



Finding the Right Home for What Comes Next

A GUIDE FOR BUYERS ON THE MASSACHUSETTS SOUTH COAST

SUSAN GORDEN RYAN
with KRISTA MASHORE

Finding the Right Home for What Comes Next

The stress-free way to get a loan, find and purchase your perfect home

by

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co-authored by

Krista Mashore

Praise for Susan Gorden Ryan

... we have never had a more enjoyable home purchase experience! Susan took the time to get to know us, our needs, our budget, as well as a very tight timeline to find that 'needle in the haystack'! We live in Florida so having someone local who really knows the area was paramount. She was with us at every step along the way and we felt well taken care of. But perhaps what stands out most to us is Susan was there with encouragement and direction to help us get to our goal. And she provided us with referrals we needed to other complimentary professionals that further assisted us. Susan provided solid information allowing for caring but fair negotiations that made the seller feel more like a good friend rather than someone simply on the other side of the table.

— Michael and Chrissy, Wareham

Susan is a kind and knowledgeable person. She will go above and beyond to assist with all the variables that occur throughout a real estate transaction.

— Lisa, Hull

Susan was amazing to work with! She is a true professional. From beginning to end, she ensured that everything went smoothly while buying our home. She is thoughtful, responsive, and honest. I am grateful that we had the opportunity to work with her.

— Ally, Swifts Beach, Wareham

Working with Susan was great, as she was very attentive, and understanding. She worked very hard for us to find the property we were looking for, and we are

very appreciative of her help.

— Tom and Angela, Middleborough

Meet Susan

She found a Florida couple their "needle in the haystack" on a tight timeline in a market they had never lived in, and she got a waterfront buyer the views she wanted while keeping her out of the flood zone. She works mostly with right-sizers and waterfront buyers, people buying the right amount of house, in the right location, for what comes next. Licensed in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island, she spent 27 years at State Street and nearly six at Citizens as a Vice President and Senior Strategy Manager before real estate, and she brings that same rigor to a home search. She lives on Buzzards Bay and owns a horse named Keeper, which is why her advice on water and on land is worth having.

Meet Krista

Krista Mashore sold real estate for 17 years and never built a sales team. She had a full-time transaction coordinator and a marketing assistant, and that was it. In those years she sold more than 2,350 homes, about 133 a year, and she ranked in the top 1% of agents nationally for 19 years straight. In her last full year selling, she did 154 homes, and the Wall Street Journal and RealTrends named her one of the top 100 agents in the country.

Then she walked away from it. Not because it stopped working. She left at the top because she wanted to teach it.

Coaching is her full-time job now. She is still licensed as an associate broker with the Mashore Group at eXp Realty, but her days are spent training agents. She has put more than \$1.9 million of her own money into learning digital marketing over the last eight years, and she used what she learned to build her coaching company to roughly \$76 million in sales, including 26 separate months over a million dollars.

She has written eight bestselling books. She has been featured in Forbes, the Wall Street Journal, Yahoo Finance, Inc. 5000, NBC and FOX, and Success Magazine named her one of its Top 125 Most Impactful Leaders and a Woman of Influence. She holds a master's degree in curriculum and instruction and a bachelor's in psychology.

She lives with her family in Contra Costa County in Northern California. One of her favorite pastimes is coaching teens in her community through her movement, Teens Lifting Lives.

To learn more about how Krista's organization Krista Mashore Coaching may be able to help you with your digital marketing strategies to dominate your profession, please visit www.KristaMashore.com.

Back to you and your move. If I can answer any questions or offer assistance, please feel free to contact me at 508-208-1927. And be sure to go to

susangordenryanluxury.com for videos and resources that will help you through every step of this.

Introduction

Have you ever read the book, What to Expect When You're Expecting? It was written for couples expecting a baby. Whether it's your first baby or you've had kids before, it's a really helpful guide. It runs through all the physical ins and outs of pregnancy as well as the emotional roller coaster pregnancy puts you on. It talks about the people who will team up with you during the pregnancy, specifically what their role is, and what to expect from them. It explains things that you, as a couple, can do to make the birth healthier and easier. Basically, it instructs you and warns you about a bunch of things so that you don't freak out!

Think of this book as, What to Expect When You're Buying a Home.

Yes, buying your home, whether it's your first or fifth, can be as emotional, joyful, scary, exciting and irritating as pregnancy! Unfortunately, too many Buyers find themselves freaking out and not getting the happy, healthy end result they'd hoped for!

A new home is a huge investment, not only financially but emotionally! People get stressed about the whole process. It can seem mysterious, confusing, and like an uphill battle. In my experience, finding the right home and getting the financing you need does not have to be traumatic or a struggle. In fact, with the right team and the right information, buying a new home can actually be fun and definitely successful.

I wrote this book to give you the information you need as a Buyer to enjoy the ride and end up with the best result at "birth," and to demystify the process so you feel confident during the whole process. As one of my neighbors (or one of my new neighbors!) in the South Coast of Massachusetts and Cape Cod, I want you to be hugely successful in the purchase of your new home!

In the first part of this book, I'll explain what you should look for in a Realtor® and how to choose the one who will do the best job for you. You'll find out what you should expect every step of the way from someone who really knows the ins and outs

of real estate. It doesn't matter what price range your buying power falls into. I really want you to expect superior service from the agent you choose to represent you!

Later in the book, I'll talk about what you can do to be a strong partner for both your real estate agent and your mortgage loan officer, making the process easier and more successful. Decades ago, dads used to hang out in the waiting room, biting their nails, smoking, and worrying while their spouse did all the heavy lifting. Real estate used to be that way (and with some agents and mortgage loan officers, it still is!). But your positive contribution to the entire process can make a huge difference to the final result. So, I'll give you some tips of things you can do before you go looking for your new house, while you're on the hunt for it, and during the final loan and closing process.

My motto has always been: "When You Do What You Love.. People Love What You Do." And I LOVE helping people find and purchase the perfect new home!

If you have any questions after reading this book, feel free to contact me at 508-208-1927

. And be sure to go to susangordenryanluxury.com for informational videos that are easy to watch and full of valuable information. We can also get you a Free Market Analysis.

This book is my gift to you, along with my very best wishes for the successful purchase of your home!

-Susan Gorden Ryan♥

How AI Changed the Way Buyers Search for Homes

If you are like most buyers today, you did not start your home search by calling an agent. You started online. You probably asked ChatGPT or Perplexity what neighborhoods fit your lifestyle. You searched school ratings, compared commute times, looked at cost of living breakdowns. You watched property videos on YouTube and did virtual tours from your couch. By the time you reached out to anyone, you already had opinions, preferences, and probably a shortlist.

That is a good thing. You are more informed than buyers have ever been at this stage, and that makes our work together more efficient and more focused.

Here is what AI cannot do for you.

AI can surface information. It cannot negotiate on your behalf. It cannot read a seller's motivation, sense when a deal is about to fall apart, or know which inspector in town is actually thorough versus which ones rubber-stamp everything to stay on the agent's referral list. It cannot walk the property and notice that the grading around the foundation tells a story the photos did not show. It cannot build the kind of relationship with a listing agent that causes them to call us first when something comes available before it hits the market.

What I have done is build a system that uses AI where AI is genuinely powerful, and still shows up in person where judgment and relationships matter. When you work with me, you get the benefit of your own research plus the tools I use on the back end to help you find, evaluate, and secure the right home faster and with less stress than you would on your own.

The agents who are still operating exactly the way they did ten years ago are not going to serve you as well as someone who has evolved. This book is part of how I make sure you walk into the biggest financial decision of your life with the full picture.

Chapter 1: Choosing a Realtor®

One of the most important decisions you can make is choosing the team that will help you purchase your new home. Unfortunately, many people just choose someone they know who happens to be in real estate. While Uncle Harvey might be a super nice guy, he may not be the best agent to help you find the right home. Hiring someone who lacks experience and knowledge can cost you thousands and thousands of dollars, even if he promises to give you the "family discount" and reduce his commission. First of all, he won't give you the guidance a real pro can give you. Secondly, mistakes and not knowing how to keep a transaction on track, especially when everything hits the fan, can be extremely costly in real estate. After helping families purchase over 2,350 homes, I've witnessed every kind of misstep and screw up possible! And I've seen how horribly expensive they can be. Trying to save money on commissions by using someone inexperienced will cost you far more than the few dollars you think you'll save. And I can't tell you how many times a Buyer has chosen a "discount broker" over me, only to come back to me months later when the other agent couldn't get the job done!

It's like choosing a surgeon for a critical operation: You wouldn't just use your next door neighbor to be your surgeon because he lends you his lawnmower and offers you a "family discount," right? Of course not! You would check his credentials, whether he specializes in the kind of surgery you need, his reputation, and a ton of other things before you'd let him slice into you!

Your home is a huge investment. So, even though it might hurt your uncle's or your neighbor's feelings, you need to choose the Realtor® who will do the best job for you. Rather than just sitting through the dog and pony show of your first appointment with a prospective agent, use it as an in-depth interview. Don't be afraid to grill them.

It's absolutely critical that your agent has in-depth knowledge of the market, what's available and coming available. They also have to know how to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of homes you're considering and be excellent negotiators. If your agent is not strong in understanding and implementing current best practices in all of

these areas, they're doing you a disfavor to even take your business! I am not kidding! Agents who are weak or "old school" will not be able to get you the most favorable terms for your new home even if they've been in the business for decades. They also won't be able to get the job done well, quickly, and without a lot of hassle.

You don't have to become an expert in real estate yourself. You just have to be very clear about the skills and services agents should be offering you before you even think of signing on the dotted line with them. When you interview a potential agent to represent you, you'll want to ask a ton of questions and I'll give you more throughout the book. Here are some areas to consider.

Credentials

Anyone can get a real estate license. A license doesn't necessarily mean they know what the heck they're doing. Agents who are really serious about the business join the National Association of Realtors® (NAR), which is real estate's national professional organization. (They'll have that designation on their business card.) Realtors® are required to follow the NAR's Code of Ethics and complete ethics training every three years that other agents don't.

All agents have basic continuing education requirements, but none of these courses do anything to help an agent learn best practices for buying homes. And all of the education and credentials in the world will not take the place of experience.

Experience is the only way to be the best of the best, to learn how to foresee and tackle problems before they arise, and to truly know the ins and outs of how to make sure a Buyer is getting the best terms possible. Those of us who strive for excellence in real estate have taken additional coursework to sharpen our skills or to learn more about our areas of specialty. We might have studied advanced negotiation, and trends in home financing. Courses like these often award a credential at successful completion.

She is a Real Estate Negotiation Expert (RENE), a Pricing Strategy Advisor (PSA), a Certified Home Stager, a certified EquiAgent, and Luxury Home, Land and Ranch, e-PRO and C2EX certified, licensed in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and a member of NAR, MAR, RASEM and CCIAOR. The point isn't how many credentials and letters an agent has after their name. It matters which credentials they've chosen

to go after, and it matters that they've taken the time to become the best they can be to become excellent at what they do and how they can serve you.

Don't hesitate to ask someone who wants to represent you in buying your new home about their credentials and additional education. And don't be impressed by fancy designations. Ask what they learned from their courses that will benefit you with the purchase of your new home.

Experience

Back to the surgeon analogy: Do you want a doctor who has successfully performed dozens of surgeries exactly like yours? Or do you want someone who typically works in a totally different specialty? Do you want someone who will be performing their very first surgery or someone who really knows their way around in the operating room?

Like many professions, good agents typically specialize (or should specialize) in certain areas or home types. We call it their "niche." Someone who tells you they can "find the right home for anyone anywhere" is just kidding themselves. They may be able to get the job done eventually, but they certainly won't have the inside track to find a home to fit your particular circumstances and needs, which means they will not get you the best result possible.

On the other hand, a Realtor® who has worked successfully with clients like you and the type of home you want in the city or neighborhood you desire will have the inside scoop and know how to get you the best outcome. A really good agent, who does not deal with your type of property or isn't in your area, will refer you to someone else, or at the very least, partner with an agent who does specialize in that area and type of property.

I can't emphasize enough how important it is to have a Realtor® who is local to the area! There are things about any area that only the locals would know. For example, one of my friends told me about Buyers from out of town who used a broker who was also from out of town. They purchased a home in what seemed to be a quiet neighborhood. But as soon as school was back in session, the neighborhood became a very heavy traffic area during school drop off and pick up. It was so bad that simply

getting out of the driveway at those hours became a daily ordeal. It was even too dangerous for them to walk to and from school! The agent did not know about the issue because they were not familiar with the area. The Buyers ended up selling the home just months after moving in. They even lost money on the sale after paying commissions.

Another example: Krista received an offer on one of our listings from Buyers who were using an out of area agent and a lender who was out of the area. She asked both the agent and lender if they knew about the higher taxes in this particular development because it's significantly higher than what is normal. They said that they were aware of the issue. Then she asked if they had incorporated the higher rate into the Buyer's payments when qualifying the Buyer. Again, they both assured her that they had. It turned out they did NOT look into it carefully enough to verify the tax rate. They had just estimated using a slightly higher amount than normal. When it was time to get fully approved, the Buyer couldn't qualify for the loan payments because, with the actual tax rate, payments exceeded their debt-to-income ratio. The agent ended up crediting her commission back to the Buyer so the purchase could go through.

In both of these cases, the problems would have been avoided if the Buyers had used a Realtor® who was very familiar with the area.

What about years of experience? This can be a double-edged sword. If you've got someone with years of experience who is keeping up with current trends in real estate, and who is a real go-getter, that's perfect! They bring you the wisdom of many transactions along with a cutting-edge process and twentieth-century thinking.

But if you're considering someone with scads of experience who still does real estate the exact same way they did it when Reagan was in office, run for the hills! It's like hiring a surgeon who still sterilizes his scalpel over a hot flame! Real estate is so different than it was decades ago, even five years ago. The market has changed dramatically, and the way Buyers find homes and secure financing is totally different. If your "experienced" agent doesn't know this and doesn't know how to look beyond MLS for what's available, well, you'd be shooting yourself in the foot to choose them.

You'd be much better off with a newbie who is gung-ho, tech savvy, smart, conscientious and knowledgeable about the market, and who is eager to do all they can to build themselves a great reputation. They'll treat you like gold because to them, you are! Just make sure that newbie is working for a good broker who will pay attention and guide them along the way.

Reputation

This is so important! You want someone who is respected in the community and who is totally ethical as your agent. In fact, why would you ever want to deal with someone who is unethical in any circumstance? Unless you're looking for a partner to help you rob a bank. But even then, you want the guy to be honest enough to give you your share of the loot, right?

No Seller's agent or financial institution or real estate attorney (or pizza delivery guy!) will want to work with an agent who is known to be shady or even extremely difficult to deal with. Even if you are a highly qualified Buyer, your offer will be tainted if it's presented by an agent who is unresponsive, untrustworthy, and a pain in the you-know-what. And if you do happen to get a Purchase Agreement through Mr. or Ms. Shady-pants agent, trust me, it will not go well. And in this litigious world we live in, you just might be putting yourself at risk.

Just don't hire that weasel! Plenty of professionals out there are ethical and respected. Don't invite unnecessary grief (and lawsuits!) by choosing the rotten apple in the barrel.

Okay, so how do you scope out an agent's reputation? Asking them for references would be nice, but they'll only give you their most satisfied clients or the people they've bribed to say nice things. Your better bet is to go online and check out Google My Business, Zillow, Facebook, Realtor.com, or Yelp for client reviews. You can also check with the Better Business Bureau and your state's real estate licensing board. If you know some mortgage loan officers or real estate attorneys in the area, ask if they have any insight into the agent you're considering.

Overall Team

It takes a village, right? Unless a Realtor® is working with just 5 or 6 clients at a time, they cannot keep on top of everything that needs to be done to get you the best result in the shortest amount of time! They need support. They need resources. They need other really committed, skilled, and talented people on their team to keep the momentum going during the purchase of your home.

Not every great agent has an office of twenty staffers to run the show. Some professionals have built part-time teams or virtual teams that are highly efficient and effective. But if your prospective agent uses their pool maintenance guy to keep up their website and their thirteen-year-old niece to track availability in the market, you need to look elsewhere.

A Realtor® who strives for excellence will spend money to make sure their team is skilled, dedicated, and motivated. So, much of what is done during the purchase and financing of your house will not be done by your agent themselves. It's important that you know who else will be working on your purchase, what specifically they contribute, their experience, and how often you'll be interacting with them.

Outside Resources

Every transaction requires a number of outside resources: home inspectors, real estate attorneys, insurance agents, even building and maintenance contractors, etc., etc., etc. Realtors® who really know what they're doing have consciously cultivated a good team of these folks. They've vetted them, checked their work and their references, and probably work with them consistently. These are the professional experts your agent calls for advice and/or service.

Why do you care? This outside team can make or break a transaction! When your agent has a strong outside team to support you through the process, you'll avoid so many headaches! Even if that outside resource is needed on the "Seller's side," your agent can ensure the deal goes through smoothly by recommending these good resources to the Seller and to the Seller's agent.

