



CONTAINER  
HOMES

Master Guide on

# PURCHASING A SHIPPING CONTAINER

A comprehensive handbook on selecting, inspecting, and purchasing a shipping container

Written & Edited by  
Editorial Team,  
Love Container Homes



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# Chapter 1

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## Introduction

If you are reading this book, we are sure that you are fascinated by the design and creativity of shipping container homes. The way these steel units are refurbished, fabricated, and used to build all sorts of building structures captures people's attention and imagination throughout the globe. Enthusiasts are not just fascinated by the unconventional designs, eco-friendliness, and affordability of shipping container architecture, but also their strength, durability, modularity, the ease of construction. Apart from the above benefits, and the colossal reduction in the building time that can be achieved with steel shipping container modules.

The trend of building residential and commercial structures out of shipping containers took root more than two decades ago. The initial fuel for the popularity of shipping container buildings was the movement of minimalism in architecture. Moreover, the tiny house movement (an architectural and social movement advocating a simpler and greener lifestyle in small living spaces) was influencing more and more people from all over the globe. Albeit on a small scale, there was a sustained reverse migration to the countryside of those city dwellers who were interested in downsizing their ecological footprint and reducing the nonessential requirements in life.

Apart from the tiny house movement, rapidly increasing costs of living and loss of livelihood due to economic slowdowns also began to prove shipping container houses to be a reliable, cost-effective, and sustainable housing solution.

However, it was only the past decade that brought about a more significant spur in the global popularity of shipping container homes. The market for shipping container homes has grown at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.5% in the past decade. By the year 2025, the shipping container

home industry in the US is expected to be worth \$73,070.5 million. According to experts, this rapid growth in popularity cannot be credited to the rising interest in tiny houses or a desire for affordable housing alone. Several factors such as growing acceptability of container homes among people, architects, engineers, and contractors due to their structural strength, modularity, transportability, and fast and easy constructability are hugely responsible for this rapid growth in their popularity. Moreover, building departments of various jurisdictions are, of late, giving shipping container architecture its due recognition and acceptance. The unfortunate tag of the 'deviant' form of architecture is gradually fading away and people are increasingly noticing the real value that shipping container constructions have to offer.

One after the other, various natural disasters have demonstrated that the strength, durability, and adaptability offered by shipping container constructions are unparalleled. The homeowners' desire for these benefits has become the main impetus behind this dominant wave of shipping container homes. We know of multiple families in Florida who, after losing everything due to hurricanes after hurricanes, are shifting to more durable shipping container structures. We also know of some families who are the survivors of the Paradise Camp Fire (2018) in Northern California. More than 18,000 structures got burnt down, and 85 people lost their lives in that fire. These families recognized the importance of fire-retardant living structures and are now rebuilding their communities using shipping containers.

Several building departments across North America are recognizing not just the benefits but also the viability of shipping container projects. Various homeowners are now able to get building permits for their shipping container projects approved more easily than ever before. A whole parallel industry involving architects, engineers, fabricators, and contractors is developing around this growing architectural style.

Much of this popularity and acceptance of shipping container homes, as has been mentioned earlier, is due to the benefits of using shipping containers as the building blocks of construction. Moreover, various media forms, especially social media, have played a crucial role in popularizing these

benefits to a broader populace. There are several bloggers and content creators on various social media platforms who are keen on providing inspiration, beautiful ideas, and construction knowledge of shipping container homes. Most of these content creators are themselves quite experienced and informed about constructing shipping container buildings.

Unfortunately, however, the same internet that has proved a valuable resource for many cargotecture enthusiasts is also responsible for the proliferation of many unwarranted myths about shipping containers and their use in architecture. It is very difficult for a beginner to distinguish between truth and myth about shipping containers. *Chapter 2*, therefore, aims to bust the most common myths about shipping containers and their use in architecture.

