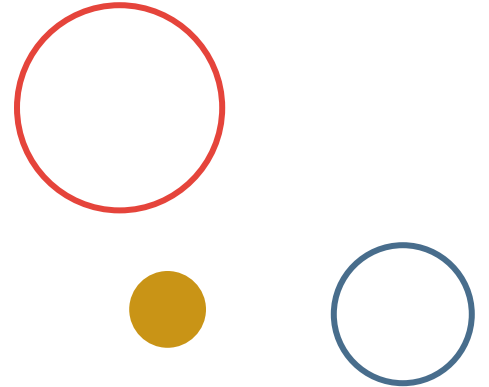


Your Path Home.



A confident, plain-English guide to buying a home in the Bay Area, from first conversation to keys in hand.

Michael Fielden

YOUR REALTOR & GUIDE

Luxuriant Realty

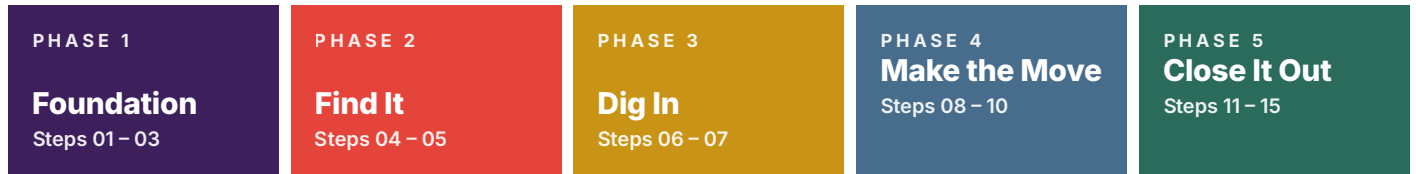
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15 steps to your front door.

Buying a home is a sequence, not a leap. Here's the whole thing on one page. Each step has its own chapter in the pages ahead. Watch the color, every step is tied to its phase.



<p>01 FOUNDATION</p> <p>Start with your expert Build your team. A great agent makes everything easier.</p>	<p>02 FOUNDATION</p> <p>Sign the BRBC The Buyer Rep Agreement, what it is, why it exists now.</p>	<p>03 FOUNDATION</p> <p>Get pre-approved Why we start with Zillow Home Loans, real pre-approval.</p>
<p>04 FIND IT</p> <p>Define your search Budget, neighborhoods, must-haves vs nice-to-haves.</p>	<p>05 FIND IT</p> <p>Tour homes What to look for past the staging. Notes that help.</p>	<p>06 DIG IN</p> <p>Disclosures & inspections TDS, SPQ, NHD, AVID, plus reports. We translate every one.</p>
<p>07 DIG IN</p> <p>Know your contingencies Inspection, loan, appraisal. Clauses that protect you.</p>	<p>08 MAKE THE MOVE</p> <p>Make an offer Price, terms, timing. What actually makes an offer win.</p>	<p>09 MAKE THE MOVE</p> <p>Get into contract Acceptance, executed contract, opening escrow.</p>
<p>10 MAKE THE MOVE</p> <p>Wire your EMD Earnest money. Wire fraud is real, we verbally verify.</p>	<p>11 CLOSE IT OUT</p> <p>Appraisal & underwriting The lender pressure-tests the deal. We watch the calendar.</p>	<p>12 CLOSE IT OUT</p> <p>Remove contingencies The point of no return, in the best way.</p>
<p>13 CLOSE IT OUT</p> <p>Wire the balance Down payment plus closing costs. Same wire-fraud rules.</p>	<p>14 CLOSE IT OUT</p> <p>Fund & record Lender funds, county records, you officially own a home.</p>	<p>15 CLOSE IT OUT</p> <p>Get your keys Final walkthrough, possession, the part where you exhale.</p>

Typical timeline: 21 to 40 days from accepted offer to keys.

Your role: Stay decisive, stay communicative, ask anything.

Welcome, future homeowner.

If you're reading this, you're thinking seriously about buying a home in one of the most demanding real estate markets in the country. You should feel proud. You should also feel prepared. That's what this book is for.

■ How to use this book

Read it once cover-to-cover before we go too deep into your search. Each step has a short chapter with three things: what the step actually is, what we'll do together, and a small set of questions for you to answer in writing.