I've always believed that my great team of resources is one of my strongest assets because I've seen what can happen without such a team, literally hundreds of times. An inept attorney can completely derail a closing by miscalculating amounts due. An

insurance agent can totally delay a close by not getting the right policy together in time. Another example: What if the Seller needs to fix something to get lender approval for the deal? Your own agent can save the day by having just the right person to handle it on speed dial. They won't have to scramble around for a contractor who may or may not be good and may or may not get the job done in time.

Rapport

"Rapport" is a French word so, of course, it's hard to understand! Basically, it means that you feel "aligned" with someone. You not only get along with them, but you also feel that you're "kindred spirits." They "get" you. Maybe you have different backgrounds, even come from different cultures, but they "speak your language."

I know, this probably sounds like dating advice! But the point is that you'll be entrusting a complicated transaction and your precious future home to a total stranger. Not only is it the largest financial asset most of us will ever acquire, but we put a lot of emotional attachment into our homes as well. You want someone you really trust and who understands how important this purchase is to you.

You probably have specific, important reasons and goals for buying your home and specific needs regarding the mortgage on it (we'll talk about this in a later chapter) so you don't want some bulldozer of an agent to put their agenda before yours. You want someone who will not only guide you but who will listen to you. You'll be spending time and making important decisions with your Realtor®. They don't have to become your very best friend, but you certainly don't want to get stuck with someone who irritates the heck out of you!

It's also important that your agent is good at building rapport with other agents. Face it, we all like working with people we like. A Seller's agent is much more likely to share information with a Buyer's agent they feel good about. Even if it's unconscious, they'll probably look more favorably on an offer that comes in with an agent who is easy or even fun to work with. And when it comes to negotiations? A friendly agent who is a good negotiator will get much farther than one who is unpleasant to be around!

Choosing Your Mortgage Loan Officer

One of the very first things your agent should recommend you do is to get pre-approved for a mortgage. In fact, most good Buyers' agents won't even start showing you homes until you've gone through the pre-approval process. Pre-approval is not the final step in getting the loan you need. But it will let you know how much financing you qualify for which, in turn, tells you what price range you should be looking in.

You and your agent need to be confident that whoever does the pre-approval really knows what they're doing. Why? There's nothing more discouraging than spending hours hunting for a home, finding one you're in love with, then discovering that you can't qualify for the loan you need to buy it!

Your mortgage loan officer (MLO) will play a very critical role in the purchase of your new home from start to finish. You want the same qualities, integrity, good reputation, rapport, etc., as you want in your agent. Even if you get a referral to a certain mortgage loan officer (often your Realtor® will give you some), it's worth your time to check them out online for reviews. Here are some additional things to look for: Experience: Most mortgage loan officers will tell you that the only way to really learn about the ins and outs of the mortgage industry is to work in the field! If your potential mortgage loan officer is new, make sure that they are being mentored and supervised by a senior person.

Detail orientation: Starting in the pre-approval process, your MLO needs to make sure that all the T's are crossed and I's are dotted! They need to be accurate about any documentation needed and that it's prepared properly. They need to be able to spot errors in financial calculations as well as evaluate the language within your loan documents.

Knowledge of current guidelines: FHA, Fannie Mae, and Freddie Mac send out new qualification guidelines frequently. You want to make sure your MLO has a process for staying updated, so you don't get caught in the middle of a transaction only to realize that you no longer meet the requirements for the loan you thought you had!

Breadth of loans and programs to offer: A good mortgage loan officer will tell you if they don't offer the type of loan that would be best for you. In that case, they'll give

you as much help as they can and direct you elsewhere. It's even better if they have a wide range of loan-types they can draw from to meet your particular situation.

Good communication skills: The loan process and the documentation involved is complicated! Unless you're a real estate attorney or work in real estate finance, a lot of the terminology will be unfamiliar to you. Make sure your MLO takes the time to explain what's going on in a way you can understand.

The Buyer Representation Agreement. What It Is and Why It Protects You

Before we go any further, there is something important I want to walk you through. After the 2024 NAR settlement, a new rule went into effect: before I can show you a single home, we are both required to sign a Buyer Representation Agreement. I know that sounds formal. I want to explain what it actually is, because most buyers hear "agreement" and immediately get nervous. You should not.

A Buyer Representation Agreement is simply a written contract that spells out our working relationship. It covers how long we will work together, what geographic area we are focusing on, and how my compensation is handled. That is it.

Here is why it actually works in your favor.

Before this agreement existed, buyer's agents operated largely on a handshake. You could work with someone for months, they could invest dozens of hours into your search, and either party could walk away at any time with no accountability. That created a dynamic where agents were sometimes less invested than they should have been, and buyers sometimes found themselves without representation at the worst possible moment.

The agreement fixes that. When you sign it, I am legally and ethically committed to representing you and only you. My fiduciary duty is to your interests, not the seller's. I cannot share your financial information with the seller's agent. I cannot push you toward a home that is better for my commission than it is for your situation. The agreement makes that commitment binding and formal.

On compensation: what you pay, if anything, and how it is handled is something we discuss and agree on upfront. In many transactions, the seller contributes to the

buyer's agent compensation as part of the overall negotiation. In others, it is handled differently. Every situation is unique, and we will talk through exactly what this looks like for your purchase before you sign anything. There are no surprises.

What I want you to know is this: an agent who is unwilling to explain this agreement clearly, or who gets defensive when you ask questions about it, is not the right agent for you. The agreement should feel like protection, because that is exactly what it is.

Brilliant Buyer Questions to Ask

I'll give you specific questions to ask about certain topics later. Here are some questions you can use to vet a potential agent to represent you. You can use similar questions to interview a mortgage loan officer. I'd suggest you keep this list (along with other questions you have) right next to you during your first appointment so that you get the information you need to feel confident about your decision.

Credentials: Are you a Realtor®? What resources from the NAR do you use?

What additional courses have you taken in real estate? What did you learn from them?

(If they show you a certain credential) What does this credential mean? How will it help you find the best home and the best terms for me?

Experience: How much experience do you have representing Buyers like me in this area? Can you give me some recent examples?

How many clients have you helped buy a home over your career? Is that you and your own team personally, or does it include other agents under your broker?

Do you specialize in clients like me and the type of home I'm interested in? This geographic area? What should I look for in this type of home? What makes this area unique?

Does your company offer any specific programs to first time Buyers, teachers, vets, etc. that might apply to me?

(If they have many years of experience) How would you say that real estate has changed over the last several years? Have you kept up with the latest trends in representing Buyers? What specifically do you do in that arena?

(If they have little experience) Do you have a more senior person who will be intimately involved in this transaction? Who is that person?

Reputation: Though you can't really ask them directly what their reputation in the community is, you can ask: Are you involved in the community and any professional organizations?

What do you like your clients and counterparts to say or think about you? What do you think you are known for as an agent?

Overall Team: Who else is on your team? What are their skills and background?

What specifically do you handle versus what members of your team handle?

How often will I be interacting with them? With you?

Chapter 2: Mapping the Journey

In this chapter, I'd like to give you a brief overview of the steps you'll be taking in purchasing your new home. Nowadays, we're so used to jumping in the car and telling our GPS where we want to go. The GPS gives us step by step directions and we just follow them. If the device is good, it warns us of traffic ahead or road construction. If it's not so good, it might tell us to take a left turn over a concrete barrier!

I suppose if you wanted to, you could just wait until your mortgage loan officer or Realtor® told you what to do next on this journey (and hopefully, they wouldn't steer you over any concrete barriers!). But I think most people would prefer to see the lay of the land and get a sense of the whole process so they know what to expect. I've laid it out in general in this chapter and will get more detailed in later chapters.

These steps may not happen in exactly this order. You may sit down and clarify your goals before you ever meet with your Realtor® or MLO. You might start looking at homes on the internet or going to open houses before you get pre-approved (though I wouldn't recommend it). That's okay as long as you understand the importance of each step along the way.

GRAPHIC HERE Step One: Pre-approval Many years ago, just about anyone who had income from a job and some cash could buy a home. So, Buyers started by finding a home they wanted and then applied for whatever mortgage they would need.

In fact, that's one of the things that lead us to the 2008 crash in real estate: People were getting loans they "chose" instead of loans they "qualified for". So, mortgage companies are looking for much more assurance that their loan to you will be repaid and it's become trickier to qualify. That's why I always recommend (and any good real estate professional or MLO should recommend) that you get pre-approved first. This process is not a commitment that you'll get a particular mortgage, but it lets you know the amount of loan you probably qualify for. With that and the cash you have for a down payment, you have a good idea of the price range you should be looking in. In

Chapter 3, I'll explain the process as well as the difference between pre-qualification and pre-approval.

Step Two: Clarify Your Goals and Priorities This is SO important if you want to end up in the right home! If you don't take this step seriously, it's too easy to end up in a house that's a dream home for some people but a nightmare for you! And if you're a couple buying together, you need to take the time to make sure that you're both rowing in the same direction. If you aren't, the whole process can be a mess for you, and you'll drive your Realtor® and MLO crazy! In Chapter 4, I'll give you questions to consider so you can get really clear on your wants, needs, and absolute deal breakers.

Step Three: Meet with Your Realtor® and Start Your Search Once you're clear what you want in your new home, your Realtor® can help you hone in on homes that fit your criteria and price range. Part of your search can be online. As you figure out which are good possibilities for you, you'll need to show up in person to check out different homes and scope out their neighborhoods. Chapter 5 will give you checklists of exactly what you should be looking for as you search.

Step Four: Make an Offer!

This is the exciting, scary part, right? It's like finally asking the guy or gal of your dreams to the prom! Your agent will guide you in how to make an offer that will be attractive to a Seller. In Chapter 6, I'll give you some insights into what makes a winning offer and how to put your best foot forward.

Step Five: Negotiations Toward Final Purchase Agreement Most people in the U.S. have little real experience when it comes to negotiation. We go into the department store, look at the price tag for an item we want, then just plunk down our credit card and buy it. Other cultures haggle for hours in the marketplace over the tiniest thing. It's expected and people get good at it. Your Realtor® does (or should!) have great experience and expertise at negotiation. In Chapter 6, I'll tell you what your agent should be doing for you and how you can contribute to the negotiation process. I'll also explain parts of the purchase agreement that you need to understand.

Step Six: Loan Approval The next few steps basically happen simultaneously but this is the one where you'll need to be the most proactive. Your pre-approval opened the

door but now, before the lender will commit to giving you the mortgage you need for your new home, you need to give your potential lender all of the back-up documentation they need, and it's a lot! By the end, it'll feel like they know more about you than your mother! In Chapter 9, I'll give you some tips on how to move through this step with ease and grace, so your home purchase stays on track.

Step Seven: Inspections!

The first time you see a home, it's like a first date. You've got stars in your eyes, and your date seems perfect. Well, in this part of the journey, you need to get those stars out of your eyes and take a good, hard look. Buying a home is a marriage, not a fling, and you don't want to wake up with regrets in the morning! In Chapter 7, I'll explain what you can learn from reviewing the disclosures, the impact of the appraisal, what a home inspection should tell you, and what to look for during your own inspections. We'll also discuss different ways to handle unexpected issues and problems that are uncovered during this time.

Step Eight: From Accepted Offer to Closing Even Buyers who have purchased multiple homes can be pretty clueless about what actually happens in this stretch, and Buyers arriving from another state are often confidently expecting a process that does not exist here. In Chapter 8, I'll take you behind the curtain so you can see what is happening and how it affects you as a Buyer.

Step Nine: Final Walk-through This is your last chance to check out your new home before it becomes yours! In this inspection, you're looking for anything that has been removed or changed in the property that is unexpected. This is usually pretty straightforward with no unpleasant surprises. But it's still important to verify that what you thought you were buying is what you bought. We'll talk about what you need to do if you do find something's not right in Chapter 7.

Step Ten: Prepare to Move In Let's face it: Moving is never easy, even when you're excited about it! That said, you can have a relatively smooth move, or one that disrupts your life for weeks, even months!, after your boxes show up in your new home. In Chapter 9, I'll give you checklists and tips to make your move less chaotic. I'll also talk about ways you can prepare long before your purchase is final.

Step Eleven: Sign at Closing You'll sign a ton of documents before your purchase is final. Before closing, you'll need to review and acknowledge the Closing Disclosure from your lender, and there is a required waiting period after that before you can close. At the closing itself you'll sign more documents like property transfer forms, the mortgage document and promissory note. No matter what paperwork you've reviewed before, these are the documents that set the mortgage terms and your commitment to repay in stone.

Step Twelve: Get Keys and Move In!

Woo-hoo! Moving day! Once the property transfer has been recorded, usually in a few days after final signing, you're free to move in. This part of the process is mainly about timing and logistics. In Chapter 9, I'll give you some tips to make this day as smooth as possible.

Chapter 3: Acing the Pre-Approval Process!

I know you're eager to be looking at homes to find The One, but unless you've got the cash to pay for it outright, beginning the loan process is your all important first step. For many people, going through the loan approval process is about as fun as a root canal. Few of us have perfect financial histories and even for those who do, the process can feel like an invasion of privacy. But here's the deal: Someone (a bank or lender) is about to loan you hundreds of thousands of dollars. That's a lot of money! And even though they'll be able to foreclose on your home if you don't keep to your agreement to repay them, they're in the banking business, not the foreclosure business. They don't want to have to kick you out of your house and then try to sell it to recoup their losses. A bunch of them ended up doing that during the 2008 recession and it was not pretty.

They are relying on you to repay them. They aren't related to you. They don't know you and don't yet recognize that you are an upstanding citizen who is conscientious, responsible, and honest. They need to verify that you are all these things. And, based on their prior experience, they need to feel comfortable with the bet they're making that you will actually be able to keep up with mortgage payments and repay the loan. That's why they are so thorough and ask for tons of information. Don't take it personally. It's just what they need to do.

And honestly? Your lender and mortgage loan officer are on your side! They want you to be able to stay in that awesome new home you find. They don't want you to stress over payments that you have to struggle to make every month. They want to see you in the loan that makes the most sense for your unique family and financial situation. That's the other reason that they're so thorough and ask for tons of information. So, relax. It may feel like an IRS audit, but it's for your own good!

There are three major steps in the process. First, before you even start looking with your Realtor®, you'll go through pre -approval or pre-qualification. Next, when you've found that perfect home that you're eager to buy, you'll go through the actual

loan approval process. Finally, you'll review and acknowledge the loan disclosure then sign final loan documents. In this chapter, we'll cover the pre-approval process.

Pre-Approval versus Pre-Qualification The first step you'll take in getting your mortgage is pre-qualification or pre-approval. These two are not the same thing, and I definitely recommend pre-approval, so let's break it down: Pre-qualification only gives you a ballpark figure of the mortgage amount you would qualify for. It's based on information you give the lender, but they don't go through the verification process (like credit checks and verifying everything you tell them). It's often done on the phone or online and you get the estimated figure in a pre-qualification letter pretty quickly. You can then show this to Sellers when you make an offer.

However, pre-qualification is not that reliable, and it may even give you unrealistic expectations of what you can expect when it comes to an actual mortgage. For example, at the stage when you apply for the loan, you may find that a lender discounts the income you've stated because you've been on the job for a shorter time than they prefer. Or they may quote you a higher interest rate based on your credit report. A quick pre-qualification doesn't pick up on these things.

Once, a Buyer I knew about wanted to buy a second home. They were pre-qualified by the lender based on the income they reported and their current monthly payments. Unfortunately, the Buyers didn't think they needed to include a car loan where they had co-signed for their son because the son made all the payments. But when the lender pulled the credit report for final approval, they noticed the car loan. Even though the Buyers weren't making the payments, as co-signers, that payment was counted against them because if their son defaulted, they would be on the hook. The result was that they couldn't get the loan they needed, and the deal fell through.

A pre-approval is much stronger. In fact, I'd say that a great MLO will always run you through the pre-approval process, not just a pre-qualification. A not-so-great loan officer might just take some information over the phone (Buyer beware!) or online and send you a pre-qualification letter without confirming for themselves everything you told them. They'll quote you ballpark figures, but they won't have enough information to ensure that the financing will go through or that it will work for you.

(Even stronger than a pre-approval is a "TBD" though not all lenders offer it. For a TBD, the underwriter who will actually fund the loan has reviewed and approved the client's information. The address of the new home is "to be determined" but once they have the signed contract, they are able to move forward. It's still a conditional approval, but it has gone one step further in the loan process which strengthens your position in the Seller's eyes. Ask your MLO if they are able to offer a TBD.)

Yes, pre-approval takes more work and a heck of a lot of documentation! But at the end of the day, you've got a much more solid idea of the price range you qualify for. You'll end up with a conditional commitment from the lender which is much more attractive to Sellers than a simple pre-qualification. You'll have much less risk of losing your deposit and being out of money unnecessarily. You'll feel much more confident and at ease that the terms your MLO told you were actually correct. And don't forget, you'll eventually have to provide all of this documentation and information when it comes to getting the loan anyway. So, why not get it over with?

This chapter is written assuming that you'll be working with a great MLO who will take you through the pre-approval process. When you first meet with this great MLO, they should be asking you a bunch of questions so they can understand which loans might be the best fit. Here are the major ones: 1. What are your goals for buying this house?