Much of the information available in the public domain is primarily focused on documenting the conversion of shipping containers into tiny houses. However, not much information is available on how to plan the purchase of a shipping container, and from where can they be procured? Even lesser information is available on the lessons learned from the purchase, and the measures to ensure that one gets the best value out of every penny spent on containers. Even when some little information is available, it is most often scattered and incomprehensible to a layperson. Unfortunately, there are many questions that are yet to be answered regarding how to plan the purchase of shipping containers. For example, how many types of containers are available in market? Which among them is best for construction? What sizes are these containers available in and what are the advantages and disadvantages of various sizes of containers? Whether should you purchase an old container or a new container? What are their advantages and disadvantages? There are a large number of variables that go into answering all the above questions. *Chapter 3* is dedicated to exploring all such variables and the answers to the above questions. It provides a detailed discussion on what are shipping containers, how and where are they produced, and what are the most common types of shipping containers? With the help of various case studies and past experiences of various stakeholders of this industry, this chapter tries to outline various variables and pointers that are

paramount in deciding what type of containers should you buy. It also provides a detailed yet simple overview of nomenclature, specifications, and classification of various types of containers that otherwise can be very confusing. Once you are aware of all the basic information regarding the containers, their types, demand and supply dynamics, prices and uses; the later sections of *Chapter 3* help you identify your own project needs and based on those needs help you decide the type of container that is best and most feasible for your project. The last section of this chapter deals with searching various containers using various means and guiding you on how to contact container dealers and depots.

Before you actually contact dealers and plan a visit to their dealerships and depots, you are advised to have basic information on various types of certifications and industry terminologies that are used to denote whether the container is of acceptable quality or not. Being an unconventional architecture, the certifications (at the time of manufacturing) are considered very important pieces of information by the building departments as there are no other means of ensuring the quality of the containers. Before you make a physical visit to the dealers, you are advised to enquire whether the containers sold by the dealer fulfill the certification criteria that are deemed necessary for the building department's approval. Once you get an assurance from the dealer, only then you should plan a physical visit. *Chapter 4* of this book has been devoted to guiding you regarding various types of certifications available in the shipping container industry and their significance in shipping container architecture. This chapter will also guide you on where to find the certification on the container, how does it look, and how to verify it? Many times, in the case of old containers, these certifications are removed by the dealers. *Chapter 4* will guide you through the alternative mechanisms to ensure the quality of the containers based on various industry terminologies allotted to such the type of containers. This chapter will help you filter good quality dealers and containers even before you plan a physical visit. This knowledge will not just save your precious time but will also ensure that all the containers you visit are of a bare minimum

acceptable quality. This will ultimately help you gauge fair pricing of the containers.

*Chapter 5* explores an often neglected yet very crucial part of the whole planning process of purchasing the shipping container – the Pre-purchase Checklist. Before you purchase and accept the delivery of the container, you are highly advised to go through the whole checklist provided in this chapter. This chapter aims to provide you with various tips and tricks to ensure that your purchasing experience is smooth, and delivery is hassle-free. All information ranging from site preparation to, payment methods, delivery planning has been properly documented in this chapter.

Once you have a theoretical knowledge of shipping containers like their specifications, nomenclature, classification, and certifications, and completed all the pre-purchase planning, you are good to plan a site visit in order to select, inspect, and finally purchase the containers. *Chapter 6* provides a comprehensive knowledge of all types of common damages and repairs that are found in shipping containers. The chapter contains more than 100 illustrative photographs explaining damages and acceptable repairs in all parts of shipping containers. The information provided in this chapter is very valuable, unique, and unprecedented for anyone planning to build a container home.

## Conclusion

We are confident that this book will bridge the crucial knowledge gap caused by the unavailability of any comprehensive information on various available types of containers, their importance in construction, their certification and quality check, and other theoretical and practical knowledge of purchasing them. This book is a culmination of hard work and years of experience in container architecture industry. As you read along, you will get a rare chance to explore crucial industry knowledge in order to avoid common mistakes while selecting, inspecting and purchasing shipping containers for your project. You must understand that the shipping container industry is a business-to-business (B2B) industry, where one business provides logistical support to other businesses. The latter businesses have a large contingent of

engineers and inspectors who have expert knowledge on shipping containers. They help these businesses to find the best quality containers. However, there are no experts available to help individual homeowners and builders who just want to build a home and are searching for good quality containers. It is the shipping container dealers who benefit the most out of this information asymmetry. Since they know everything about the containers and the buyers know very little, the dealings between both the parties are bound to result in losses for the buyers. After getting tricked into purchasing substandard containers and failing the building inspection, many of our clients have come to us for consultation. It is pretty evident that this is not an individual's problem—it is more of an industry-wide problem. The only remedy to this problem is to democratize the industry knowledge and make it readily available to everybody. This work is a sincere outcome of our committed efforts to fulfilling this goal.