

Home & MORTGAGE

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How to find a deal in a hot market

These seven strategies can help you achieve your dream of homeownership, while staying within your budget.

First-time buyers are often intimidated when homes in their region are priced beyond their budget. But with a little persistence and flexibility, it is possible to get your first home without exceeding your price threshold.

Here are some strategies to consider:

1. Look beyond the borders. If your desired area is popular with buyers, home prices will reflect that. Meanwhile, a property that's just a block or two away may be significantly cheaper, but enjoy the same amenities.

2. Whittle your wish list. Knowing what you want is great — but a long list of requirements will cost you. Consider demoting a few items from “must have” to “nice to have.”

3. Put your stamp on it. Homes that haven't been “staged” or “fluffed” for viewing, and those that haven't been decorated in many years, often sell for a more reasonable price. **Bonus:** Making cosmetic changes yourself results in a home that reflects your personal taste.

4. Tackle a fixer-upper. If your tolerance for dust and disruption is higher than average, look for a place that

needs some “TLC.” Keep in mind, though, that extensive repairs and renovations will increase your investment in your home, so factor potential costs into your budget.

5. Think small. Additional square footage, extra rooms, and more floors all come at a cost. Smaller homes can be beautiful, efficient, practical, and easier to maintain, which makes their smaller price tag that much more appealing.

6. Consider a condo. A comparison of Canadian home prices reveals that condominiums are, on average, the least expensive type of home. They can also offer a worry-free lifestyle, which is appealing to many first-time buyers.

7. Share a wall. Semi-detached, townhouses, and row houses are generally less expensive than detached homes. Find one with a solid brick construction and you may not even notice a difference — but your wallet will.

Helping you find solutions to your home-buying needs is our goal. To determine what your upper price limit for a home should be, and find ways to stick to it, just call for an appointment. 🏠

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Do your condo homework

Confirm what's yours. Obtain a clear written description of the unit, its exact boundaries, common areas, and exclusive-use areas, such as balconies.

Check on restrictions. Read the regulations and bylaws thoroughly to confirm any usage limitations that may affect your enjoyment of the unit. Restrictions on renovations and external decor options like door colour and window coverings are common, as are restrictions governing noise, pets, balconies, business use, and rental possibilities. You may want to visit the site and talk to residents to get a sense of the community and building operations.

Find out the fees. Learn what the monthly fees for your unit are currently, check whether they are scheduled for an increase, and confirm what they include. Low condo fees can be a red flag for special assessments down the road.

Have a home inspection. Consider hiring a qualified inspector who specializes in condominiums to check your unit and the building. You'll get an idea of any major expenditures that could be coming up, like a new roof or a furnace replacement, particularly if the property is more than a few years old.

If you are considering buying a condominium, you may be about to embark on a purchase that brings benefits not usually enjoyed by ordinary homeowners. These may include access to recreational facilities and large outdoor spaces, extra security features, and reduced maintenance worries. Of course, along with the perks, it's important to consider the different financial and legal obligations associated with multi-unit properties.

As a condo owner, you'll share both the use of common elements and the financial responsibility for their upkeep with other unit owners. You'll want to do some investigating first so you know exactly what you are buying into.

Checking from stem to stern

There are many checks you can do to ensure that the prospective property meets your financial and lifestyle expectations.

Do the due diligence

In most provinces and territories, you are entitled to review a number of documents that will supply much of the necessary financial and operational information.

You should be looking at operating budgets, financial statements, and annual general meeting minutes. Check the building's insurance coverage, and whether there's been any legal action taken against the condo corporation. Plus, you should read the governing documents such as the constitution, the condominium plan, and bylaws.

By taking the time to review key information now, you'll help ensure that "what you see is what you get," and you'll be more likely to enjoy your home for many years to come.

If you're considering buying a condo, call us so that we can talk more about what it will mean for you. 🏠



Mortgage ABCs

Helping you be an educated homeowner

■ Equity

The portion of a property's value that the homeowner owns outright. This is equal to the value of the property, less the amount owed on its mortgage.

■ Conventional mortgage

A mortgage loan of up to 80% of the property's lending value. These mortgages usually do not require mortgage loan insurance.

■ Home equity line of credit

A flexible borrowing option backed by the borrower's home, giving access (at the borrower's discretion) to a predetermined percentage of the home's equity.



Your mortgage broker: A source for financial solutions

A mortgage broker can assist you in ways that go well beyond offering great rates.

Many people think of a mortgage broker as someone who can help them get a good rate on their mortgage. While this is certainly true, a mortgage broker can also help you with much more than that.

