

A HOME FOR YOUR HAPPILY EVER AFTER

By Kathleen Klarenbeek

The excitement of two lives joining together often means you will be moving into a different home. Whether you have never owned a home, or you want to sell your existing house(s) and start fresh, this is a terrific time to buy! Interest rates are near all-time historic lows, and this gives you more buying power. Lenders can explain your options and help determine just the right loan product for your needs, and your Realtor® will work hard to help you find just the right home for your Happily Ever After. Here are some helpful tips to guide you through the home-buying process.

MEET WITH YOUR LENDER

An initial meeting with a loan officer is important. At this point you can get pre-approved, learn what types of loans are available and the steps you need to take to get financing, and identify any potential roadblocks that need to be worked out. Of course it is fine to talk with your own bank, but don't be afraid to talk with other lenders to compare what they have to offer. Taking the time to shop around can save you thousands!

TALK WITH YOUR REALTOR

There are several ways you can find a skilled agent, if you don't already have one who came highly recommended. You want someone who will focus on your specific needs and help make the process go smoothly. After meeting the agent, ask yourself how comfortable you are around him or her. You will undoubtedly have many questions along the way, and you will also be sharing information you feel is important to choosing your next home. Thus, it's important you feel you are being heard and understood. You most likely plan to live in your next home for years to come, so a good rapport with your agent is vital.

Your agent can help you determine what you want and need in your next home, and how to prioritize accordingly. Most people feel pretty strongly about the minimum number of bedrooms and bathrooms they want, but there are so many other factors to consider. Do you mind taking care of a yard? What size of garage will work for you? Is the school district important? Other things to think about include how long you hope to live there, whether you are willing to commute, and features that may help or hinder resale value.

SEARCHING FOR YOUR HOME

Many people start their search on-line, either on their own or with their agent's guidance. Numerous web sites are available where you can input your desired price range, location, and features to narrow down your choices and view pictures. It's important to know that what looks perfect in pictures may be disappointing in person, and conversely, pictures don't always do justice to a home's true appearance. Your agent may also have knowledge of homes that are coming on the market soon, so utilize his or her resources as much as possible.

Now for the fun part... previewing homes with your agent! Whether you visit only a couple houses or a couple dozen, only you will know when you have found just the right home that fits your needs. A good real estate agent will explain your options and educate you about the pros and cons of your choices.

MAKING AN OFFER

When you have found the home you love, the next step is making an offer. Your agent will assist you throughout this process, which involves much more than just agreeing on a price. Other important terms to consider include how soon you want to move in, whether it is worth asking the seller for help with closing costs, and what type of financing you will be using.

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OUR OFFER WAS ACCEPTED, HURRAY! NOW WHAT?

Your agent will make suggestions regarding what types of inspections you may want. If an inspection brings up a major concern, you may wind up going back to the negotiating table to determine who will remedy the problem. Once any hurdles in the inspection process are cleared, you will be in the home stretch. You will have a few responsibilities to be mindful of as you approach your closing date. These include following your lender's recommendations regarding credit and finances, selecting home insurance, and arranging to have the utilities put in your name. Your lender and your agent may need information from you – and will also have information for you – during this time, so be on the lookout for their e-mails and phone calls. On closing day, you will sign all the necessary paperwork and then be handed the keys to your new home. Congratulations!

MOVING IN

Moving can be stressful, so consider having a professional moving company help with the move into your new home. Take time to ask potential movers about packing and unpacking, loading and unloading, and transportation of your belongings. Full service movers can also provide temporary storage and car hauling, if needed.

Follow these steps, and you could begin your Happily Ever After in your very own home!