



THE MORE YOU KNOW

Why You Should Think Carefully About Where to Buy a House

Location matters

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Over the last few years, [Ravi Davda](#), a digital marketing CEO, and his wife have bought—then promptly turned around and sold—not one but two [houses](#) they had intended to live in for years. With the first, they decided they wanted to be closer to family. With the second, they realized they didn't like the neighborhood. Both homes increased in value, so it wasn't a financial hit, but as everyone who's done it knows, moving in (and out) isn't easy.

“I know this is going to sound obvious, but before you even think about buying a house, decide if you're ready to commit to the house, the city or state, and the neighborhood,” Ravi says. “Ask yourself, can you see yourself here in 10 years' time? There's a lot involved in making a house a home, so if you leave after only a couple of years, it doesn't make sense.”

Buying a house is a financial investment, but you're also making a decision to invest in a place. That's why it's important to get educated about *where* you're buying as much as *what* you're buying. “[Historically, location was often a choice made in consideration of work, as well as the quality of the schools, if the buyers have children or are planning to have them,](#)” explains [Tracy Do](#), a Los Angeles–based real estate agent with [Compass](#). In recent years, these priorities have shifted due to the surge in remote work and desire to migrate. Tracy points out that rising prices are also a big factor in pushing people toward areas they might be less familiar with. As a result, this has increased the risk of buying somewhere that's maybe better in escapist fantasy than in practice.

Location considerations can be both macro and micro, and you should look at all of them, insists Stephanie Younger, a real estate agent with Compass in L.A. “When we look at macro factors, we pay attention to population growth, business opportunity, quality of schools, presence of parks, and a healthy shopping district,” she adds. Micro factors include street traffic, parking, and absence of negative site influences, such as highways and industrial infrastructure. Though it can be easy to fall head over heels for a home, it’s extremely important to purposefully choose the location first and the home second, emphasizes interior designer Sarah Sain of South Carolina home renovation company Sain Homes. “Any home has the potential to be reimaged and redesigned, but you can’t pick up a house and move it to a better area,” she notes.

As you begin your house-hunting process, take the time to drive or walk around the potential new neighborhoods, both during the day and at night. Measure your commute, if there is one, at different times of day; see how well the area is lit; and note whether there are cars and people out, suggests Beatrice de Jong, a broker and consumer trends expert at Opendoor. Consider too how the neighbors on a given street care for their home, whether there are young kids running around, and the closest amenities. Think about whether it’s important to you to have a gym, market, coffee shop, or other amenities within walking distance or a near drive. Scott Mosely, a team manager at Redfin, also advises not being afraid to talk to people. “Go to the corner market as well as small neighborhood restaurants and strike up a conversation with the locals around what they like and dislike about the area,” he adds.

It’s also a good idea to research any development plans in the works that may impact your quality of life or home value—negatively or positively. “Ask your agent about building permits in the area, so that you can get an idea of what is being planned,” Scott explains. “This is especially relevant when

you are moving on the edge of a major area that will likely become developed in the next 5 to 10 years.” Development often means rising property values—but it also means noise. Many cities and towns will also have this information posted on their website.

Most importantly, make an effort to tap into and then listen to your gut. “When visiting a city or neighborhood, imagine yourself living in it,” Beatrice concludes. “Envision where you’ll take your morning walk, what nearby restaurant you’ll order takeout from, and picture yourself relaxing in the backyard or on the patio to make sure you can see yourself enjoying your new home for years to come.” It’s not the end of the world if, in five years, your needs or desires change. But the longer you can stay in a home, the better your return.

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