Do you intend to live there for the long run or a specific length of time? Are you looking for a new house or an older one you can renovate to suit you? Answers to these can help your MLO guide you into a mortgage that will support your goals. For example, if you're hoping to buy an older home, your MLO will keep in mind that you'll need cash down the line for repairs and renovation. You may even need to fix items that the lender deems necessary prior to funding the loan you need to buy the home.

1. How much cash are you comfortable coming up with for the down payment and closing costs?

Is this cash in savings, a retirement account, a gift from relatives? It's an urban myth that your total deposit must be from savings! This cash can be in the form of gifts or from a retirement account. The lender will just want to verify that the gift is not

another loan that you must repay or that it's a withdrawal from your retirement that will leave you vulnerable as you age.

This information also allows your MLO to determine how quickly you'll be able to come up with the good faith deposit with the offer you make and the down payment when it's due at closing. Is it in the type of account where you can get your hands on it immediately? Or will you have to transfer funds which can cause a delay? If you have to move funds around, how much time will you need to do this? An exceptional loan officer will ask upfront if you plan on getting a gift from someone for your deposit because the underwriter of your mortgage will require that you follow a certain process for those gifted funds. There are so many things to think about when gifting is involved that you have to be careful and well informed.

Documents needed for cash funds: Be prepared to have at least the most recent month (all pages) of any asset accounts, such as checking accounts, investment accounts, and 401k's, that you plan to use for the down payment and closing costs.

1. What is your total monthly income?

Total income means the gross income on your pay stub plus any other income, like alimony or child support. Your lender will want to ensure that your income is stable, so your MLO will ask you if you anticipate any changes to your job or income within the next several months, how long you've been at your job, or how long you've been self-employed or owned your business.

Documents needed for income: Your MLO will ask you for the last two months of bank statements, all pages. They'll also ask you for pay stubs that cover the last 30 days of income and two years of W2's. Or, if you own your own business or are self-employed, they'll ask for the last two years of your federal tax returns (all pages and schedules).

If you are on fixed income the loan officer will want to see 1099s and any recent award letters.

1. What are your current monthly obligations?

What credit card debt do you have? Do you have past taxes still owed? Do you have alimony or child support payments? Have you had any collection accounts, a bankruptcy, or foreclosures in the past? Your monthly obligations and how timely you've been on paying them directly impacts your credit score. And your credit score directly impacts the loan you'll be able to get. Your MLO also needs this information to help you calculate what level of payment you can afford. I know all of these questions seem like a lot, but don't let them freak you out. The lender needs to make sure (and you should want them to) that you can actually afford this house. You have to answer them to qualify for the loan. So why not answer them all now and so you know where you stand?

Documentation for monthly obligations: Your MLO will ask you for your social security number and most recent addresses so they can run a credit report on you. They will also want to see your driver's license. If you have an arrangement to pay off past taxes with the IRS, they'll ask to see any documentation on this.

1. What total monthly payment are you comfortable with?

To figure this out, you'll want to take into account your total monthly expenses for the new home: mortgage, insurance, and taxes, as well as homeowners association dues and private mortgage insurance, if any. For first-time home Buyers or people who have rented for a long time, I often suggest that they pretend to make that payment for a few months and see how it works for them. Put the difference between what you're currently spending for housing each month and what you anticipate spending each month into a savings account without touching it. You'll find out pretty quickly whether you'd really be comfortable with that new level of monthly obligation!

Your income may qualify you on paper for a payment of \$4,500 a month, however, you may feel more comfortable at \$4,000 a month. You might find out that you'd rather pay less on your mortgage so you have extra funds to travel or so you have the freedom to work less in the future. You might discover that spending this amount on a mortgage gets in the way of other goals, like saving for retirement. It's about what you're happy and comfortable with, not just the size loan you qualify for.

About Down Payments and Closing Costs

When you purchase a home, your lender typically lends you the major portion of the purchase amount and you are required (in most cases) to come up with a smaller portion. Another urban myth is that your portion (your down payment) needs to be 20% of the purchase price. It can be as little as 3% on some conventional programs, though those low-down-payment programs come with income limits, so ask whether you qualify rather than assuming. FHA starts at 3.5% if your credit score is 580 or above. And if it's a VA loan to a veteran or a USDA loan in a rural area, your down payment can actually be 0%.

If your down payment is less than 20%, in most cases your lender will require mortgage insurance to protect the lender in case you default. On a conventional loan this is called PMI, it costs you an additional amount each month based on your loan size and your credit score, and here is the part worth knowing: it does not last forever. By law it comes off automatically once you have paid down to 78% of the original value, and you can request it sooner at 80%.

FHA works differently and this trips people up. FHA mortgage insurance lasts the life of the loan if you put down less than 10%, which is most FHA buyers. Put 10% or more down and it drops off after 11 years. That difference can be worth tens of thousands of dollars over the life of the loan, and it is one of the things a good loan officer will walk you through before you pick a program.

The down payment required depends on the mortgage loan program you choose. A great MLO should teach you how to calculate what that number would be using different purchase prices and loan program options.

Closing costs as a Buyer typically include mortgage insurance, homeowner's insurance, appraisal fees, and prorated property taxes. They will also include loan origination fees. These fees are usually similar between different mortgage lenders. What could vary the most is the origination fee or discount points the lender may charge. So, make sure your MLO explains those points to you.

An experienced mortgage loan officer should be able to provide you an estimate or breakdown upfront of what your closing costs will probably look like. Keep in mind that in most cases, these costs are part of the cash that you'll need to provide at closing.

About Credit Scores

Your credit score is a major factor in getting a mortgage. It will impact the loan amount, interest rate, and type of loan you can get. But it's another myth that you have to have a perfect FICO score of 700 or above to qualify. FHA and VA are much less worried about FICO scores than other lenders and can work with a minimum of 580 (this might change by the time you read this book). Most conventional loans are backed by the mortgage companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and they typically require a minimum credit FICO score of 620. Every lender has their own criteria. They typically get reports from all three major credit bureaus to do their review and they'll use the lowest score from the three.

And, if there are two or more people on the loan with you, they will look at the mid-scores of all signers on the loan and take the lowest score.

One way you can save yourself time and headache is to check out your credit report ahead of time. This will give you a chance to see if there are any mistakes or dings on your credit that show up that you can get corrected. You are entitled to one free credit report every year from the three national credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion) by going to AnnualCreditReport.com.

Keep in mind that credit reports are a snapshot in time. It may look great today but whenever you do something, like make a major purchase, go on a spending spree on credit, make a late payment, or even put a purchase on layaway, it will affect your score. So be especially mindful of any financial moves in the months before buying your home and while you are under contract. Also, ask your MLO how long the credit report is good for. Some companies can use the same credit report for as long as four months.

And be sure to tell your MLO if you've had any foreclosures or bankruptcies in the past whether it shows up on your credit report or not. They'll advise you on how to improve your credit and what kinds of programs you might qualify for.

About Income Ratios

It's very important that you figure out what kind of monthly mortgage payment you are comfortable with. But your mortgage loan officer will also let you know the

amount a lender is comfortable lending you! They do this using two different ratios, often known as "debt to income" ratios.

In mortgage lending, the first ratio they use is called the "front-end ratio." You take your gross income and divide it into your anticipated mortgage payment which includes principle, interest, taxes and insurance (PITI), as well as private mortgage insurance and homeowners' association dues if any. For example, if your new mortgage expenses are \$2,000 (\$1,700 mortgage payment and \$300 HOA fees) and your monthly income is \$9,000, your front-end ratio is about 22%. As a guideline, lenders like to see a front-end ratio no higher than about 28%, or 31% on an FHA loan. Treat those as starting points, not cutoffs. Automated underwriting routinely approves higher when the rest of the file is strong.

The other ratio, the back-end ratio, measures how much of your gross income is allocated to all your other monthly debts. These other debts typically include student loan payments, credit card payments, and any other non-mortgage loan payments. You get this ratio by dividing your gross income into the total of these other monthly payments. So, if you have a monthly income of \$9,000 and your other monthly payments are \$2,600, your back-end ratio is just about 29%. Lenders generally like to see a back-end ratio around 36% or less. You may still read that 43% is a hard ceiling. It isn't anymore. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau removed the 43% debt-to-income cap from the Qualified Mortgage rule back in 2021 and replaced it with a pricing-based test, so the number is a guideline now rather than a wall. In practice, Fannie Mae's automated underwriting can approve up to about 50% with strong compensating factors, FHA can go above 43% when the file supports it, and VA sets no fixed cap at all. That said, lenders might accept higher ratios based on other factors such as substantial down payments, large savings, and a favorable credit score.

Don't let any of this discourage or confuse you! A really good MLO will be able to guide you so that you can best meet lenders' criteria. They should also be able to explain all your potential options and compare interest rates, down payments, and total monthly mortgage payments.

The True Cost of Owning a Home

Your pre-approval tells you what a lender is willing to give you. That is not the same as what you can actually afford to live comfortably.

Before you set your target price range, walk through the full picture of what homeownership actually costs each month. The mortgage payment is just the beginning.

Property taxes are calculated as a percentage of your home's assessed value and they vary significantly by state, county, and even neighborhood. In some areas this adds a few hundred dollars a month to your cost. In others it is substantially more. Your agent and lender can help you pull the actual tax history on any home you are seriously considering.

Homeowner's insurance is required by your lender and the cost depends on the size of the home, your location, and the coverage you choose. Homes in areas with flood risk, fire risk, or other hazards can carry meaningfully higher premiums. Get a rough insurance estimate before you fall too far in love with a property.

HOA fees, if the community has them, are a fixed monthly or quarterly cost that goes on top of everything else. In some communities these are minimal. In others, especially in condos and newer planned communities, they can add several hundred dollars or more per month. Find out what the HOA covers, what its reserve fund looks like, and whether any special assessments are on the horizon.

Maintenance and repairs are a reality of ownership. A general rule of thumb is to budget one percent of the home's value per year for ongoing upkeep. That means a \$500,000 home carries roughly \$5,000 a year in expected maintenance. Some years you spend less. Some years your water heater and your roof conspire against you.

Utilities in a larger home cost more than in a smaller one. In a different climate than you are used to, they may cost significantly more or less. If possible, ask the sellers for twelve months of utility bills as part of your due diligence.

When you add all of this up and compare it against your monthly take-home income, you get a real picture of what homeownership costs in your life, not just what the bank approved you for. I use AI tools to help buyers model this full cost picture for specific properties before they make an offer. The goal is no surprises after you close.

Once your MLO has done their work and gotten you pre-approved, don't mess it up by changing your financial situation. Don't go on a spending spree. Don't buy any big-ticket items or take out additional loans or credit. Even though you've been fully approved, the lender can deny the loan if you change your circumstances. For example, I know of a Buyer who was 100% pre-approved. They found the home they wanted but, prior to closing on the home, the Buyer put a bunch of furniture on layaway. Because of this, the lender denied the loan because they had been counting on all the money the Buyer currently had in the bank for reserves. The loan fell through, and the Buyer could not purchase the home they'd bought all that furniture for!

Red Flags

Most mortgage loan officers are conscientious and ethical! But there are a few red flags you want to watch out for: A mortgage loan officer who gets minimal information from you before telling you what to expect in a mortgage A mortgage loan officer who gives you just one option with a large down payment and high closing costs A loan officer who is hard to reach and doesn't return calls in a timely way A loan officer whose loan terms sound too good to be true, especially when you've had input from other MLOs that sounds less rosy Okay, so you've gone through the pre-approval process and now you're ready to go off and find your awesome new home! But first you need to define what an awesome home for you would be.

Chapter 4: Getting Clear on What You Want

When you first meet with your Realtor®, they'll be asking you a ton of questions to get clear (and help you get clear) on what you want and need in a home. It's like talking to a travel agent about your vacation. They may be the best travel agent on the planet and know about all kinds of great vacation spots. But there's no way they can arrange for the perfect trip if you don't tell them exactly what you want! That kayaking trip in the Yukon may have been awesome for their last client, but it would be a nightmare for you! No matter how knowledgeable they are, unless you tell them exactly what your needs and wants are for this vacation, they can't do their job. If you remain vague, odds are they'll send you to a place that makes you wish you'd never left home!

It's the same with your Realtor®. They know (or should know) a heck of a lot about the homes and neighborhoods in their community. But until you tell them, they know nothing about you and what you want and need in your new home.

One of the first things a good agent should ask you is if you have been pre-approved. (If you haven't, they should send you to a good MLO who can help you do that.) Your Realtor® will want to make sure that in the pre-approval process, you have considered all of your expenses like taxes, insurance, maintenance costs, and utilities. And they'll also need to know the loan amount you are comfortable with if it's different than the amount you qualified for.

You probably didn't wake up one morning and decide to go out and buy a new home. You've probably been thinking about it for a while, maybe even made a list of what your perfect home has. Now is the time to get crystal clear on what you want versus what you need. Wants and needs are two different things and it's important that you know the difference. Wants are things you can compromise on. Needs are set in stone. For example, you may want three bathrooms to accommodate the occasional guest. But would two and a half-baths be okay? For some households, absolutely not. You may need to have a large, fenced yard for your three Rottweilers, and that's non-negotiable.

You can use this list to help you organize your wants and needs even before you talk to your Realtor®. When using this list, first describe what you'd want in your perfect house then what you absolutely need. Let's start with the house itself: Floor plan: Do you prefer an open floor plan or one that gives each member of the family a lot of privacy? Do certain rooms need to be adjacent (i.e. the nursery near your bedroom)? Do you prefer a lot of light or a cozy darker feel? Single story or two story? Do you need a full bathroom on the first floor for company?

Your agent should be able to explain the pros and cons of different floor plans. For example, houses with higher ceilings are more expensive to heat. Two stories may sound great now, but if you plan on staying in the house for a long time, you may not want to climb stairs in your 80s.

Bedrooms: How many? How will they be used (as bedrooms, home office, guest room, etc.) What size? Any special requirements, like a very quiet bedroom for someone who works at night and sleeps during the day? Do you want the other bedrooms close to or farther away from your bedroom?

Bathrooms: How many? Who will be using them? Do they all need tubs? Any special requirements, like for someone who is elderly or disabled? Would half-baths work?

Kitchen: What size? What types of appliances? How many people will be working in it at one time? How often do you cook? Do you want a breakfast nook or counter for eating in the kitchen? What kind of storage and counter space?

Living Room: How will this be used? How often? Who will use it most? How many people at one time?

Dining Area: Do you use a separate dining room for casual or formal dining? How often? For how many people?

Storage: How much indoor storage do you need (closets, cupboards, etc.)? For what kinds of things?

Garage: How many vehicles do you have? How else will you use your garage (workshop, storage, etc.)?

Outside: How do you use your outdoor space? What kinds of amenities do you use (barbeques, jacuzzi, pool, etc.)? Do you use it for entertaining and if so, how many guests do you want to accommodate? Do you have pets that will use the outdoor space? What time of day do you use your outdoor space most?

Landscaping: Are you a gardener? Will you hire a gardener? Do you prefer low maintenance landscaping?

Maintenance/Renovation: Are you comfortable with a home that might need minor or extensive renovation? Would you get frustrated with an older home that needs ongoing maintenance?

Odds and Ends: Walk through your current home and consider what you have or would like to have in a new home. Ceiling fans? Gas hook-ups for your washer/dryer? Carpeting or hardwood floors? Fireplaces?

When thinking about the house itself, be sure to consider your furniture (unless you're buying new furniture along with the house). You don't want to show up on moving day to find out that your precious heirloom table only fits in the dining room with all the chairs pushed in! I know a writer whose office set-up requires a room that is at least 14' X 14'. So, putting it in a standard bedroom just doesn't work. Pull out your measuring tape and jot down the sizes of any furniture that you know you want to keep.

Next, let's get into the location of your home. You may already know the area well and know which neighborhoods you'd prefer. By getting detailed about what attracted you to these neighborhoods, your Realtor® may be able to point out others that are as good or better for you.

Proximity: How long of a commute do you want? Do you need to be near an airport? Do you want to be near family members? Close to the water or parks or hiking trails? Close to shopping? Walking distance to schools?

Your agent should be able to clue you in about traffic patterns. For example, Commute times are one of those things that look fine on a map and feel completely different in real life. A road that seems close can take two or three times longer than you expect at the hour you would actually be driving it. If you are not from this area, or your agent

isn't, you will not know that until you are already living there and sitting in it every morning.

Schools: If school districts factor into your search, that is yours to define and yours to research. I do not rate districts and I do not steer buyers toward or away from them. What I will tell you is which district a given address falls in, because that is a matter of public record. For everything else, GreatSchools.org covers all fifty states and every district publishes its own data.

Homeowners' Associations: Do you want to live in a community with a homeowners' association (HOA)? Your Realtor® should be able to explain the specific CC&Rs (covenants, conditions, and restrictions) of the HOA in any neighborhood you are considering.

There are pros and cons to an HOA. If you haven't owned a home with an HOA before, consider your own personality. Are you comfortable with rules and regulations that are policed by your neighbors? (Most HOAs are overseen by volunteer neighbors who are elected by the community.) Are you happier in a neighborhood with shared amenities, common standards that need to be followed by everyone? Be aware that there are costs associated with an HOA, typically a monthly maintenance fee and an annual assessment.

