistics

www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/15cdfb6cdb264658ca256f02007967be?OpenDocument). The average lot or block size for both nations excludes multiple units. However, most new housing in both nations is single rather than multiple unit. Data was not found for total houses constructed, including multiple units, per acre or hectare. However, with the US construction mix, only 3.2 houses per acre (8 houses per hectare) --- single family and multiple unit --- would be constructed even if no land were added to account for the multiple units.

⁸ Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

⁹ Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (Ireland), *Housing Statistics*, 24 November 2005.

Seven Dublin houses or six United Kingdom houses could be built on the average new house lot in Australia.

Indicating a similar misunderstanding, the *Times of London* wrote that an objective of an Essex County plan was:

*...to persuade builders to provide big family apartments on the continental model, rather than large numbers of small detached houses.*¹⁰

In fact, much of recently built housing stock in many continental (Western Europe) markets is detached. For example, single family houses comprise two-thirds of new house construction in France.¹¹ The United Kingdom has some of the most tightly packed suburbs¹² in the high-income world, nearly double that of Western Europe and one-half greater than in Japan.¹³

Value for Money: New houses, adjusted for size differences, are more than twice as costly relative to incomes in Ireland and the United Kingdom compared to Australia and New Zealand. New houses in Ireland and the UK are four to five times as costly compared to affordable markets such as Indianapolis and Winnipeg (Figure 2).

¹⁰ Hugh Pearlman, "The Greening of 10 MPH Suburbia, *The Sunday Times*, (November 20, 2005), www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-1879922,00.html

¹¹ Michael Ball, *RICS European Housing Review 2005*, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, (2005), www.rics.org/NR/rdonlyres/FE69252B-B62E-47BD-820E-471AA2072C65/0/ehr_2005_full_report.pdf

¹² Nearly all urban population growth in Western Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States has been suburban for decades (Demographia, *High-Income World Metropolitan Areas: Core City and Suburban Population Trends*, www.demographia.com/db-highmetro.htm).

¹³ Demographia, *Suburban, Core & Urban Densities by Area: Western Europe, Japan, United States, Canada, Australia & New Zealand* (2005) www.demographia.com/db-intlsub.htm.

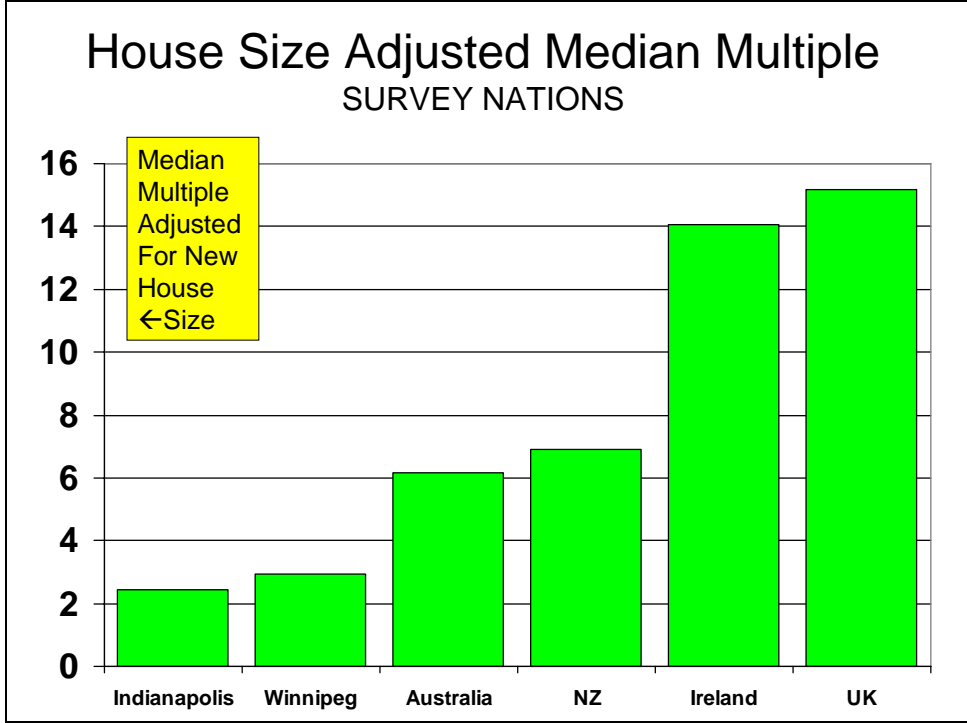


Figure 2