The pages have space to write directly in them. The act of writing down what you want changes the search.

■ A note from me

I bought my first home before I worked in real estate. I remember staring at disclosure PDFs and wondering what I was missing. I remember thinking, someone should explain this in plain English.

That's the job. Plain English, honest analysis, and a steady hand. You bring the goal. I bring the playbook.

Onward,

Michael Fielden

REALTOR · LUXURIANT REALTY · DRE# 01932285

REALITY CHECK

A first-time Bay Area buyer who follows this process can reasonably expect to be in contract within 2 to 16 weeks of getting serious, and in a home 21 to 40 days after that. Some buyers move faster. Some take a year. Both are fine. The market rewards prepared patience.

■ Your first three actions

ACTION 01

Read this book once, end to end.

Don't fill in the questions yet. Just get the shape of the process in your head.

ACTION 02

Schedule a 45-minute sit-down.

Coffee, video, or phone. Bring your questions and any wish-list ideas.

ACTION 03

Start the pre-approval.

I'll introduce you to Zillow Home Loans.
Costs nothing, clarifies everything.

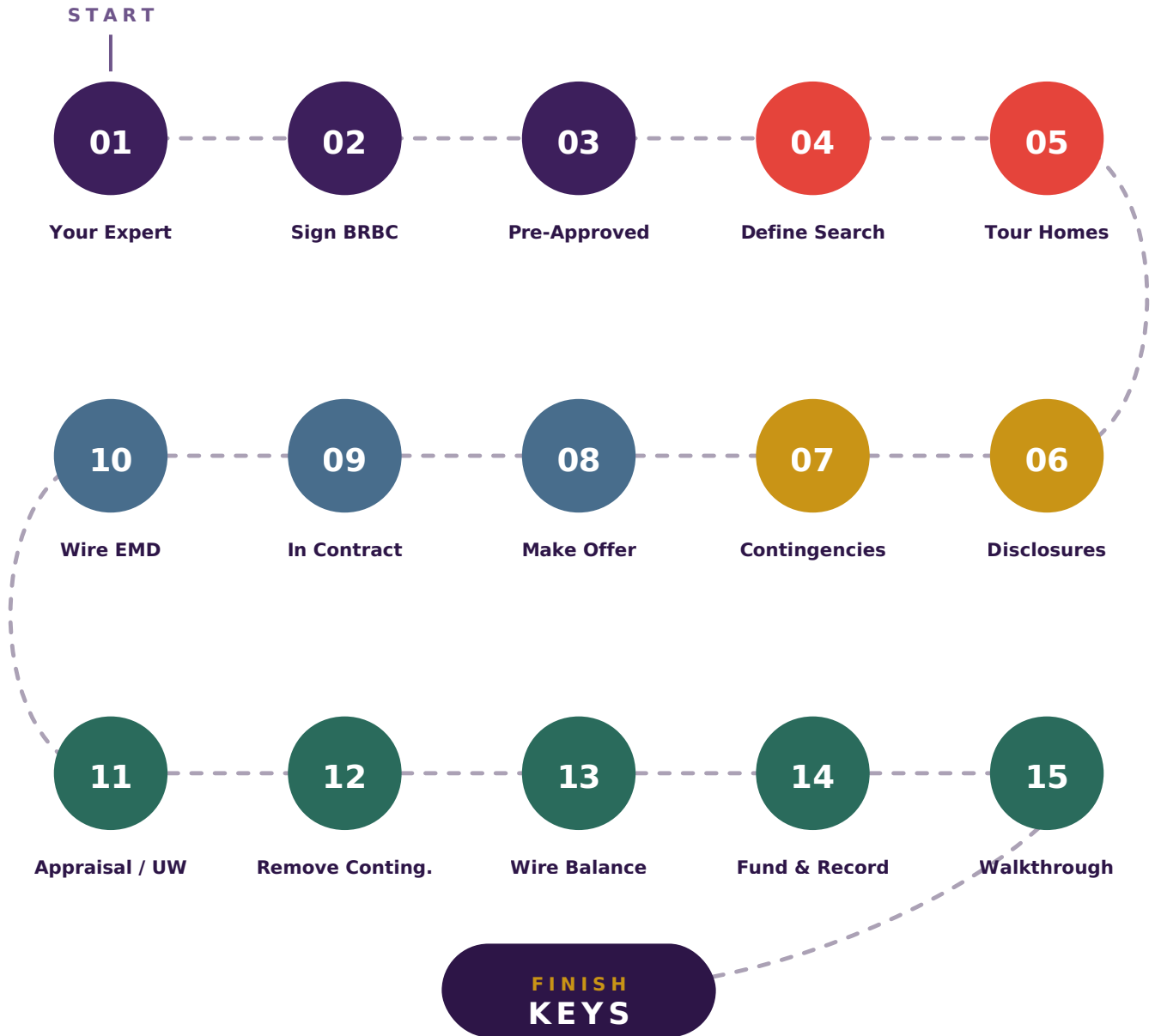
WHEN YOU'RE READY

Text or call me anytime. No pressure, no timeline.

408.691.9484

Your journey, end to end.

Same 15 steps as the previous page, but as a single path. Follow the road from your first conversation to keys in hand. The color of each circle tells you which phase you're in.



Typical timeline: 21 to 40 days from accepted offer to keys.

Who's on the field, and **who you'll actually talk to.**

A Bay Area home purchase pulls in a surprising number of people. You and I sit at the center. Three contacts make up your day-to-day. Everyone else works in the background, you don't manage them, we do.



- You + Michael
 - Lending team
 - Escrow & title
 - Inspections
 - Insurance / warranty
- Solid lines: daily contact. Dashed lines: behind-the-scenes.

01 Build your team first. Everything else gets easier from there.

A great buyer's agent saves you time, money, and the costly mistakes you wouldn't see coming. This is the most important decision you'll make before you make any other decisions.

■ What I do for you

I represent your side of the deal, full stop. That means I owe you a fiduciary duty: loyalty, disclosure, confidentiality, and reasonable care. In practice, that looks like reading every disclosure carefully, pushing back when terms don't favor you, sourcing off-market opportunities when the public market is thin, and telling you when a house isn't the right one even though it would close my deal.