Safety: Do you want a gated community?

Do you want a neighborhood with well-lit streets? Do you want to be on a street with light traffic? Safety is a question I am not permitted to answer for you, and I will not. Fair housing law is strict on this, and rightly so: an agent characterizing a neighborhood as safe or unsafe is how steering happens, whatever the agent meant by it. What I can do is point you to the objective public sources so you can look for yourself. Crime data is published at SpotCrime.com and generally by the local police department. Registered sex offender information is at the National Sex Offender Public Website at nsopw.gov. Go look, take your time, and draw your own conclusions.

To guide you in terms of the location of your home, your Realtor® really needs to know the area. I know the South Coast of Massachusetts and Cape Cod deeply, and that knowledge shows up in ways that no online search can replicate. Two waterfront

homes can look almost identical online and carry very different long-term risks, costs and day-to-day experience. My job isn't to render technical opinions on any of that. It's to make sure the right questions get asked early, and the right specialists get brought in before you're emotionally committed rather than after. So we talk about flood and velocity zones, elevation, drainage, shoreline condition, prevailing wind and exposure, how the house sits in relation to the water, and how it has held up against salt and storms. We talk about what sits beyond the house too: seawalls and coastal banks, signs of erosion, conservation restrictions and wetlands buffers, dock and mooring permitting, private roads and easements, and what the place looks like at low tide. The answers come from surveyors, engineers, home and specialty inspectors, insurance agents, and the town's own conservation and building departments. What I bring is knowing which of those questions matter for a particular property, and who to call. An agent who genuinely knows the whole market catches things like that across neighborhoods, not just in one corner of town.

Once you've gone through your list of wants and needs with your Realtor®, they'll have a pretty clear idea of the types of homes and neighborhoods they should show you. They should NOT start showing you homes until they have that information! And they should NOT start showing you homes until they've done their homework and researched homes that fit your wants and needs! They shouldn't just send you to everything out there. They should show you homes that specifically match your criteria and what you're interested in.

A really good Buyer's agent should not only sort through what's available. They should go look at those homes first or at least contact the Seller's agent and get information ahead of time. For example, if I know my Buyer hates the smell of cigarette smoke, I'll do my due diligence beforehand. I don't want to waste my Buyers' time because I know that if you're sensitive to smells, you'll always smell that smoke no matter what you do!

And if there's not much on the market to fit their criteria, we'll send out letters to homeowners, letting them know we've got a Buyer interested in their type of home or location.

Once your agent has done their due diligence and found homes they think you'll like, it's time to get out there and check them out! In the next chapter, we'll talk about how

to tour homes efficiently, what you should be looking for, and some Dos and Don'ts.

Chapter 5: Going On Tour

Looking at the homes that you and your agent believe might be The One can be fun and exciting, almost like a first date! It can also be confusing and mind-numbing like speed dating when you see a whole bunch of houses in a short period! The key is to be organized and understand what you should be looking for. Touring homes is both an art and a science. By that I mean, you want to see how you feel about each home. You want to visualize yourself there and sense what it would be like to live there. But you also need to be analytical and determine if the home really does fit your criteria.

When you start touring homes, your agent should provide a sheet for each home that has its basic information such as square footage, lot size, gas or electric utilities, number of bedrooms and bathrooms, roof type, etc. so you can keep the houses straight in your mind. For my clients, I also leave room on each sheet so they can jot down comments, pros and cons, and notes, and I provide a checklist of things they need to notice.

I tell my clients to rate the homes on a scale of 1 to 10 and to rate the first home they see as a 5. Why? It might be that all the homes you see after the first one rate lower or higher. It might turn out that a 5 really is the middle of the pack. It doesn't matter. You just need to start with a baseline to compare the others to. I also suggest that you don't even bother rating a house you really don't like at all. If it's a "no" the second you walk through the door or step out of the car, turn around and don't even look at it. Throw that sheet away and don't give it a second thought. It will only clutter your mind.

Here are some things you should pay attention to: Neighborhood: Drive around the whole neighborhood, not just the block the house for sale is on. Do yards look well-landscaped and maintained? Do the houses look freshly painted and well-maintained? Are there sidewalks, bike lanes? How is the street lighting? Are there a lot of cars parked on the street?

I am not allowed to tell you a neighborhood is "good" or "bad," and I would not do it even if I could, because that judgment belongs to you. What I can tell you is factual and observable: what the commute actually runs, where the water is, how a road floods, what the town has approved for development nearby. Everything else is your own research from the public sources, done before you get in the car.

Front and backyard: How much maintenance will the landscaping take? What is the sun exposure in the front and back? Does the backyard fit with the way you use it (i.e. patio for entertaining, open play area, area for pets)? What condition are the fences in? Are there exterior electrical outlets in the back and front? Gas hook-ups for a gas barbeque or fireplace?

House exterior: Take a close look at the exterior of the home. Has it been well-maintained? Do you see cosmetic or structural changes you'd want to make? What kind of lighting does the front and backyard have? How close are you to the next door neighbors? Where is the HVAC unit or any pool equipment? (Both can be noisy!) Where is your next door neighbor's equipment? (Theirs can be noisy too!) Where are the garbage and recycling bins located? What noises can you hear in the yard such as planes flying overhead or traffic?

Entrances and exits: When you drive home from work or from picking up groceries, how will you access the house? Will you be protected from bad weather? When you have visitors, what door will they use? Is that entrance inviting? How do you access the backyard? What about the size of these entrances? (Newer homes follow ADA. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, standards but older homes may have more narrow doors.) Are the entrances well-lit? Are there many stairs to navigate?

Garage: How many vehicles can you fit into it? What type of storage does the garage have? Are there electrical outlets?

General Interior: How much natural light does the house get? What is the sun exposure in different rooms? How does the house smell? (Smoke odors are nearly impossible to get rid of!) How clean is the home? (If a home isn't clean, that might indicate that it hasn't been well-maintained in ways you can't see like air filters or screens or regular equipment maintenance.) Are the floor coverings well-installed and

well-maintained? How high are the ceilings? (High ceilings are nice but may mean higher utility bills.) Will the different rooms accommodate your furniture?

What type of heating/air conditioning system does the home have? Are there fireplaces and, if so, are they wood burning, gas or electric? (Per Environmental Protection Agency regulations, you can't put in new woodburning fireplaces if the home doesn't already have one. Depending on your location, you may be able to install a gas fireplace.) What kind of lighting in each room? Does the home have ceiling fans or hookups for ceiling fans in case you want to install them later?

How is the flow of the house, the movement from one area to another? How close are different rooms to one another? (You may not want the kitchen next to a bedroom if you run your dishwasher at night! You may want bedrooms closer together or farther apart, depending on your preference.)

What additional storage is there throughout the house (linen closets, coat closet, etc.)? Where is the laundry area? Gas or electric hook-ups?

Bedrooms: Are they situated near potential noise (near a street, the HVAC unit, close to neighbors)? Are they conveniently located near bathrooms? What is the closet space like? Lighting? Is there at least one bedroom on the ground level for company or if you become elderly or have an elderly parent living with you? Are any bedrooms on a single level near the street, and does that matter to you?

Bathrooms: Is the storage and counter space sufficient? Lighting? Mirrors? Is there a bathtub and a shower, or just one? Is there a bathroom on ground level with a bedroom (this is a common need if you have or anticipate having elderly parents visit or live with you)?

Kitchen: Are the appliances gas or electric? Will your refrigerator fit in the space provided? What type of lighting? Is the counter space and storage sufficient? Are there enough electrical outlets for your small appliances?

Whew! It's a lot, isn't it? Your Realtor® will be there to help you see things you might not notice. After years of touring homes, they should be experts at pointing out the pros and cons of each home to you! It's especially important that they point out things that might not be obvious about the area. For example, if the home is located on or

near a golf course, is the golf course well-run and maintained? (If so, will they mind waking up at 4AM when the landscape maintenance crew gets started? Is the home located such that golfers would tend to hit balls into the yard or hit the house itself and damage it?) Is the golf course active or not? If it's not active, eventually that means it will have overgrown and dead grass that will devalue the area.

I make sure to point out things you would never know unless you truly knew the area, things that directly affect your quality of life and the long-term value of the home.

On the Cape especially, the exact location changes the experience more than buyers expect. A property on Nantucket Sound, on Cape Cod Bay, on Buzzards Bay, on a harbor, on a pond, or on a tidal inlet will behave very differently when it comes to wind, water depth, boating access, erosion, flood exposure and seasonal traffic. Two homes twenty minutes apart can be two entirely different lifestyles, and the difference never shows up in a search filter. If there are any proposed changes in the area, such as new roads or developments, I make sure that I've done the research on those changes so I can tell my clients about them.

One perspective I bring to the table is how well the home will sell when they're ready to buy the next home. According to a study published by the National Association of Home Builders, the average Buyer stays in a single-family house about 13 years and the average first-time Buyer stays in their home for around 11 years. In some areas, people move much more often. So, it's a good bet that one day, you'll want to sell the home you're buying. A good Realtor® will keep that in mind for you.

I point out things that could cause the home to depreciate or could be considered negative to future Buyers as we're looking. I talk about any minimum retrofit requirements that the home may need, and who is typically responsible for installing them if the retrofits are required to be installed prior to closing. I tell them if I see any repairs that need to be made. Even if there is something about the home they really like, if it might not be favorable to future Buyers, I point it out. I've had clients say, "Man, it's almost like you're trying to talk me out of the house." I tell them, "No, I'm just trying to make sure that you know anything and everything about it." At the end of the day, they appreciate my honesty.

It's also important that your Realtor® points out positives you should consider as you make your decision. For example, that the home is in a high school score area, or the location is good for commuters, or the condition of the home is excellent, or the style of home is very desirable.

For example, single story homes with three car garages and a pool are super-highly desirable in some areas. They end up selling for more because there are fewer of them.

What happens if, after you've weighed the pros and cons, you end up with a couple of homes that are a tie? I tell my clients to do things like drive to the home in the morning then drive to work to figure out how long it takes for their commute. Check out the home at different times of day. Drive your dog over to the neighborhood and take a walk around. Sometimes you don't have time for these things because there's an offer deadline or the market is so hot you may miss out. In that case, do them during the inspection timeframe.

A few Dos and Don'ts while you're looking at homes: Don't look at homes that are above your price range.

It typically makes the homes that are in your range seem worse by comparison!

Don't look at homes in neighborhoods you don't like. Even if you find the perfect house, you'll never feel comfortable in it if you don't like the surroundings!

Do take your time in the home, even if the Seller is present. They shouldn't be there but if it turns out they are, don't feel you have to rush. Respect their space but take your time just as you would if they were not present.

Don't make verbal comments about the home, either positive or negative. Many homeowners have cameras for security that record people who are present. A negative comment or even talking about changes you'd make to the home could affect how well your offer is received and any negotiations down the road. Remember, the homeowner probably loves the home as it is, and you don't want to offend them before they even see your offer!

Do visit the neighborhood at different times of day, if at all possible. Check it during rush hour to see traffic. Check at night to see how well-lit it is. One client says she

always goes by in the evening to see if lots of people are out walking their dogs. To her, this indicates a safe neighborhood.

Don't look in their drawers or bathroom medicine cabinets. You should check pantries, cupboards and closets to see how much storage the home has. But looking through their personal stuff is a no-no!

No matter how careful you are, you won't pick up absolutely everything about a house you're viewing! For example, I know of someone who bought a home that seemed perfect, until they wanted to use their backyard only to discover that the new next door neighbor ran their noisy HVAC unit 24/7 in spring and summer!

Just be as observant as you can. Remember the criteria and priorities you set before you started looking.

The AI Buyer Decision System

One of the most common things I hear from buyers is this: "We love two houses and we cannot decide." It is one of the most stressful moments in the entire process, and it happens to almost everyone.

I have a tool that removes most of the emotion from that decision.

After you have toured homes and narrowed your list, I put your priorities into what I call the Buyer Decision System. We sit down together and score each property against the things that actually matter to you: location, layout, condition, school district, commute, outdoor space, potential for appreciation, whatever your list looks like. The system runs the comparison and surfaces which home is the stronger fit based on your own stated priorities, not based on which one has the nicer kitchen photos.

What this does is give you a clear, data-driven answer to a question that buyers usually try to answer with gut feeling. And gut feeling is valuable. But when you are spending the most money you have ever spent on a single purchase, having a framework underneath the feeling gives you confidence in the decision after you make it.

A lot of buyers second-guess themselves the moment they go under contract. They wonder if they chose right. The Buyer Decision System gives you a documented reason for your choice. That is worth more than most people realize when the anxiety of being under contract sets in.

And when you find a home you love that matches up to your criteria, it's time for the next step: making an offer!

Chapter 6: Making the Offer

When it comes to making an offer on a home you'd love to own, the most important thing you can do is: Trust Your Realtor®!

You've chosen a professional so treat them like a professional! If your dentist told you that your tooth is cracked and you need a crown, would you tell them to fix it with a filling instead? If your accountant told you that you owed the IRS another \$2000, would you blow them off? If your trusted mechanic said you need new tires, would you ignore their advice? Probably not.

Some people think of real estate agents as a commodity, and frankly some agents are. But a Realtor® who has done a significant number of transactions is a professional. Like an attorney or a doctor, it's their fiduciary obligation to work in your best interests. Trust what they're saying, trust their advice and guidance. Don't think they're just after their commission. And if you're working with an agent who seems like their commission is more important than you, get out of Dodge as fast as you can!

A good Realtor® has the knowledge and experience to tell you how to structure an offer that will succeed in getting you the home you want. It's a partnership. Discuss their recommendations thoroughly, ask questions, offer alternatives if you want, but trust their advice.

And if you don't trust your agent, why the heck did you choose to work with them in the first place?

My second piece of advice is: Put Your Best Foot Forward!

Buyers sometimes think that they should low-ball their first offer and see what happens. If the market is a Buyer's market, that might work. Though often even in a Buyer's market, that strategy backfires. The Seller gets insulted and won't even counter a disrespectful offer! And in a Seller's market? Forget it. A Seller will be getting much more attractive offers so why even consider yours?

If my Buyers really want the home we're making an offer on, I tell them to put together the most attractive offer they feel comfortable with. Think of it like dating: If you want even a chance of having a second date, you need to be at your best when they first meet you, not your worst.

And finally, Keep Your Ego Out of It!

While putting together an offer and during negotiations you need to keep your cool and keep your emotions in check. Use your logic and rational mind to make decisions, not your ego. I've seen somebody lose a \$450,000 house over \$5,000. If you're buying a \$450,000 house, who cares if it's \$5,000 more than you wanted? In the whole scheme of things, what is \$5,000? That's the equivalent of about one latte every week over the next 30 years. Don't waste your energy arguing over the small stuff.

What Your Realtor is Considering

As your Realtor® advises you on what your offer should be, they are taking a ton of things into consideration and weighing them: The Market: In real estate, we talk about "Sellers' markets" and "Buyers' markets". A Sellers' market is when Sellers call the shots. There are more Buyers looking for homes than Sellers looking to sell. In a Sellers' market, often inventory is low, home prices are rising, and interest rates are low. In a very hot Sellers' market, homes for sale will get multiple offers within hours of the For Sale sign popping up, and often those offers will be well above asking price and offer the incredibly attractive terms for the Seller!

However, in a Buyers' market, there are more homes for sale than interested Buyers. In those markets, you'll have more flexibility in what kind of offer you make. Most Sellers will be more willing to compromise to get their home sold. One thing to note: Though it might be a Buyer's market on a national scale, the market within a certain city or even neighborhood might be different. What you read in the news may not apply to the zip code you want to move into! Also, even in a Buyers' market, if the type of home you want is scarce, the Seller is still in the drivers' seat.

For example, in some areas, single story homes with a three-car garage and a pool are very desirable, and very hard to get because there are so few of them. This drives the price up and your bargaining power down no matter what the market is doing.

Comparables: You've already seen the MLS comps, but now is when your agent will really analyze them. How comparable are these comparables? Your Realtor® will get down to the nitty gritty and compare these homes to the one you want in terms of age of the home, condition, lot size, additional amenities, upgrades, etc., etc. They'll take into account specific location, views and sun exposure. They'll look at how recent (or not) the comps are and how long they were on the market before selling.

Other Offers: Are there any other offers on the table? Your agent should be communicating with the Seller's agent to find out as much as they can about other offers, how many and what type, such as cash or other financing. How does this affect your offer? For example, if you have an offer with conventional financing and 20% down, it may be considered more attractive than an offer with FHA or VA financing because those require less money down, a lower credit score and they have more lender-required repairs that the Seller must make in order for the Buyer's loan to go through. But each is individual. Several times, I have seen Sellers accept an offer from the VA Buyer even though that offer was lower and the terms weren't as favorable. They chose it because they appreciated that the Buyer was a veteran who had served our country. I have to admit, I love when that happens! I'm always rooting for veterans.

So, what if the other offer is a cash offer and yours is a conventional loan? You may be in a weaker position depending on other terms that may or may not be in the offers. From the Seller's perspective, they may prefer the offer that is most likely to close. A cash offer requires no appraisal (although very rarely, a cash offer will still get an appraisal) and doesn't have a loan contingency. So, even though your offer is higher, you may need to do more to sweeten the pot and give the Seller confidence that you'll be able to close.

