

A7 — Alternative Building Systems · 29 July 2026

SIPs, in practice

Two projects, panels to shell — Dallas, Texas

Photos from two jobs. The point is not that panels are good or bad — it is where the labor, the money and the risk actually moved.

THE LENS — TREAT EVERY ALTERNATIVE AS A MATH PROBLEM

- 1 Does it reduce **site labor** hours — or just move them to transport, crane and finishing?
- 2 Does it need **repetition** at scale, and is that **volume** realistic here?
- 3 Can **local trades** inspect, insure and finance it without special waivers?
- 4 Does it maintain **control-layer** continuity?
- 5 Is TOTAL delivered cost — factory + transport + crane + site finishing — actually lower?

Watch for these five in the photos. Every one of them shows up on site.

It arrives on a gooseneck, tarped.

A stick-built job has no truck like this.
Freight, permits and a place to put the load
are now real costs that did not exist before.

How many loads, and who eats the freight?



Every panel is a numbered part.

G4, G6, C7, 1B, 5D — hand-marked, cut to a drawing, and each one belongs in exactly one place. This is a **kit**, not a pile of lumber.

A one-off plan pays for the CAD/CAM and collects none of the volume benefit. What volume flips it?



Sheet 4 of 37, before anything ships.

SIP walls and roof construction details, engineered and stamped up front. The drawing set is the product; the panels are downstream of it.

Who pays for that engineering — and what happens to it when the plan changes?



Set day: the shell goes vertical.

The hours changed shape rather than vanishing — into telehandler time, staging space, and a small crew that has to know the sequence.

Did the schedule win survive contact with inspections and utility hookups?



One panel. One machine. Two people.

This is the whole claim in a single frame: a wall that would have been framed, sheathed and insulated by a crew is placed in one lift.

~2x factory labor productivity is the claim. Is it still 2x once you count the machine day?



Roof panels, screwed off from above.

Every joint between these panels is a water and air continuity decision, made at height, by hand, on a schedule. The factory internalized the wall handoffs — it did not internalize this one.

Who inspects the panel joints after set? The state insignia does not cover what transport cracked.



Closed in, with deep overhangs.

Dry-in arrives in days rather than weeks, and the overhangs — the cheapest bulk-water control there is — come along with the panel layout.



But beware potential mismatch between factory built and site-built elements

Note gap on left side of picture — the foundation formwork was laid out incorrectly and this caused a lot of rework of panels and stud packs on site to align the panels to the pad.



A SIP shell, stick-framed inside.

The panels do the envelope; conventional framing still does the partitions. Two systems, two trades, two sequences on one job.

Where did the savings die — one-off design, transport, crane days, or double-touch finishing?



SO — WHERE DO THE SAVINGS ACTUALLY DIE?

Six places, all of them visible in those photos:

One-off design

repeatability IS the advantage — a custom plan buys the cost and skips the benefit

Transport + crane days

new line items with no stick-built equivalent

Double-touch finishing

a SIP shell still needs an interior

Draw-schedule mismatch

the factory wants paying before a "home" exists on site — teases A9 in September

Inspection uncertainty

eats the schedule win, which was the reason you did it

Tolerance mismatch

a formwork layout error becomes panel rework

**Think of an alternative-system project
you built, priced, financed or reviewed
in Northern Colorado.**

Where did the expected savings survive — and where did they disappear?

Built, priced, financed OR reviewed — lenders, appraisers and code folks, answer from your seat.