A mortgage broker is a financial professional with whom you can form a long-term relationship that can extend to various types of financing. Here are some examples:

- If you have an upcoming expense, such as sending your child to college or university, your mortgage broker can help you cash out equity in your home or secure a home equity line of credit.
- If you are looking to buy a cabin or lakefront property, a mortgage broker can help you with financing for it.
- Little-known fact: If you are having problems meeting all of your financial obligations, a mortgage broker can help you consolidate your debts by securing a debt consolidation loan, so you have just a single, manageable payment every month.
- If you want to finance a renovation or other major expenditures, your broker can help arrange suitable refinancing options.
- When it's time to renew the mortgage, your broker can negotiate the best rate with your current lender. Your broker will also shop around with other lenders to check for alternatives that may result in further savings.
- Mortgage brokers may also be able to give you information about legal services for buying a home and recommend realtors, appraisers, and home inspectors.

If you have any questions about financing or debt consolidation, or if you're thinking of upsizing or downsizing, just call us. We can help you determine your options to work towards your goals. 🏡

Get an energy audit for multiple benefits

Savvy homeowners know that saving energy doesn't just help the environment — it helps keep your energy bills in check too. This is where getting an energy audit can be helpful. An energy audit zeroes in on the areas of your home where energy is being lost, so you can focus on the most effective changes to make.

Depending on your situation, an energy audit may also provide you with a government grant under the ecoENERGY Retrofit Program, based on the improvements you make.

Choose the right advisor. The first step is to contact a qualified energy advisor who is licensed by Natural Resources Canada's (NRCan) Office of Energy Efficiency.

The advisor will conduct a detailed evaluation of your home, performing checks such as a blower door test, which checks for air leaks. You will receive a printed report that includes an energy efficiency rating comparing your home with others in the region. The report will also tell you how you can improve your home's energy efficiency.

Because an audit can be expensive, it's a good idea to compare quotes from different energy advisors in your area. You can find NRCan-licensed energy advisors in your neighbourhood by calling 1-800-622-6232, or by visiting www.ecoaction.gc.ca.

Applying for a grant. To qualify for the grant, you must make the suggested improvements to your home within 18 months following the initial audit. Then, you must have your energy advisor conduct a post-retrofit audit,



complete the grant application, review it with you, and forward it to NRCan.

By plugging those leaks and improving the energy efficiency of your home, over the years you'll save money and help preserve the environment. 🌱



Bright ideas for lighting

A home that's warm and bright can feel a lot cozier on a winter night. But much of the energy we use to light our homes is wasted. Try these easy ways to save energy — and cut your electricity bills.

- Change some of your regular 60-watt incandescent light bulbs to 15-watt compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs. CFLs use 75% less energy and last up to 10 times longer.
- Motion detectors can provide convenient and safe lighting only when it's needed in your parking area, laneway, or porch.

■ Consider adding motion sensing lighting on the inside of your home as well. It can be convenient on landings and in hallways, closets, and bathrooms, eliminating the need to fumble for light switches in the dark, and also ensuring you're not lighting up rooms that no one is using.

■ If you decorate your home with strings of lights during the holidays, consider using energy-efficient LED lights.

■ Replace your wall-mounted light switches with dimmer switches for increased energy savings, longer bulb life, and more relaxing lighting. Upgrade older dimmers that are warm to the touch, since these switches don't save energy. 🏠

Wrap up your air conditioner

The warm days have faded and the heating hasn't yet been switched on. This is the perfect time to prepare your air conditioning unit for the winter. You'll save money on energy bills and keep it in good shape for next year.

If you have a window unit, remove it if you can. If you can't, be sure to seal around the edges with caulk, and cover it with an airtight, insulated jacket.

If you have central air, cover the outdoor unit with a specially designed jacket to keep debris from accumulating during the inclement weather. Remember to flip the dedicated breaker switch. 🏠



Holiday countdown checklist

As the days get shorter, our favourite holidays for family gatherings are getting closer and closer. To begin preparing your home in advance for guests and social events, here is a to-do list:

6 weeks ahead

- 🕒 Polish the silverware and wash special occasion platters, dishes, and glasses well in advance, so you're not faced with the prospect of a tarnished table setting.
- 🕒 For unplanned gift exchanges, purchase and wrap attractive items like picture frames.

4 weeks ahead

- 🕒 Stock up on non-perishable or frozen appetizers, snack foods, and drinks so there's always something on hand.
- 🕒 Launder and iron linens so you don't have to scramble if someone shows up early. Lay them out on a guest bed or hang in a closet to prevent wrinkling.



- 🕒 For overnight guests, it's considerate to clear some space in a closet or a drawer. Also, make sure that the clock in the guest room is correctly set, and that there's a reading light by the bed.
- 🕒 De-clutter the house, remove obvious breakables, and do major housework.

Today's the day

- 🕒 On the days when you're expecting guests, make sure you clear any snow and ice from the driveway and the front walk. 🏠