The Seller's Shoes: Throughout the book, we've talked about what's important to you and your priorities. Now it's time to take into account what the Seller needs and wants. A good Realtor® will have done their research and be able to tell you what's important to the Seller. Do they want a fast close? Do they need a rent-back? Would they feel more confident accepting an offer with a higher down-payment? Is a higher initial earnest money deposit important to the Seller? If you really want the home, do whatever you can to provide the Seller with what's most important to them.

For example, Krista had a client in a Seller's market who really wanted a certain home. The Seller was eager to sell but they wanted to stay in the area and there weren't many homes for sale. The Seller was afraid that they wouldn't be able to find a replacement home and they'd end up "homeless". She was able to come in with an offer that had generous rent-back provisions. This meant that the Seller could go ahead and close on the sale knowing that they could stay in place while they hunted for their new home. It also gave the Seller funds to purchase their next home. Their offers didn't have to be contingent on selling their home and this put them in a much stronger position as Buyers in a very competitive Sellers' market. Her Buyer's offer wasn't any higher than others that came in, but the rent-back tipped the scales in their favor.

Strategies for a Sellers' Market

In a Sellers' market, you can't be dragging your feet and, if you really want a certain home, your offer will have to be outstanding. If you know it's an extremely competitive market and there are a bunch of offers on the table, don't gamble. If you would be willing to offer \$10,000 more for the home, go in with your first offer at \$10,000 more. Don't wait thinking that you'll offer it on the next round. Why? Because often the listing agent will say, "Hey, this person came in from the get-go super committed. That means they're the most serious. This is one we should take." However, if you hold back and they counter you and you add \$10,000 to match the other offers later, if all terms are the same, they'll most often pick the offer of the person that came in with their best offer to begin with because they showed the most initiative.

Another option, if you've been fully approved for your loan, you can waive the appraisal contingency. This means that if the house doesn't appraise at the sales price, you'll make up the difference in cash. I've sold several homes for \$60,000 to \$100,000 over the appraised value in a Sellers' market and Buyers were happy to pay the difference out of pocket. You can specify a specific amount over the appraisal you're willing to pay or give it a blank check. Obviously, only do this if you're comfortable doing so! But in a Sellers' market, it's a very effective strategy if you're determined to get the house.

I know of some Buyers in another market who had been looking for a property for a long time. They kept missing out on homes they wanted because of bidding wars and multiple offers. So, they wrote an offer that was non-contingent on the home appraising. They ended up paying \$100,000 over what the house appraised for. Yet they were still thrilled because they were in love with the home!

Another strategy is to shorten the timeframes for inspection contingencies. Shorter timeframes are always attractive because it means the Seller spends less time waiting to see if you'll approve inspection findings. Another option is to say that you'll accept the property "as-is". In other words, no matter what issues the inspections show, you'll be responsible for making all necessary repairs. Or, you can ask for a credit for any necessary repairs that show up to save the Seller the hassle of making the repairs themselves. Just be aware that even this is a risk. Inspections may show a little bit of dry rot and give you a \$3000 estimate for repair. But once they get into it, it's not uncommon to discover that the damage is much more than anyone thought. Your \$3000 credit won't cover the final \$15,000 cost!

How to Win in Any Market

Real estate markets shift. The strategies that work in one market can actually hurt you in another. Here is how to think about making offers depending on what kind of market you are in.

In a seller's market, inventory is low and competition is high. Homes go fast, sometimes within hours, and multiple offers are common. In this environment, your offer needs to be strong out of the gate. This is not the time to test a seller with a low-ball number. A good agent will tell you what the home is actually worth and help you offer at or above that if you want to win. Other things that make your offer more attractive in a seller's market: a larger earnest money deposit, a faster close, fewer contingencies where you can reasonably reduce them, a pre-approval letter from a local lender (not just an online one), and a personal letter if the seller has an emotional attachment to the home. I will advise you on which of these to use and which to skip based on what I learn about the seller's situation.

In a buyer's market, you have more leverage. Homes sit longer, sellers are more motivated, and there is room to negotiate on price, repairs, closing costs, and terms.

This is when we can ask for things that would be laughed out of a seller's market offer: concessions toward your closing costs, price reductions after inspections, longer contingency windows, or seller-paid rate buy-downs that lower your monthly payment. Do not be timid in a buyer's market. That is when buyers leave the most money on the table by being too conservative.

When interest rates are high, your buying power is lower, but so is the competition. Fewer buyers can afford to be in the market, which means less pressure and more room to negotiate. One strategy worth discussing is a seller-paid rate buy-down, where the seller contributes money at closing to lower your interest rate for a period of time. Another is looking at adjustable-rate mortgages if you know you will refinance or sell within a specific window. A good mortgage professional will model these options for you so you can compare the real monthly cost.

When interest rates are low, competition heats up because more buyers qualify and more buyers feel confident. This is typically when seller's markets form. If you find yourself buying in a low-rate environment, speed matters. Being fully pre-approved and ready to move quickly is what separates buyers who get homes from buyers who keep losing them.

One truth that holds in every market: the buyers who win are the ones who are prepared before they fall in love with a house. Pre-approval done. Priorities clear. Agent relationship established. When you are ready to move, you can. When you are not, someone else gets the house.

How to Be the One They Want

Besides the terms of the sale, there are other ways you can stand out and make a positive impression with the Seller and their listing agent. You may have heard of the "buyer love letter," where a Buyer writes to the Seller about how much they adore the home and why they should be chosen. I do not use them, and I will tell you plainly why. Those letters routinely reveal things about a Buyer that a Seller is not permitted to consider: whether they have children, their religion, their national origin, their age, their disability. When a Seller then picks one offer over another, the letter becomes evidence of why. It creates exposure for the Seller, for the Buyer who loses, and for both agents. A number of brokerages and several states have restricted or banned the

practice outright for exactly this reason. What actually wins a competitive offer is the thing a Seller can lawfully weigh: price, a clean and credible financing position, a deposit that signals commitment, a timeline that solves the Seller's problem, and terms that are not littered with escape hatches. I could tell you dozens of stories where a letter or video text to the Seller helped a Buyer beat out the other offers. It seems almost too easy! But it really works because to most Sellers, it's not just a real estate transaction. It's their home! Making connection through a letter or video text is so much more personal and gives them a feel for who will live in their home next beyond the terms of the offer.

I'll send a video text, an email, and a letter to the listing agent to make connection. I call them and talk to them about my Buyer and let them know how solid my Buyer is. I explain that they understand what the market's like, and that they're not going to be high maintenance asking for a lot of repairs. I let them know that I've educated the Buyers on what's expected right now due the market climate, whether it's good or bad. And I also have the mortgage loan officer call and talk to the listing agent as well so they can discuss how qualified the Buyer is.

It's a Legal Contract

One last point I want to make is that the Purchase Agreement is a binding contract. If the other party (the Seller) lives up to their side of the contract, you are expected to live up to yours.

Krista once had a listing where, after the contract was signed, the Seller decided they didn't really want to sell after all! She explained that the contract was legally binding. They tried to dissuade the Buyer by disclosing every tiny negative thing they could about the property, making the littlest molehills into huge mountains. In the end, the Buyer still wanted the home and fulfilled their side of the agreement. Her Seller was out of luck!

In many ways, it's easier for a Buyer to get out of the contract based on inspection contingencies. If, within the timeframes of the inspection contingencies, you get cold feet because you realize something you didn't know at the time of offer (such as the traffic being heavy at certain times or that the neighbors are loud party animals), you as the Buyer can back out if you discover something that you don't like.

Also, be aware that all the terms you negotiated in your contract are binding. If you agreed to accept the home as-is and find out after closing, or while under contract, that the house has a mold problem, you can't go back to the Seller and complain or ask them to fix it or lower the price. As-is is as-is, no matter what problems you find. So, make sure that you pay close attention to exactly what you're agreeing to!

As soon as both parties sign, you are under contract. Congratulations! But you've still got more steps to go through before it's your home sweet home.

Chapter 7: Disclosures and Inspections

If going on tour was like speed dating and making your offer was like putting your best foot forward on a first date, this is now the time when you're thinking of marrying and you need to find out what you're really getting into before you tie the knot! In real estate, we do this through disclosures and inspections which are built into the contract. (And if there were a similar process before marriage, we'd definitely have fewer divorces!)

You can't take this stage lightly. Yes, you adore the home, and it seems absolutely perfect. But would you still feel the same if you found out that the basement floods every winter or that the foundation is cracking and may need mega-bucks to repair? Maybe not. Here's how you can find out before, not after, the fact: Disclosures

Disclosures are forms that the Seller completes that reveal to you the condition and any known defects about their home. The laws around disclosures vary from state to state. Disclosure rules are set state by state and they are not the same everywhere. In many states a Seller must disclose anything that has been repaired, replaced, modified, added, or changed, and the safest assumption is that if you are wondering whether something belongs on the form, it does. Your agent and the official Massachusetts or Rhode Island disclosure form are the authority on what actually applies to you. If the Seller has replaced the water heater two times, they need to say, "Replaced water heater two times," and give the dates. It's required that they specify the number of times because if it's been replaced four times in two years, that reveals a bigger problem than just the water heater. It's probably a water problem or an electrical problem or something similar which might be a concern. They are required to be very specific so you'll know if it's a red flag or not. Owners also need to disclose any problems or potential issues they know of, even if that issue should be obvious to most observers.

So, if you're in a state with strict disclosures and you trust the Seller, would you still need to get inspections? Absolutely! Because even in the strictest states, Sellers only have to disclose what they know about. And this is one time when what you don't know will hurt you!

If the Seller doesn't know about something because it's in the walls and it's hidden, they can't disclose it to you. Once you buy that house, it's yours. If you suddenly find out a month later that there's \$50,000 worth of hidden insect damage and the Seller didn't know about it, it's now your problem, not theirs.

For example, Krista had listed a home and had to sell it for significantly under its market value because there was a sex offender living on the same street. They disclosed this because the Seller knew about it. But if they hadn't known about it, it would not have been their responsibility to disclose it. Per Megan's Law, where a sex offender lives is public record, but it's not the Seller's job to look it up, it's yours.

Two States, Two Sets of Paperwork

I am licensed in Massachusetts and in Rhode Island, and I want to set an expectation early: they are not the same system. If you are shopping on both sides of the line, the forms you sign will differ, the vocabulary will differ, and in at least one important respect the two states start from opposite assumptions about what your agent is to you. Do not assume that what you signed in one state means the same thing in the other.

I am deliberately not going to print the specific rules, timelines, or form names in this book. Not because they are secret, but because they change, and a book that quotes them accurately today becomes a book that misleads you in three years. What follows is awareness, so you know what category of thing is coming and what question to ask. For the current specifics, ask me at the time, and for anything with legal consequence, ask your attorney.

Who your agent actually represents, and the fact that it might be nobody.

Both states require a written disclosure about the relationship between you and any licensee you deal with, presented early in the process. Read it. It is the most consequential piece of paper most Buyers skim.

Here is why it matters more than it looks. Both states recognize an arrangement in which a licensee assists with the transaction while representing neither side. No loyalty to you, and by default, no obligation to keep what you say confidential. It has a name on the form. Massachusetts and Rhode Island use different names for it and

structure it differently, and in one of the two states, a version of non-representation is the starting assumption unless the form says otherwise.

Sit with that for a second, because it is the thing out-of-state Buyers most often get wrong. You can be working with a licensed, competent, perfectly ethical agent who is not representing you, and the paperwork will have told you so. When you sign it with me, I will walk you through which box is checked and what it means, and you should ask that of any agent, not only me.

Older homes and lead paint. Homes of a certain age carry disclosure obligations around lead paint at the federal level and at the state level, and both Massachusetts and Rhode Island go beyond the federal baseline in their own ways. Given the age of the housing stock around here, this applies to a great deal of what you will look at. You will receive materials, you will be asked to sign an acknowledgment, and it happens earlier in the process than most Buyers expect, because the point is for you to have it **before** you are obligated under a contract rather than after.

Two things you should know as the person being protected here. First, you are generally entitled to a period in which to have the property assessed for lead before you are locked in. Ask for it rather than assuming it has passed. Second, in Rhode Island the requirements are more extensive than the federal ones, and if they are not met, the statute gives the buyer a written right to void the agreement up until the transfer of title. That is a meaningful protection, and it only works if somebody is paying attention to it. I pay attention to it.

Your right to inspect. Massachusetts has moved to protect Buyers here, and it is worth knowing that a Seller's ability to demand you give up a home inspection as the price of getting your offer accepted is restricted, not unlimited. If you have heard from friends in hotter markets that waiving the inspection is simply what one does to compete, understand that the rules here are not those rules. Ask me what the current state of it is when you are ready to write.

Who can recommend an inspector. Massachusetts places real limits on a licensee recommending a specific home inspector, and whether those limits apply depends on the representation relationship we have. It is a genuinely odd rule if you

have not met it before, and it is not me being unhelpful. I will tell you exactly what I can and cannot do at the time, and there is always a path to a good inspector.

Septic, water and the coast. A great many properties on the South Coast and the Cape are on septic rather than town sewer. Massachusetts requires an inspection in connection with a transfer, and that inspection has a shelf life, so a "recent" one may or may not still count. That inspection is customarily the Seller's responsibility, but it is negotiable. A Seller can specify an as-is sale, or the contract can put the inspection and its consequences on you. If that is what you are being handed, know it early, because it is a real cost and a real risk moving onto your side of the ledger. Separately, many Cape Cod watersheds are designated as nitrogen sensitive areas. That designation is made watershed by watershed rather than Cape-wide, the list has grown over time, and whether it covers the parcel you are buying is a lookup rather than a guess. Ask me to run it before your inspection window closes.

Sewer, betterments, and the cost that does not appear on any form. If you are buying on Cape Cod, this is the item most likely to surprise you after the closing, so I am going to be direct about it. Much of the Cape is in a long municipal transition from septic to sewer, driven by nitrogen in the coastal waters. It is proceeding town by town and watershed by watershed, on schedules measured in decades. Each town has its own plan, its own phases, and its own calendar.

When sewer reaches a street, Massachusetts allows the town to assess a **betterment** against the properties that benefit. It can be apportioned over a long run of years, it carries interest, and it is a lien recorded against the property. That last part is what matters to you: it runs with the land, not with the person who was living there when the vote happened. If a balance is still outstanding when you buy, you are buying the balance.

There are also several distinct costs wearing the same word. The betterment is your share of building the public system. There may be a separate connection or privilege charge. There is the private cost of running the line from the house to the street and decommissioning the existing septic system, which is entirely yours. And there is an ongoing sewer use charge for as long as you own the home. Hearing one figure does not mean you have heard all four.

Now the part that genuinely catches people. If a betterment has already been assessed and the order recorded, it is a lien, and it should turn up in the municipal paperwork your attorney pulls before closing. **If the street is merely scheduled for a future phase, it will not appear in that paperwork at all.** There is no lien yet, so there is nothing to certify. You can close on a house, receive a clean municipal lien certificate, and still be a few years away from a substantial assessment.

The only way to know is to ask the town. So we do, on any Cape property, as a matter of course: where does this street sit in the plan, is there an assessed betterment outstanding, and what has the town published about what is coming. I would rather make that call and find nothing than skip it and find out later.

I want to be precise about one thing people constantly merge: a sale triggers an inspection and a disclosure. A sale does not, by itself, trigger a septic upgrade. Those are separate obligations on separate clocks, and confusing them is how Buyers end up either panicking about a cost they do not have or missing one they do. What is worth your attention is the size of the number if it does land on you. If a system in a nitrogen sensitive area fails or has to be replaced, the replacement may have to meet a higher nitrogen-reducing standard than a conventional system, and that is a materially larger expense. Price that possibility into what you are willing to pay, and get the septic answer before your inspection window closes, not after. This area is under active regulatory change and the details are genuinely moving, which is exactly why they are not printed here. Ask, every time, on every property.

What the Seller tells you. One of the two states mandates a standardized Seller disclosure form with real procedural teeth attached to it. The other approaches it differently. In either case, the Seller is only ever disclosing what they actually know, which is the whole reason the inspection exists.

None of the above is legal advice and none of it is a substitute for your own attorney. Rules change, forms get revised, and the right answer depends on your property and your transaction. Treat this as a map of the terrain, not as the terrain.

Reviewing disclosures is only part of your due diligence. You need to understand, based on what your agent lets you know, just what the Seller does or doesn't need to disclose in your state and how much digging you need to do on your own.

Appraisals

A home appraisal is an unbiased estimate of the fair market value of a home. For lenders, this is a way to assess the home's market value and decide what size loan they're willing to give you for that property. For example, if you are putting 20% down on a property that appraises at \$400,000, they will not lend you any more than \$320,000 no matter how much the Seller is asking for. The person who does the appraisal is licensed and/or certified by the state you're in and they are trained to determine the value of a home fairly, objectively and without bias. Appraisers are highly regulated, so they take the "fairly, objectively and without bias" part of their job very seriously.