■ What a good agent actually changes

- **Price strategy:** knowing what to offer, when to escalate, and when to walk.
- **Disclosure literacy:** spotting the thing the seller's report didn't quite say.
- **Vendor network:** inspectors, contractors, lenders, escrow officers I've worked with for years.
- **Negotiation cover:** I take the awkward conversations so you don't have to.
- **Calendar discipline:** hitting every contingency window without sweating.

MICHAEL'S TIP

Ask any agent you're interviewing how many disclosure packages they've read in the last 90 days. The number tells you everything. Bay Area buyers need an agent who lives in those PDFs.

YOUR TURN

What are three things you most want from your agent?

02 UP NEXT Sign the BRBC, the buyer rep agreement in plain English.



02 The Buyer Rep Agreement, in plain English.

Since August 2024, California buyers and their agents sign a written representation agreement before touring homes. It sounds bureaucratic. It's actually one of the better things to happen to buyers in a decade.

■ Why this exists now

A national legal settlement changed how buyer's agents get compensated. Before, the seller almost always paid the buyer's agent through the listing agreement. Now, that compensation has to be negotiated openly, and buyers and their agents have to put their working agreement in writing up front. The form is called the BRBC: Buyer Representation and Broker Compensation agreement.

■ What the BRBC actually covers

- **Who represents whom.** I represent you. Not the seller, not both sides.
- **The geographic and time scope.** What area we're searching and for how long.
- **How I get paid.** A percentage or flat fee, and where the money comes from.
- **What happens if the seller pays my side.** Most Bay Area sellers still do.
- **How either of us can exit.** The agreement is not a forever marriage.

The BRBC is a clarity document. It defines my job, my pay, and your rights, before we step into a single home.

■ What I'll walk you through before you sign

Every term. Every number. Every checkbox. If anything in the form is unclear, that's on me to fix before you put pen to paper. I will never ask you to sign something we haven't gone through together.

RULE 01

Don't sign or pay for anything you don't understand or expect. The BRBC is the first place this rule lives. If a clause reads unclear, we slow down. No exceptions.

