CENTURY 21 Affiliated
FINE HOMES & ESTATES

Tracy Scott
REALTOR® | DRE#00957686



Buyer's Guide

A quick, practical overview – from planning to keys.

By Tracy Scott, REALTOR® · DRE# 00957686 · November 2026

1. Broker Agency

Whether you are moving across town or across the country, the real estate market is a big place. An experienced agent can help you navigate the real estate market. I have access to current market information and can help you make informed decisions about the areas and properties that interest you. As you move through the process, I will walk you through confusing paperwork and, of course, assist you in house hunting.

Visit me at www.desertluxuryhouses.com, or Call/Text Me at (760) 840-7441. I will guide you through each step of the homebuying process.

2. Pre-Qualification

Prior to making an offer, and if you are getting a loan, we will need a letter of pre-approval from a lender. If you pay cash, we will need proof of funds from your bank.

Mortgage loan and lender options vary. Different loan types can accommodate different financial situations. The same goes for additional resources like the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) or Freddie Mac. I can help you understand the various options and help you pick the lender for your situation.

3. Due Diligence

Take Note of Potential Fixes/Renovations If you are looking at a property online that may need some upgrades, take note of those. See which elements of home repairs you are willing to accept, and which areas you would consider renovating in the future. And remember, paint color is easy, inexpensive change that makes a dramatic difference in a home!

I always recommend doing a home inspection for your protection. When performing inspections during the escrow process, we recommend hiring a licensed home inspector; we can provide a list of companies to call. They will provide details about their services and report flaws in the home during their inspection.

4. Home Search

As a homebuyer, you can expect to see an array of different home styles and designs. You have the choice of single-family, condominium, townhome, mountain view, acreage, luxury; you can also choose single family residence, multiple-story, or split-level. In addition, you can choose a pre-existing home or new construction. In other words, you have options. What is most important when I am setting up a property search report is that you choose home parameters that complement your lifestyle and your income. To narrow down your choices:

- Know your budget and stick to it.
- Determine a desired location.



- Consider how many bedrooms, bathrooms and square feet you need.
- Decide which amenities are must-haves versus like-to-haves.
- Consider your needs for outdoor space, like a yard, balcony or a pool.

5. Offer Process

An offer is a legal agreement to purchase a home. An offer can be conditional on a number of factors, like financing or the home inspection. If the conditions are not met, the buyer can cancel their offer. Having an agent who has your back, who can easily explain what your contingencies are on different types of offers, homes, land types, and Homeowner Associations, is a key reason you want to engage a Realtor.

6. Deposit (Earnest Money) — what it is, when it is due, and when it is at risk

The deposit (often called “earnest money”) is a good-faith payment that shows you intend to move forward. It is held by Escrow and later applied toward your down payment and/or closing costs.

The deposit amount is negotiable, however, the standard for the industry is 3% of the purchase price.

Deposit due date: Commonly due within 3 days of offer acceptance (per the contract).

Where it goes: Held by escrow, a neutral third party hired by both the seller and buyer (not paid directly to the seller).

When it can be lost: The deposit is most at risk after all buyers’ contingencies are removed, and the buyer later cancels without a contractual basis. Before contingencies are removed, buyers commonly have the ability to cancel based on contingency terms (timelines vary by contract), without losing their deposit.

7. Acceptance of Offer — what it means and what happens next

Once the seller accepts and you receive the fully signed agreement, you have an accepted offer. At that point, deadlines in the contract begin (deposit, inspections, disclosures, loan/appraisal, contingency dates).

Escrow is opened and the escrow file is created.

Disclosures and reports start flowing (seller disclosures, HOA docs if applicable, preliminary title report, etc.).

We confirm key dates and create a short checklist, so nothing is missed.

8. Escrow — what it is and its purpose

Escrow is a neutral third party that coordinates the transaction paperwork and money. Escrow holds funds, receives documents, tracks instructions, and helps ensure the transfer is completed correctly.

Open escrow: Escrow receives the contract and sets up the file and instructions.

Estimated closing statement: You can request an early estimated closing sheet, so you understand expected cash to close.



Wire instructions: Escrow provides wiring instructions (always verify by calling escrow using a trusted phone number). It is important to never trust an email that sends you wiring instructions; call escrow to verify the wiring instructions to avoid wiring theft.

Title coordination: Escrow works with title to provide the preliminary title report and later finalize title/recording. A title company is a neutral third party in real estate that ensures clear property title by performing title searches, managing escrow funds, coordinating the closing process, and issuing title insurance to protect buyers and lenders from future ownership claims or financial loss. They function as the financial and legal hub, verifying the seller's ownership, clearing liens, preparing documents, and ensuring funds are disbursed correctly to finalize the transfer of property.

9. Due Diligence / Contingency Period — commonly around 17 days (varies)

This is the investigation period where you verify the property, documents, financing details before removing contingencies, review preliminary title report, pest control report, appraisals, homeowner association document and more. A common timeline to complete the due diligence is about 17 days, but the actual number is whatever your contract states.

Appraisal: An appraisal confirms value for the lender and directly affects the loan approval and negotiations.

HOA Document: Review (if applicable), CC&Rs, rules, budget, reserves, minutes, and fees.

Buyer home inspection: Evaluates major home systems and identifies defects and safety items.

Preliminary Title Report: Shows vesting, liens, easements, CC&Rs, and other recorded items on recorded title; we review what matters and why.

Termite/ Pest I nspection: Checks for active infestation and damage for pest, mold, mildew, dry rot, and other conditions; determines if treatment/repairs are needed.

Pool I nspection (optional): Verifies equipment and condition if there is a pool/spa.

Roof I nspection (optional): Helpful if age/condition is unclear or if the inspector flags concerns.

A/C HVAC System Inspection (optional): Verifies equipment and condition if there is an A/C HVAC system.

Disclosures + documents: review the seller’s disclosures and any additional reports; ask questions and request clarifications.

Repairs/credits: Negotiate repair requests and/or credits when appropriate.

Contingency removals: Once the 17-day contingency period is up, and you are satisfied and wish to continue with the purchase of the property, contingencies are removed in writing (or extended if needed).

I will review these items with you and help you prioritize what matters most.

10. Closing — what happens at the finish line

Closing is when final documents are signed, final funds are delivered, and the transaction is completed.

Final review: Confirm the settlement statement/closing disclosure and final cash-to-close amount.

Final walk-through: Typically done shortly before closing to confirm the property’s condition and agreed repairs.

Signing: You sign escrow and lender documents (timing depends on lender/escrow scheduling).



Funds: Escrow collects your funds to close, prior to closing, by wire/cashier's check per escrow instructions.

Recording: Deed records at the County Recorders Office; once recorded, the sale is officially completed (timing varies).

11. Possession, Property, and Keys

Possession is when you get the right to occupy the property. It is usually after confirmation of recording by the County Recorder's Office unless there is a rent-back or other agreement that changes the date/time.

Keys: Received after the recording, typically delivered after closing/recording (or per the contract).

Utilities: Order prior to closing and in conjunction with the seller turning off the utilities. Confirm transfer dates and set up services before moving in.

Security: Plan to re-key or change locks after possession.

Rent-back (if any): If the seller negotiates to stay after closing, possession and keys follow the rent-back terms.

There are a lot of documents to sign after the acceptance of the purchase contract, be patient and I will walk you through what you must do.

Questions come up fast during escrow—when they do, text/call and we will walk through them.