In coming up with the home's value, they'll consider recent sales for similar properties, the current condition of the property, the location of the property and neighborhood, and how it impacts the property's value. The cost of the appraisal usually runs around \$400-\$600 and is typically paid by the Buyer.

Inspections Who pays for the different inspections varies from state to state. But even if you end up paying for all of them, it is totally worth it. Getting professional inspections is the only way to ensure that you're buying what you thought you were buying. In states that are not strict about disclosures, I would recommend that you have as many inspections as possible. Typical inspections include a pest or wood-destroying insect inspection (which also covers things like dry rot, leaks, fungus, and any other issues that reveal damage to wood), a heating and cooling system inspection, and a home inspection (which looks at things like the foundation, structural components, roof, HVAC, plumbing, and electrical systems etc.).

A separate roof inspection is particularly important. Why? This is a big-ticket item and, unless the roof is newer and still under warranty, you want to make sure that it's sound. Also, if the property has a pool, a pool inspection will uncover any leaks or cracks or problems with the equipment.

If the home is older, you may want additional inspections. For example, if the home is in an area with a lot of older trees you might want to have a sewer lateral inspection to reveal any root encroachment to the lines. If the home is on a rural property, you definitely want to have a well inspection and a septic inspection. Every type of home

and property is different, but the older the home, the more inspections you should have.

And don't think just because the house is newer that you don't need inspections! I know of one Buyer who bought a brand-new home only to find out that several electrical plugs didn't work, and the home had other electrical issues as well.

For a Seller of an older home, it would be very wise and in their best interest to do a home inspection, a pest inspection, and a roof inspection prior to putting it on the market so they understand the problems with the house. If they don't do that and they're in contract for \$500,000 then suddenly inspections show \$150,000 worth of damage to the house, well, they're not in a good position. A Buyer is not going to still pay \$500,000 to buy that house with \$150,000 worth of work that needs to be done. At that point, the contract is either going to fall apart (and the Seller will have to disclose the damage to the next Buyer) or the Seller will have to reduce their price and change the terms, or fix the issues at hand to keep the Buyer from walking away. Better to know ahead of time what they'll be dealing with!

I always recommend that the Buyer attend the home inspection. It usually takes 2 to 4 hours depending on the home and you'll get a detailed report at the end. But being there gives you the opportunity to ask questions and really poke around the house to see things you probably missed during the tour. Use this time to find out where things like the electrical panel, the main water shut-off to the house, water heater, HVAC unit, and the sprinkler controls are located.

The Certified Turnkey Home™. What It Means for You as a Buyer

When you are buying a home, uncertainty is your biggest enemy. It is what creates fear, causes buyers to over-negotiate on price trying to protect themselves from the unknown, and is behind most of the deals that fall apart before closing.

I have a program specifically designed to remove that uncertainty.

On select listings, I work with sellers to prepare what I call a Certified Turnkey Home™. Before the home comes on the market, all major inspections have already been completed. Any health and safety issues have been repaired by a licensed

contractor. The documentation is ready for you to review. The home has been through the process before you ever walked in.

Here is what that means for you.

You are not buying a question mark. You know what you are getting before you make an offer. You can make your offer with confidence because there are no hidden inspection surprises waiting to blow up the deal or force a renegotiation at the worst possible moment. The inspection process still happens on your side, as it always should, but you are starting from a baseline of verified condition rather than hoping the sellers took care of things.

When a home goes through my Certified Turnkey Home™ process, I require pre-inspections, pre-repairs by licensed contractors, and full documentation before the home ever hits the market. As a buyer, you get to see all of that before you make a single offer. You walk in knowing the condition. You write your offer from a position of information, not fear.

Think of it like certified pre-owned vehicles. When a car goes through manufacturer certification, it gets inspected, repaired, documented, and sold with that assurance built in. Buyers choose those vehicles because the uncertainty is gone. They sell faster and attract more serious buyers because everyone can see the car was properly taken care of. The same dynamic applies to real estate. A home that has already been through this process signals to every buyer that the seller and the agent running the sale operate with a higher standard.

Not every listing goes through the full Certified Turnkey Home™ process. It depends on the property, the market, and what is right for that seller's situation. But when you see it, you will know it means something.

Once you get the reports, review them carefully but don't freak out about the number of items mentioned. A conscientious inspector will write down absolutely everything but many of the items aren't really a concern. What you want to pay attention to are any major issues, health and safety issues or other problems, and your real estate agent should be able to advise you on items of great concern.

Snooping Okay, I confess that snooping is not actually a real estate term! But it can be a very helpful part of your due diligence. There are issues that the Seller may not know and that may not show up in your inspections, but your potential new neighbors know about. Here's a story Krista told me: "I represented a Seller who was selling three duplexes. His parents (now deceased) had always dealt with the property, so he really didn't know much about it. He disclosed everything he knew at the time. During the home inspection phase, inspectors didn't find much of anything. However, when we went back to the property before the close, a tenant told us that there had been mold damage. Then she started telling us about repairs and all kinds of modifications in previous years. The Seller hadn't known about any of it. But by talking to the tenant, we found out about it all. Once we did, we had to disclose it. Had she not disclosed that to me, the new Buyers would never have known."

As a new Buyer, you can ask questions like that. Ask questions of the neighbors. Ask questions of tenants who live on the property. Have your Realtor® ask other agents who have sold homes in the neighborhood if they know of any issues.

Dealing With Inspection Items What do you do about issues that your inspections (or snooping!) turn up? It depends. First of all, if the items are small, please don't try to nickel and dime the Seller to death! You'll only frustrate everyone and may delay the close. But if it's a more major issue, then it really depends on 1) what the issue is and 2) the market.

Anytime there's health and safety issues, electrical issues, roof issues like dry rot, insect damage, fogging in the windows, or broken appliances, these are the types of things you need to figure out before going forward. Either you'll ask the owner to make the repair or ask for a credit or a price reduction. But if you saw the carpet was stained and disgusting, even though that's more major, don't ask for it now. You should have written that in the original offer because that was visible to you. You only want to ask for a repair or an adjustment on things that weren't visible that you couldn't know until your inspectors reported them.

The market determines who is in the power seat in terms of how to deal with problems discovered by the inspections. For example, let's say that you've agreed to a purchase price of \$500,000. It's a Sellers' market and they had 15 other offers. Your pest inspection reveals \$30,000 worth of insect damage that no one knew about.

You've got choices: You can pay the \$30,000 for the repairs after the close. Or you can ask the Seller to do the work or give you a credit. In a Sellers' market, odds are they'll say "no" to the credit or price reduction. In that case, you can decide to back out. The Seller will have to disclose it to the next Buyer but in a hot Seller's market, it won't be that big a problem for them. The problem is really yours because then you're back to square one. You have to start your search all over again and, in a hot market, prices on properties could have already gone up. So, even though you don't really want to shell out another \$30,000 for that repair, if you really want the house, the market may force you to bite the bullet and incur the cost.

If the market is a Buyers' market, you're in a much stronger position. Decide whether you want to have the Seller do whatever work is necessary or whether you want to do it yourself and get a credit for the work or a price reduction. Just be very sure that you know what you're getting into and have solid estimates for whatever needs to be done.

For my listings, we have something that I call the "certified turn-key home". That means that my Seller has already done all the major inspections, and we have had all the health and safety issues repaired by a licensed contractor. This way, the Buyer absolutely knows what they're getting. It's less risk for the Seller, less risk for the Buyer, for both the agents, and for the lender. This works well for everyone, but it isn't available with all agents and their listings.

Final Walk Through The final walk-through comes just before closing and (hopefully) the owner has vacated. It's your chance to inspect the property with your Realtor® to verify that everything is in the condition you expected and that everything that's supposed to be in place (appliances, light fixtures, etc.) is still there. It's also when you make sure any items that were negotiated like repairs etc. have been done. Basically, you're making sure the home is in the same condition or better (based upon repair requests etc.) than when you made the original offer. It's time to double check everything that was agreed upon originally and throughout the transaction has happened and is in place. If it hasn't been done or something about the condition of your home is not what it should be, your Realtor® will advise you. Typically, it means delaying the closing until the Seller makes things right.

And this is a great time to do some measuring and decide where furniture is going to go if you haven't already. Sketch out a rough floor plan with furniture placement to

make your move smoother. This is also the time to make notes about any child or pet-proofing you need to do so you can make that a priority on the day of or before move-in.

But before you get to the final walk-through, and while you're reviewing disclosures and having inspections done, the attorneys and your lender are working the transaction simultaneously!

Chapter 8: From Accepted Offer to Closing Day

To most Buyers, the stretch between an accepted offer and closing day is like the Bermuda Triangle. You have been hands-on through the whole search, and then suddenly, whoosh, a big piece of the transaction disappears into the hands of attorneys and lenders, most of whom you have never met. They are working like crazy, but mainly behind the scenes, and you will not see much of it. It can feel mysterious. Let's break it down.

The first thing to understand is that this part of the process works differently here than it does in most of the country, and if you are moving to Massachusetts or Rhode Island from somewhere else, almost everything you think you know about it is probably wrong. Not because you were misinformed, but because you learned a different state's system.

In much of the country, a neutral escrow company holds the money, coordinates the paperwork, and closes the sale. You may have heard the phrase "we're in escrow." That is not how it works here. Massachusetts and Rhode Island are attorney states. Lawyers run the closing, the documents are different, and the sequence is different. Buyers who have done this before in another state are often the ones most surprised, because they are confidently expecting a process that is not going to happen.

Two Contracts, Not One

Here is the single biggest difference, and the one that trips up almost every Buyer coming from out of state.

Most places have one contract. You sign a purchase agreement, and that is the document that governs the sale from start to finish.

In Massachusetts, there are typically two. First comes the Offer to Purchase. This is a relatively short document, usually a standard form, and it goes in with a modest deposit. Do not let its length fool you. Once the Seller accepts and signs it, it is a

binding contract, not a friendly handshake, and Buyers who treat it as a formality can find themselves committed to terms they meant to negotiate later.

Then, usually a week or two after the offer is accepted, comes the Purchase and Sale Agreement. Everyone calls it the P&S. This is the long, detailed contract, and it is the document that actually controls the transaction from that point forward. Both sides typically have attorneys review it and negotiate riders, which are the additions and modifications that address the specifics of your deal. A second, larger deposit usually accompanies the P&S.

The window between the accepted offer and the signed P&S is short, and a lot has to happen inside it. Your inspection usually falls in that window. So does the attorney review. It is the busiest stretch of the whole transaction, and it is why I tell Buyers to have their attorney identified before we write an offer, not after it is accepted. Scrambling to find a real estate attorney over a weekend while a deadline runs is a bad way to start.

Rhode Island works on a similar attorney-driven model, with its own forms and its own local recording practice. If you are shopping in both states, understand that the paperwork will not look the same on both sides of the line. I spend a great deal of time on the Rhode Island coast, and I will tell you plainly when a question belongs with Rhode Island counsel rather than with me.

Where Your Money Actually Goes

Your deposits do not go to a neutral escrow company, because in most transactions here there isn't one. The P&S specifies who holds the money. Commonly it is held in the listing broker's escrow account or in the Seller's attorney's client account. That money sits there, untouched, until closing, at which point it is credited toward your purchase.

This matters because the entity holding your deposit is not a neutral referee in the way an escrow company would be elsewhere. The protections come from the contract and from the rules governing escrow accounts and attorney client funds, not from a disinterested third party managing the transaction. It is a different structure, and it works, but it is worth understanding rather than assuming.

You Need Your Own Attorney

This is the part I most want you to hear, because it is where Buyers from other states are most likely to under-protect themselves.

In Massachusetts, each party has their own attorney. You have yours. The Seller has theirs. That is the norm here, not an upgrade or an extravagance, and if you are coming from a state where a title or escrow company handled everything and nobody retained counsel, this will feel like an unnecessary expense. It is not. It is how the system is built, and the documents assume it.

Your attorney reviews and negotiates the Purchase and Sale Agreement on your behalf, including the riders, which is where the terms that actually protect you live. They review the title work. They explain what you are signing and why. When something unexpected surfaces, and on older coastal property something often does, they are the person whose obligation runs to you.

Your lender will also have counsel, representing the lender's interests in the loan. That is a separate role from yours, and it is not a substitute for having your own.

Line your attorney up before we write an offer, not after one is accepted. The window between an accepted offer and a signed P&S is short and busy, and hunting for a real estate attorney over a weekend while a deadline runs is a bad way to begin. I am happy to give you names.

I will also tell you plainly that the more unusual the property, the more this matters. On the coast that means waterfront, private ways, shared beach and dock rights, septic systems, conservation restrictions, and anything with a title history longer than the house.

How It Actually Goes, Step by Step

Your offer is accepted. Your initial deposit is delivered per the terms of the offer. Your agent, your lender and your attorney all get copies. The clock starts on every contingency date in the document.

Inspections happen. This is your window to learn what you are buying. On the South Coast and the Cape this often means more than a general home inspection:

septic, water quality on a private well, radon, pests, and on older coastal homes, a closer look at structure and moisture than an inland buyer would ever need.

Your attorney reviews the P&S, and you sign it. Riders get negotiated. The second deposit goes in. From this point, the P&S is the contract.

Your lender works the loan, and the appraisal happens. You will have a date in the contract by which you must produce a written loan commitment. That date is real. Missing it without an extension can put your deposit at risk, which is the single most expensive mistake available to you in this process.

Title gets examined. The attorneys search the public record going back many decades, looking for anything that clouds your ownership: old liens, unreleased mortgages, boundary problems, easements, gaps in the chain of title. In Massachusetts these records live at the Registry of Deeds for the county district where the property sits. Rhode Island records at the city or town level instead, in the land evidence records. Anything that turns up has to be resolved before closing, and on old coastal property, things do turn up.

Alarm certificates and other local items get handled. The Seller is responsible for the smoke and carbon monoxide alarms and for obtaining the certificate from the local fire department. Both Massachusetts and Rhode Island require this in connection with transferring a home, each on its own terms, and in both the certificate is only good for a limited window before the sale. It is the kind of small thing that delays closings when nobody remembers it until the last week, and it is worth confirming early that it is on somebody's list. If the property has a septic system, and out here a great many do, Title 5 requires an inspection in connection with the transfer. A failed septic is a significant expense and it is far better discovered early than on the eve of closing. A municipal lien certificate is obtained to confirm what is owed to the town.

You receive your Closing Disclosure. This comes from your lender and lays out your final numbers. Federal rules require a waiting period between when you receive it and when you can close, so acknowledge it promptly. Delay here delays your closing, full stop.

You do your final walkthrough. Usually the day of closing or the day before. You are confirming the house is in the condition you agreed to, agreed-upon repairs were made, and the Seller took what they said they would and left what they said they would.

You close. Closings here happen at an attorney's office, at the Registry, or sometimes at the property. You will sign the note and the mortgage if you are financing, plus the settlement documents. Bring valid photo identification. Funds are disbursed to the Seller, their lender, the brokers and any vendors.

The deed is recorded. The deed and mortgage are recorded, and the transaction is complete upon recording. Then you get the keys, and the house is yours.

Be Prepared to Act Quickly

Once your offer is accepted, your initial deposit is due fast, often within a day or two, and the second, larger deposit follows at the P&S. The amounts are spelled out in your contract, so they will not be a surprise. What can be a surprise is the timing.

If the money is coming from a 401k, a brokerage account, or anywhere other than a plain savings account, understand that liquidating and transferring can take several business days. Start that process before you need it, not when the deadline arrives. And while much of this process crawls, the last week before closing tends to feel like a fire drill. Have your funds accessible.

Be available to sign, too. You cannot be on a beach in Mexico. If you are buying from out of state, tell me early, because remote and mail-away closings can often be arranged but they require setup, not improvisation.

Be Diligent About Providing Information

Be ready to send whatever your lender or your attorney asks for. Yes, it will feel like they are asking for documents you already handed over during pre-approval. Send them anyway, updated. They are not asking for their own entertainment.

Underwriting needs current documents to clear conditions on your loan, and delay on your end becomes delay on everyone's end.

The attorney may also ask about something in the public record with a name resembling yours. Title searches turn up liens attached to names, not just properties, and they have to confirm that the tax lien belonging to some other person is in fact some other person. If your name is Candice Ethel Rock-Bottom, you will probably sail through. If your name is John Smith, expect a phone call.

Take a breath, answer quickly, answer accurately, and this part stays boring. Boring is the goal.

Stay Secure

I want to be blunt about this one, because it is the way Buyers actually lose money.

Wire fraud in real estate closings is a real and active crime, and it targets exactly this moment in your transaction. Criminals know the process and they know roughly when your funds are due. You will get an email that appears to come from your attorney's office, with the right names and the right details, providing wiring instructions or telling you the instructions have changed.

Wiring instructions do not change mid-transaction. Anyone telling you they have changed should be treated as a fraud attempt until you have proven otherwise. The sending address is usually a near-perfect copy of the real one, off by a character you will not notice while skimming on your phone.

So here is the rule, and it is not negotiable: before you send a single dollar, call the office at a number you looked up yourself, not one from the email, and verify the instructions by voice. Every time. If the wire goes to a criminal, the money is usually gone, and it is gone in minutes.

