

Now is the time to buy - but don't leap before looking

By [David Jacobs](#)

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With interest rates at record-breaking lows, property prices subdued but poised for a future upswing, and plenty of stock on the market to choose from, there has seldom been a better time to buy a home. Despite the enviable prospects, however, buyers should be cautious not to throw caution to the wind.



Image source: Gallo/Getty

Buying a property is one of the biggest financial commitments you'll ever make, and if you want to get the most from your investment, you need to stick it out for at least five to ten years. That's a very long time to regret your choices if you don't make one hundred percent sure they're the right ones from the start.

Know your limits

The first step to making a smart decision is to know your financial limits. Getting preapproved for a bond is a great way to kick off this process. However, knowing how much you could qualify for is only the start.

A lot of people assume the number the bank gives them is the price tag they should be aiming for. In reality, the smart choice is often to opt for a purchase below that maximum affordability level. Buying a property is stressful enough already – no need to add to that burden by having to pinch every penny for the foreseeable future. Rather build in a bit of wiggle room to make sure you can weather a few financial hiccups, make improvements if necessary and, ideally, put a bit extra into your bond every month to pay your debt off faster.



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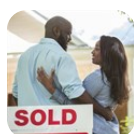


Know where you're buying

There's a reason "location, location, location" is the motto of every real estate agent. The right neighbourhood not only makes a huge difference to the value and growth prospects of a property investment, it also directly affects your potential enjoyment of your home.

Make sure you know as much as possible about the area you hope to move to, from what schools, work prospects and amenities are nearby, to its crime statistics and typical residents. You don't realise how much this can affect you until you're driving 30km every day to the nearest grocery store, living in fear of intruders, or enduring endless, all-night parties thrown by multiple student neighbours.

Talking to an experienced real estate agent in your neighbourhood of interest is a great way to get the inside scoop on all the need-to-know elements. Don't be afraid to ask tough questions – a good realtor won't shy away from the truth.



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Know what you're buying

Of course, knowing what you're buying is just as important as where you're buying it. Nothing sparks buyers' remorse like realising you've got yourself a lemon. No home is perfect, but some are a lot closer than others.

There are laws in place to protect purchasers from latent defects, but it's naïve to rely on these alone when making a purchase. Unless the thought of a protracted legal battle excites you, it's far safer to get a professional home inspection done to uncover any hidden flaws like damp, structural damage or compromised roof integrity.

Show less emotion

Home may be where the heart is, but giving your emotions too much power during the purchase process can lead you astray.

A gorgeous home might tempt you to overlook an unsuitable location, or throw caution to the wind and skip the inspection or overextend on an offer. You might also overlook fantastic opportunities while waiting for a 'unicorn' property that simply doesn't exist in your price bracket. You need to be practical while house-hunting, and let your head make the final call. Having an experienced real estate agent on your team can be a great way to ensure you're making smart decisions.

An experienced agent will be able to help you assess how well a property meets your financial and lifestyle needs, and guide you on how to position an offer for the best chance of success. Don't think that you are limited to talking to the agent responsible for the sale, either. Any good estate agent would be happy to offer unbiased advice on a purchase in their

neighbourhood.

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