The same care applies to your personal information. Attorneys and lenders have secure portals for documents. Use them. Do not upload financial documents over public wifi. If electronic transfer makes you uncomfortable, say so and ask for another option. There is always another option.

Buyers who have not moved in thirty years sometimes find all this uncomfortable, and Buyers half their age sometimes ask whether the instructions can just be texted over.

The answer to the second one is no. The answer to the first one is that we will find a method you are comfortable with.

Title Insurance and What It Is For

The title examination looks backward through the public record. Title insurance covers what the examination could not find: a forged signature decades ago, an heir nobody knew about, a filing error at the Registry, a lien recorded against the wrong parcel.

Your lender will require a lender's policy, which protects the lender's interest in the property and does nothing for yours. An owner's policy, which protects your equity, is optional and is purchased separately. It is a one-time cost paid at closing.

I recommend it, and I recommend it more strongly here than I would in a newer market. Property on the South Coast and the Cape can have a title history running back centuries, with private ways, old rights of way to the water, shared beach and dock rights, ancient boundary descriptions referencing stone walls and trees that no longer exist, and family divisions of land that were handled informally two or three generations ago. The older and more interesting the property, the more there is behind it.

Your Own Due Diligence

A great deal of information surfaces during this period. Read it. I mean actually read it, not skim it, and ask me about anything that does not make sense.

Easements. These are recorded rights allowing someone else, a neighbor, a utility, a town, to cross or use part of your property. They matter enormously if you intend to change anything.

I heard of a Buyer who purchased a one-acre property specifically to build an accessory dwelling unit for a parent. Big side yard, seemed obvious. They had not paid attention to a large easement running along exactly that side of the property, and the permits were refused. The ADU was the entire reason they bought the house.

Another: a house whose driveway had been used for eighty-five years, sitting on the neighbor's land. The arrangement was a handshake between two farmers generations back. The recorded easement from 1925 put the right of way somewhere else entirely. When a new owner bought the neighboring parcel and objected, it went to court. The buyer will likely win. She will also spend a great deal of time and money to get there.

So tell me what you intend to do with the property. A pool, a fence, an addition, a dock, a barn, a paddock, an in-law unit. Tell me before we are deep in the transaction, because the documents that reveal whether you can do it are the same documents we are reading anyway, and nobody reads them looking for a problem they have not been told to look for.

Condominium and association documents. If you are buying a condominium, and a lot of right-sizers are, you will receive the association's documents, budget, rules and financial condition. Read the budget and the reserves, not just the monthly fee. An association with a low fee and no reserves is not cheap. It is expensive later, all at once, in the form of a special assessment.

Water, wells, septic and coastal considerations. If you are buying near the water, there is a category of question that does not exist inland: flood zone designation and what it means for insurance, conservation restrictions, wetlands setbacks, coastal bank and dune regulations, private well water quality, and whether that septic system can support the bedroom count you are planning. I will raise these with you and I will tell you honestly when a question is past my expertise and belongs with a surveyor, an environmental consultant, a septic professional, or your attorney. Getting a real answer from the right specialist is worth far more than a confident guess from me.

Okay. You are almost in your new home. Now you just have to survive moving day.

Chapter 9: Moving Tricks and Tips

You don't have to wait until moving day to get started on your move. In fact, you'll find it a heck of a lot less stressful if you don't wait until the last minute. You've got plenty of things you can do even before you find your dream home. And as a bonus, the preparation for moving will also make your home more marketable if you're selling your current house.

Get rid of clutter!

Most people have excess stuff around that they seldom, if ever, use, and now is the perfect time to get rid of it! Do you really want to pay to move it to your new home?

I've watched clients fill an entire garage with "precious belongings", and end up throwing out most of it before the move was done. The clutter-clearing phase is real, and the sooner you start, the easier it gets.

Make this project a family affair where everyone commits to sorting through their stuff to see how much they can let go of. Set aside different boxes or bags designated as "donate" (or garage sale) and "trash." Here are some tips to help with the process: Don't keep something because you might need it "someday."

" Yes, in another ten years you might decide to use that shamrock-shaped cake pan you used ten years ago. But what are the odds? Ask yourself how often you've even thought of that item. If it's been more than a year, consider ditching it.

When you have bunches of the same thing, ask if each one is "the best, the favorite, or necessary."

If you have thirty-seven screwdrivers or sixteen flower vases, sort through them and get rid of ones that aren't best, favorite or necessary. (Do NOT use these criteria to sort through your kids!)

Is it beautiful to you? Does it make you happy? Your collection of teddy bears may seem goofy to others. But if it makes you happy, keep it. If you're just keeping it out of

habit, get rid of it. This question is especially helpful when sorting through clothes. When you put on that piece of clothing, do you feel good in it? Does it still fit your current style and lifestyle? You can ask yourself, "Is this something I would buy today?" If not, out it goes!

Do you want this in your new home?

That lamp you got in college may have traveled with you since, but does it really fit the vision you have of your new digs? If not, get rid of it.

Think "recirculate."

Sometimes folks have trouble getting rid of things that are "still good" and they don't want to waste them. But if you're not using them or enjoying them, they're already going to waste! Consider donating it or giving it to someone who will really appreciate it.

If it's broken, let it go.

If you haven't done it before now, are you really going to test all the lights in that Christmas strand to find the one light that's out? Are you really going to get that fancy formal altered (or lose that extra twenty pounds) so it fits you? If you haven't fixed it before you move it, odds are you never will.

Pre-packing

You probably have several items that you aren't getting rid of but that you won't be using until you're in your new home. Why not pack them up now and get them out of the way? Here are some items to consider for pre-packing: Items for different seasons: If it's early summer, odds are that you won't need your holiday platters or Christmas ornaments until you move. You can probably pack away your snow boots, skis, and heavy jackets. If it's winter, you probably won't need your inflatable pool toys or snorkeling gear. Mark it clearly, pack it for moving, and store it out of the way some place like in the garage.

Non-daily items: What are the things you won't need for the next couple of months? If you enjoy scrapbooking or woodworking, will you really have time to do it before you

move? What about the books on your shelf? Which can you do without for now? How about the extra dishware or glassware you use for entertaining?

Once You Have a Move Date

Once you are under contract and have a move date, you can really begin organizing and handling logistics for your move.

Utilities: One to two weeks before your close date, call utility companies to transfer services into your name and start service as of the date of the close. Be sure to include gas, electric, internet, water, trash, phone service (if you still have a landline!), and any other services such as alarm services that need to be transferred.

Mail: You can go to your local post office and fill out a change of address form or you can do it online at <https://moversguide.usps.com/mgo/disclaimer> for a fee of \$1.05. Most companies these days will pick up on your change of address, but I recommend that you contact your bank and financial institutions directly (online or in person) to change your address to avoid any confusion or delay.

Schools: If your household will be using the public schools, contact the district directly to find out what their enrollment process is, what records they will want, and how registration works for activities and programs. Start that call early. Districts have their own calendars and their own paperwork.

Doctors: If you're moving away from your regular doctor, try to get referrals and get set up with a new doctor before you move. If that's not possible, at least see about transferring your medical records. And don't forget to locate a new veterinarian for your pets!

Hire a Mover

Unless you are best friends with a professional moving crew, you probably need to hire a moving company to help you move. Get referrals from friends or your Realtor ®. Depending on the market, movers can get booked up quickly, so get your move on their calendar as far ahead as you can. Get a quote from them for the move and make sure they take all of what you're moving into consideration. Be sure they are licensed and bonded and get references for any movers you consider. The cheapest bid may

not end up being the least expensive if half of your items are damaged in transit! Decide if you'll have the movers do most of the packing (much more expensive) or if you'll do it yourself (much more time consuming).

Create Floor Plan

One of the best tips I can give you is to draft a floor plan of your new home. It doesn't have to be perfect but good enough that your moving crew can use it for reference. Moving day is hectic enough without seven mover guys all asking you at once where each item goes!

During one of your inspections, draw a rough floor plan with room dimensions. (This is easiest to do on the final walk-through when the home is empty.) Bring along measurements of your furniture and decide where each piece will go in each room. As you do so, take into consideration obstructions (like built-in cabinets or chimneys), lighting, windows, where area rugs would go, traffic patterns, etc.

Buy a bunch of Post It Note stickies in different colors. (The stickies that are made specifically for moving usually stay on boxes better.) When your floor plan is finished, name and color code each room according to the colors of your stickies. Then, as you pack, mark each box using the appropriate color of stickie so the movers have easy reference. Make copies of these floor plans and, on moving day, place them strategically around the house where the movers will see them.

Packing Tips

Packing always takes more boxes than you think, more paper or bubble wrap than you think, and more time than you think! The earlier you start, the more relaxed you will be. Start by packing up the items you use the least and designate certain areas where you can stack packed boxes.

Marking: Use the color code system and place stickies on at least two sides of every box. Rather than just marking a box as "kitchen," be specific about what's in each box so you'll be able to find what you need on the other end. This is especially important if others are helping you pack!

Survival packing: Survival packing minimizes the stress of your move in a big way! It's basically about gathering the essentials that you and your family will need for the first several days. Keep these with you or in a designated space so they don't get lost in all the confusion.

Pack a suitcase or two with clothes that you'll need for several days after the move. Trust me, you won't want to do laundry or go on a hunt for clean undies for that first week or so! Include basics that you would bring on a vacation like toothbrushes, medications, soap, shampoo, some towels, and even toilet paper! And don't forget to include your phone chargers.

Pack up a special box of survival drinks and food that you can access right away without hunting through your kitchen boxes. If you need coffee first thing in the morning to feel human, put your coffee maker and a few cups in this box. Slip in some silverware and a few plates, bowls, glasses, and napkins. If your spouse gets cranky when they get hungry, add a few power bars. If a glass of wine relaxes you at the end of the day, include a bottle and a couple of glasses, and don't forget the opener!

Also pack a box that has enough pet food, kitty litter, blankets, and toys to take care of your pet and keep them comfortable during the first few days of unpacking.

Pack a special box or suitcase of sheets and blankets for each bed. One client tells me that the first thing she does after the movers are finished is make up the beds so they're ready when everyone is exhausted and ready to crash!

Staggered Moving: This doesn't work for everyone. But, after closing, if you have access to your new home before you need to be out of your old home and if you're moving in town, one very sane way Krista has found to move is in stages, room by room. She's done it several times and said, "I start with the main rooms, such as the living room. I pack up a bunch of boxes and even pull out drawers and leave them packed as they are. I throw everything into my SUV, then unpack it into the new house. So, I'll literally box up the entire kitchen and then unpack it right into the new kitchen. Then I take those now-empty boxes and start with another room. I leave bathrooms and other essentials for the last stages. At the very end of the process, the movers come in and just have to move the heavy stuff and furniture. This makes the

move feel less overwhelming, saves on boxes and you know exactly what you have and where it goes because you just packed it. I love doing it this way!"

On the Day of Your Move

The day before your move or at least before the movers arrive (which is usually dawn-thirty!), take a stack of those colored stickies to your new home. Place the color-coded stickies over or next to the door of each room so they are easy to identify (Bedroom 1, Den, Office, etc.). It's also helpful to place stickies on walls where your big pieces of furniture should be placed that name the furniture (i.e. "Double Bookcase", "Bureau", "Bunk Beds", etc.)

Also, verify that your electric, gas, water, heating and cooling, phone, and internet are set up. Moving by candlelight is no fun at all!

Install/Deinstall: Some of your furniture will need to be disassembled for the move and good movers are familiar with how most furniture comes apart and goes back together. But if you have anything that's tricky, be sure and have instructions for them. A friend of mine has a massive u-shaped desk set up with various pieces that are screwed together. She keeps a chart of the desk's layout so it's easy to see which piece goes where when they try to put it back together. Another friend has a lot of bookshelves with removable shelves. He marks the holes where the shelf pegs go so it's easy to put shelves back in the same configuration.

Pets: I've never met a pet who enjoyed moving day! They can even get anxious during the packing process. If at all possible, I suggest having a friend take care of your pet during the move. If you can't do that, make sure they stay out of the action in a closed-off room, in a crate or even in your car if they'll be safe there. Once the movers have left, introduce your pet to the house slowly, room by room. Show them where their beds, litter boxes and water are. It's best not to let them wander around the house on their own even if they're typically well-behaved. Your presence will help them understand what's going on.

And, if you haven't been able to do it before the move, make pet-proofing your home a priority before you let them run loose in your new home.

Locks: I always recommend that new homeowners change the locks when they move in. The prior owners are probably upstanding citizens, but you never know who else might have a key. Better to be safe than sorry. If you haven't been able to do it before the move, schedule a locksmith to come by.

Meet Your New Neighbors: This is so much easier and less awkward when you first move in! It helps you start off on the right foot and you'll get to learn more about the neighborhood you've moved into, like good restaurants and other local services. For clients who want it, I send postcards to all the neighbors introducing the new home Buyers. It's a great ice breaker!

Celebrate!

You did it! You're in your new home and, though you've got days of unpacking and arranging ahead of you, take time to celebrate.

A Last Word

I could share so much more about buying a new home! By picking the right MLO and Realtor®, you'll have experts on your side who can fill in anything I haven't covered. But armed with the information I've shared in this book, you now know more than 99% of home Buyers! I hope you've learned a lot and have gotten some ideas and inspiration. And I hope you are completely successful in finding a new home that you love!

If I can answer any questions, feel free to contact me at a 508-208-1927

. And be sure to go to susangordenryanluxury.com for informational videos that are easy to watch and full of valuable information.

Wishing you the best
Signature here

Oh, and One More Thing

If you're like most people, you may still be confused about the National Association of Realtors commission settlement, what it means and how it affects you. There is so much misinformation out there that it makes me crazy. So many people writing about this have no clue what it actually involves, so let me lay out what happened and what it changes for you.

Here is the timeline, because the dates get garbled constantly. A jury verdict came down in the Sitzer/Burnett case in October 2023. NAR announced a settlement agreement in March 2024, and a judge granted it preliminary approval in April 2024. The new practice rules took effect on August 17, 2024, and the court granted final approval that November. The rules below have been in place since then and are how every agent in the country works today. There is still an appeal moving through the courts over how the settlement money gets divided among past sellers, but it does not change how your purchase will work.

What's fascinating is that the lawsuit was brought against a long-standing Multiple Listing Service (MLS) Rule called The Cooperative Compensation Model Rule (MLS Model Rule). And that MLS Model Rule was introduced in the 1990s by consumer protection advocates to protect Buyers and Buyer's agents. No court ever ruled that rule illegal, by the way. NAR settled the case and agreed to change it, which is a different thing, and you will hear it described wrong constantly. Another part that can be confusing is that all MLSs, states and brokerages have interpreted the settlement and regulations differently. So, you really need to talk it through with your agent to make sure you understand it. That said, here are the most important changes the settlement agreed to: Big Change #1: NAR will not allow offers of compensation to Buyer's agents to be posted on MLS listings.

Compensation and who will pay the commission will be negotiated off MLS. That said, with some MLSs (not all) the Seller will still be able to offer concessions, like covering Buyer closing costs, etc., on the MLS platform. Sellers typically used to pay the commission that was due to both the Seller's and Buyer's agents or brokerages. But

commissions are and always have been negotiable. It's just that now Sellers can't announce their willingness to cover Buyer's agent or their brokerage compensation on MLS. It can be listed on signs, in flyers, on the agent's own website etc. It just can't be shown in any way on the MLS site.

Big Change #2: NAR now requires written representation agreements for MLS participants working with Buyers before they can show you any home for sale. Along with laying out responsibilities and clarifying expectations, this agreement will cover compensation, and how much the Buyer's agent will be paid. And no matter who ends up paying for it, the agreement specifies that you as the Buyer are ultimately responsible to see that your agent or their brokerage gets paid.

Every Buyer's agent worth their salt should already be using some kind of agreement that clarifies exactly what they'll do for you and what your responsibilities as a Buyer are. After the settlement, this type of agreement is mandatory. If an agent just shows you around during an open house, you don't need this agreement because technically, they are representing the Seller. However, if that agent ends up representing you to buy that house or another house, you must sign a Buyer Broker agreement.

Big Change #3: Compensation is now negotiated separately and in writing rather than being advertised in advance. This is the change most often described incorrectly, so let me be precise about it.

What did NOT change: a listing brokerage can still be paid by the seller, and can still pay a portion to the buyer's brokerage at closing, exactly the way it worked before. NAR has stated this plainly in its own guidance on the settlement. You may see people claim that sellers must now cut a separate check directly to the buyer's agent and that the listing brokerage is out of the middle. That is not what the settlement says.

What DID change is where the conversation happens. Compensation to a buyer's broker can no longer be published on the MLS, so it is no longer something your agent can look up before showing you a home. It is negotiated between the parties, in writing, as part of the offer. In practice that means the amount is now a live term of the deal rather than a number posted in advance, which is exactly why having someone who negotiates well matters more than it used to.

Do You Really Need an Agent?

As it always has been, who ends up paying the Buyer's agent or brokerage compensation is negotiable. It has always been a case by case issue that depends on market conditions, Seller's goals, other concessions on the table, etc. etc. But clearly, if you as the Buyer end up paying your agent or their brokerage compensation, that's a big chunk of change for you. So, you might be asking yourself, "Do I really need an agent at all?" Absolutely! When Buyers decide to represent themselves in a real estate transaction, without the expertise of a Buyer's agent, they might think they're "saving money". But when you consider the overall financial investment and potential liability involved, it's really a false savings. In this book, I've talked a lot about what a good agent can do for you. In a nutshell: They negotiate on your behalf. The Seller's agent is representing the Seller and the best interest of the Seller. Their job is to get the Seller the best terms and highest possible price. Anything you say or reveal to them can be used against you to help the Seller. A Buyer's agent's job is to get you the best terms and protect your interests.

They have access to all sorts of market and community information, so they'll show you homes that you may not be aware of as well as some you didn't consider that could be perfect for you.

They'll introduce you to a great mortgage loan officer who will make sure you know exactly how much home you can really afford (and who will get you the best loan possible).

They'll research the market and then communicate with the Seller's agent to uncover Seller hot buttons and needs so you can craft an attractive offer.

With their market expertise and experience, your agent will negotiate a deal with the best terms possible including who pays the Buyer's agent or their brokerage compensation.

They'll find qualified inspectors for you and review all reports to point out any issues with the home.

They'll order the title documents and review them for any red flags.

They'll review all legal documentation to ensure you avoid legal hassles throughout and after the process.

They manage all the people and processes to make sure your closing stays on track.

When you're diving into buying a house, you're stepping into a bit of a battleground, and you need someone in your corner, right? That's where a Buyers' agent comes into play.

These agents, they're like your personal advocates, your warriors in the real estate world. They hunt down listings, they go toe-to-toe with Sellers, and Seller's agents. They negotiate deals on your behalf that literally will make or break the chances of you getting the home, and they can save you big bucks. That's right they can save you big time.

But here's the kicker, these folks don't see a dime unless they get you across that finish line, with keys in your hand. They take on all the grunt work, all the risks, all the late-night phone calls, and the endless paperwork, all the liability, all in the hope that they can get you what you want. They'll spend literally hours behind the scenes on your behalf. And if they don't deliver, if they don't negotiate a deal that you're happy with, they walk away with nothing, zip, nada. They don't get paid.

So, why would these agents do it? Because they believe they can win for you. They know they will do way more for you than you can on your own. They put their time, their energy, their money, their resources and their reputations on the line every single time. And when they do succeed, when they get you that dream home under the terms you're thrilled with (including who pays the commission), that's when they get paid. It's a small slice of the final purchase price that you both agree to before they even start.

Myths About the Ruling and Settlement

Myth #1: The ruling was because agents were getting paid too much.

False! The case had nothing to do with how much agents get paid. Buying a home is undoubtedly one of the biggest financial investments you'll ever make. You want an expert on your side who is totally worth what they're getting paid. And if you have an

agent that you don't think is worth every penny of what you've negotiated, you've got the wrong agent! No agent is going to work for free and a great agent can usually save you time, headaches and money that's worth more than you end up paying them.

Myth #2: Now Sellers will refuse to help with agent compensation.

False! Smart Sellers understand that Buyers already have a big cash outlay (down payment, inspections, appraisal fees, title insurance, etc.). Having Buyers pay all or even some of the Buyer's agent's compensation means that fewer Buyers will qualify to purchase their home, especially first-time Buyers. So, most know it's just good business to be flexible.

That said, it totally depends on the market and other factors. For example, if homes are selling like hotcakes, Sellers have less reason to make concessions. So, it's just good business on your part to stay flexible as well. You may think that you can't or shouldn't make an offer on a home where the Seller verbally says they won't help with your agent's compensation. But you don't want that to stand in the way of a home that is perfect for you. Go view all homes that meet what you want. A lot can happen during negotiations and compensation is just one of the negotiation points. It's the bottom line that matters to a Seller. Your agent can negotiate different compromises, offsets and terms to see that the Seller gets what they need while also protecting you. If you can't come to a deal that works for you, you can simply walk away from the negotiations.

Bottomline, don't let the recent changes freak you out! Your agent will be able to help you navigate them and get you into a home that is perfect for you!

Appendix: Sources and Where to Verify

I wrote the legal and regulatory parts of this book deliberately in general terms, because the specifics change. Legislatures amend statutes, agencies rewrite regulations, courts decide things, and towns adopt new plans. A book that quotes a rule precisely today becomes a book that misleads you in three years. What does not change as fast is the *shape* of the obligation, and that is what I gave you.

This appendix is where the specifics live, so you can check my work and so you know I did not make any of it up.

Everything below was verified against primary government sources as of September 2026. Not blogs, not summaries, not anything an AI wrote. Official regulation and statute text, from the agencies and legislatures that issue it. Anything I could not confirm at the source is not in this book at all.

Please read this next part carefully. This is publicly available information as it stood on the date above. It is not legal advice, it is not a complete statement of the law, and it is not a substitute for a licensed attorney reviewing your specific transaction. I am a real estate professional, not an attorney, and I do not practice law. Rules change, and some of the items below were under active revision when this book went to press. Before you rely on any of it, verify it at the source or ask your attorney. If something here conflicts with what your attorney tells you, your attorney is right.

Massachusetts

Agency disclosure. 254 CMR 3.00(13)(a). Massachusetts Board of Registration of Real Estate Brokers and Salespersons. Requires a licensee to give a prospective buyer or seller notice of the licensee's relationship at the time of the first personal meeting to discuss a specific property. Related subsections cover dual agency, designated agency and the non-agent facilitator role. Authority: M.G.L. c. 13, § 56; c. 112, §§ 87RR, 87SS, 87TT. [mass.gov/regulations/254-CMR-300-professional-standards-of-practice](https://www.mass.gov/regulations/254-CMR-300-professional-standards-of-practice)

Home inspector recommendations. M.G.L. c. 112, § 87YY½. A broker or salesperson may not directly recommend a specific home inspector or inspection company, but may on request provide the board's complete list of licensed inspectors. The section also requires distribution of the state's home inspection brochure, and it contains an exception where the licensee is acting exclusively as the buyer's broker under a written agreement. *malegislature.gov, Chapter 112*

Home inspection waivers. 760 CMR 74.00, Residential Home Inspection Waivers. Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. Effective June 6, 2025, with an exemption for transactions where the offer or purchase and sale agreement was executed on or before October 15, 2025. It restricts the seller side, not the buyer side: a seller or seller's agent may not condition acceptance of an offer on the buyer waiving or limiting an inspection, and may not accept an offer that requires it. It also requires a separate signed written disclosure. A buyer may still choose to waive after acceptance, provided the decision was not required or influenced by the seller or the seller's agent. *mass.gov/regulations/760-CMR-7400-residential-home-inspection-waivers*

Septic inspection at transfer. 310 CMR 15.301(1), Title 5. A system must be inspected at or within two years before transfer of title. An inspection up to three years old may be used if accompanied by pumping records showing the system was pumped at least annually. There are weather provisions and a list of transfers that do not trigger it, including refinancing and certain transfers between spouses. *mass.gov/regulations/310-CMR-15000-septic-systems-title-5*

Nitrogen sensitive areas. Designation is at 310 CMR 15.214. Obligations are at 310 CMR 15.215. Two separate categories exist: water supply protection areas, which apply statewide, and natural resource areas, which cover Cape Cod watersheds that have both an EPA-approved nitrogen total maximum daily load and coverage under the 2015 Cape Cod Section 208 Area Wide Water Quality Management Plan. The natural resource designation is made **watershed by watershed, not Cape-wide**, and the number of designated watersheds has grown since the regulations took effect on July 7, 2023. 310 CMR 15.215(4) places the burden of determining whether a property is in a designated area on the property owner, and requires the transferor to disclose to the buyer **and to the board of health** whether the facility is subject to an upgrade requirement. A sale by itself does not trigger a nitrogen-reducing upgrade;

the upgrade obligation runs on a separate, community-based clock and can be suspended where a town has filed the required notice or permit application. Related: 314 CMR 21.00, the watershed permit regulations, which create the municipal permitting process. MassDEP publishes maps and an address lookup. *mass.gov*

Lead paint, state. 105 CMR 460.720. Before the signing of a purchase and sale agreement, the seller of residential premises built before 1978 must provide the state property transfer notification and known lead hazard information, and the agent must verbally inform the buyer and obtain a signed acknowledgment. If a buyer elects an inspection, the seller must allow at least ten days. *mass.gov/regulations/105-CMR-46000*

Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. M.G.L. c. 148, §§ 26E, 26F and 26F½. Section 26F requires the property to be equipped by the seller with approved smoke detectors upon sale or transfer. Section 26F½ requires carbon monoxide alarms and provides that the property shall, upon sale or transfer, be inspected by the head of the fire department for compliance. Neither statute mentions a certificate; the Certificate of Compliance is the document the local fire department issues on the Commonwealth's form after a passing inspection, and the Department of Fire Services describes its delivery at closing as industry practice driven by purchase and sale agreement terms and lenders rather than by the statute. The certificate states on its face that it expires sixty days after the date of issue. Under M.G.L. c. 148, § 10A, where the smoke and carbon monoxide inspections are conducted at the same time, no additional fee may be charged for the carbon monoxide inspection, and the statute sets maximum fees for inspections conducted separately. *malegislature.gov; Department of Fire Services guide for sellers of one- and two-family residences and DFS form FP-007C*

Municipal information at closing. Massachusetts municipalities issue a municipal lien certificate showing what the town is owed against a property. Ask your attorney what it covers in your town and what it does not.

Fair housing, state. M.G.L. c. 151B, § 4. The housing provisions are in the numbered paragraphs, and paragraph 7B specifically addresses discriminatory notices, statements and advertisements. *malegislature.gov*

Rhode Island

Agency relationships. R.I. Gen. Laws § 5-20.6-3. This is the one most likely to surprise someone coming from Massachusetts. All licensees are **presumed to be transaction facilitators** unless the licensee obtains informed written consent, through an executed mandatory relationship disclosure, to act as a designated client representative. The chapter expressly abrogates the common law of agency: no agency representation is assumed, and none is created by implication. Related: § 5-20.6-4, duties owed to a customer; § 5-20.6-8, mandatory relationship disclosure; § 5-20.6-9, written requirement for representation. *webserver.rilegislature.gov*

Seller disclosure. R.I. Gen. Laws ch. 5-20.8, particularly § 5-20.8-2. Unlike Massachusetts, Rhode Island has a mandatory written seller disclosure, delivered no later than before signing any agreement to transfer. The agent may not communicate the buyer's offer until the buyer has received the disclosure and signed a receipt for it. The statute also limits the agent's liability for the accuracy of the seller's own representations. The chapter contains additional mandatory items including lead, private well testing and cesspool inspection. Amended 2024.
webserver.rilegislature.gov

Lead disclosure on sale. R.I. Gen. Laws § 5-20.8-11 requires every contract for the purchase and sale of covered residential real estate to give the purchaser a ten-day period, unless the parties mutually agree otherwise, to conduct a risk assessment or inspection for lead exposure hazards before becoming obligated under the contract. Failure to include that provision, or to provide the required inspection results, or results showing a lead exposure hazard, entitles the purchaser to void the agreement by written notice to the seller before the transfer of title at closing. Civil penalties run against the seller or their agent. R.I. Gen. Laws § 23-24.6-16, within the Lead Poisoning Prevention Act, directs the Department of Health to issue disclosure regulations that incorporate the federal requirements and go beyond them.

Those regulations are at 216-RICR-50-15-3, § 3.5, and they state expressly that they are in addition to and not in lieu of the federal requirements. Before the purchaser is obligated, a non-exempt seller must provide the EPA pamphlet containing the Rhode Island insert, a completed lead disclosure, copies of any current lead certificates, and a chronological listing of available lead inspection reports and certificates, with copies

delivered on request within seven days at no charge. The disclosure acknowledgment must be a stand-alone document that includes the property address, and the seller must retain the signed acknowledgment for at least three years. Section 3.5.5 places an independent duty on the agent to ensure compliance and provides for referral to the Department of Business Regulation for enforcement against the licensee. Note that the age threshold in § 5-20.8-11 and the threshold in the regulation are not currently stated the same way, which is one more reason to work from the current form rather than from memory. *webserver.rilegislature.gov and rules.sos.ri.gov*

Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms on sale. In Rhode Island this obligation is regulatory rather than statutory; the former statutory chapters were repealed. The operative provision is the Rhode Island Life Safety Code, 450-RICR-00-00-8, § 24.6.3.1.4, with a parallel provision for three-family dwellings. It provides that occupied residential properties shall, at the responsibility of the seller before title is transferred, be provided with smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, and that at the time of transfer of title the seller must provide the purchaser with a certificate from the fire department for the community in which the dwelling is located stating that the alarms have been inspected within one hundred twenty days prior to the date of sale and determined to be in good working order. The fire department must inspect within ten days of a request from the owner, and the inspection may be conducted by that department or by the Office of the State Fire Marshal. A single certificate covers both smoke and carbon monoxide. The section contains a list of exemptions, including certain foreclosure and tax sale transfers. Fees are set locally; ask the fire department. *rules.sos.ri.gov and the Office of the State Fire Marshal*

Fair housing, state. R.I. Gen. Laws § 34-37-1 et seq., the Rhode Island Fair Housing Practices Act; § 34-37-4 sets out unlawful housing practices, and §§ 34-37-5.2 through 5.4 address brokerage services and real estate related transactions. Rhode Island's list of protected classes is broader than the federal list.
webserver.rilegislature.gov

Federal

Lead-based paint disclosure. 42 U.S.C. § 4852d, implemented at 24 CFR part 35 subpart A and 40 CFR part 745 subpart F. For housing built before 1978: the EPA pamphlet, disclosure of known lead-based paint and hazards and any available

evaluation report, and a ten-day period for a risk assessment or inspection unless the parties mutually agree otherwise, all before the buyer is obligated under the contract. Required lead warning language and signed acknowledgments go in the contract. *ecfr.gov* and *uscode.house.gov*

Affiliated business arrangements. 12 CFR § 1024.15, Regulation X under RESPA. Where a referral is made to a settlement service provider in which the referring party has an ownership or financial interest, a written disclosure in the prescribed format must be given on a separate piece of paper no later than the time of the referral, with an estimated charge or range of charges, and the consumer may not be required to use that provider. *ecfr.gov*

Fair housing. 42 U.S.C. §§ 3601 et seq. Section 3604(c) reaches any notice, statement or advertisement indicating a preference, limitation or discrimination, or an intention to make one. It is worth understanding that this provision covers what is said and what is implied, not only what is refused. *uscode.house.gov*

Sewer betterments and Cape Cod wastewater. Sewer expansion on Cape Cod proceeds under the Cape Cod Area Wide Water Quality Management Plan, prepared under section 208 of the federal Clean Water Act and approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2015, together with the Title 5 nitrogen sensitive area provisions and 314 CMR 21.00, the Massachusetts watershed permit regulations, which allow a municipality to take on a town-wide compliance schedule in place of individual system upgrades. Under 314 CMR 21.00 a watershed permit runs for a term of no longer than twenty years. Individual Cape towns publish their own comprehensive wastewater management plans describing implementation in phases over twenty to thirty years. Timelines are set town by town.

The betterment mechanism is M.G.L. c. 83, §§ 14 and 15, which establish the obligation and the method of allocation, read together with M.G.L. c. 80, the general betterment chapter, which c. 83 § 28 makes applicable to apportionment, interest and collection. Under c. 80 § 13 an assessment may generally be apportioned into as many as twenty portions; under c. 83 § 15D a municipality that has accepted that section may apportion sewer betterments over a period of up to thirty years, with no prepayment penalty. Interest provisions appear at c. 80 § 13 and c. 83 § 15C. The lien is created by c. 80 § 12 and takes effect upon the recording of the order stating that

betterments are to be assessed, which is why it runs with the property rather than with the owner. Under c. 80 § 13 the assessors, on the written application of the owner, shall order the unpaid balance payable forthwith, which is the ordinary route to a payoff at closing. A separate connection or privilege charge is authorized by c. 83 § 17, and ongoing sewer use charges by c. 83 § 16. Towns may levy estimated assessments during construction under c. 83 § 15B.

The municipal lien certificate is M.G.L. c. 60 § 23. By its own terms it covers amounts that "at the time constitute liens," and it provides that amounts not then ascertainable shall be expressed as such. That is the basis for the statement in this book that a betterment not yet assessed and recorded will not appear on it.

Offsets exist. The Cape Cod and Islands Water Protection Fund and the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust reduce a municipality's project cost rather than paying an individual homeowner directly. Barnstable County operates a loan program for homeowners covering septic work and sewer connections. Massachusetts also provides a personal income tax credit for septic repair or replacement and, as of tax years beginning in 2024, for sewer connections required by Title 5 or by a watershed permit. Amounts and eligibility have been amended more than once and should come from a tax professional.

No dollar figures from any town are reproduced in this book. They are set by local vote, adjusted on published schedules, and revised as project scope changes.

The short version

Ask. Every property, every time. The rules above are the reason a real estate professional, an attorney, a Title 5 inspector and a town hall all end up in the same transaction, and the reason none of them can be replaced by a book.