[SEE ALL THREE RULES · PAGE 22](#)

YOUR TURN

Write down any one question about the BRBC you want answered before signing. Bring it to our next conversation.

03 UP NEXT Get pre-approved, and why Zillow Home Loans is a smart place to start.



03 Why we start with Zillow Home Loans.

In a competitive market, a pre-approval letter is your ticket to be taken seriously. Not all letters are equal. Where you get yours matters more than most buyers realize.

■ Why Zillow Home Loans makes sense as a starting point

- **Fast, real underwriting.** Their process verifies income and assets up front, not just a quick credit pull. The letter means something.
- **Rate match.** If you find a better legitimate offer elsewhere, they'll work to match it. Starting here costs you nothing.
- **Free appraisal.** When you close with them, the appraisal fee is covered. A real \$700 to \$1,000 saved.
- **Tight communication.** Their team coordinates directly with me.
- **Integrated tooling.** They plug into the same Zillow ecosystem you're probably already using.

STRATEGY

Start with Zillow Home Loans. If you want a second opinion, grab a quote from your bank or credit union, compare, and choose the letter you trust most.

■ Pre-qualification vs pre-approval (not the same)

A pre-qualification is a soft credit pull and a conversation. A guess. A pre-approval verifies income, assets, and runs a hard credit pull, with the lender committing to a specific loan amount. Sellers know the difference.

■ What you'll need to send the lender

- Two years of W-2s or 1099s, plus last two pay stubs
- Two months of bank statements showing down payment funds
- Recent retirement and brokerage statements if those funds are part of the plan
- ID, and authorization for the credit pull

YOUR TURN

What monthly payment, including taxes and insurance, would still let you live the life you actually want? What number would feel uncomfortable?

04 UP NEXT, PHASE 2

Define your search. The honest version of what you actually want.



04 The honest version of what you actually want.

Most failed home searches fail here. People search for everything they like instead of what they need, and the search goes on forever. We're going to be precise.

■ Budget reality

Your pre-approval is a ceiling, not a target. Most buyers shop 10 to 15 percent below their max approval to leave room for life, savings, repairs, and a margin in case rates move. We'll set a search budget together that reflects what you want your monthly cash flow to look like, not what the bank says you can technically afford.

■ Location, location, math

The single biggest mistake first-time Bay Area buyers make is optimizing for square footage over commute or school district. Square footage is easy to measure. Commute time and school assignment are easy to underestimate. We'll quantify both before we draw your search map.

! RISK & WATCH-OUT

Home-sale contingencies usually lose competitive bids.

The trap: in multiple-offer situations, sellers heavily favor offers that don't depend on the buyer selling another property first.

What we do: we talk early about whether you can bridge with temporary housing, a short-term rental, or a bridge loan. If bridging isn't realistic, we shift the search toward less competitive listings.

YOUR TURN, TOP 3 EACH

Must-haves (a home must have these, or you walk):

Nice-to-haves (you'd love them, but could live without):

05 UP NEXT

Tour homes. See past the staging, take notes that actually help.



05 See past the staging. Take notes that work.

Touring is fun. It's also the moment most buyers start drifting from the plan they set on the prior page. We'll keep it grounded.

■ What I'm looking at while you're falling in love

- Roof age and slope (binoculars help)
- Foundation, water staining at base of walls, hairline cracks in slabs
- Windows: original vs replaced, dual-pane, signs of condensation
- Electrical panel age and capacity
- Water pressure, drainage at sinks, hot water recovery
- Drainage and grading around the building
- The neighbor situation. The neighbor situation. The neighbor situation.

■ What's worth ignoring

Paint colors, light fixtures, hardware, staging furniture, the smell of cookies the listing agent had baked. Cosmetics are negotiable later or free to change. Don't price them in.

If the price is right, the layout works, and the bones are good, the cosmetics are noise.

YOUR TOUR LOG

For each home, write three things: a favorite, a concern, and a deal-breaker if any. By house number five, the patterns reveal themselves.

06 UP NEXT, PHASE 3

Review disclosures and inspections. The paper trail tells you what the house won't.



06 The paper trail tells you what the house won't.

In California, sellers are required to disclose what they know about the property. Add the pre-listing inspection reports and you have a small library to read before offering. This is where deals are won or lost.

■ The core seller-side forms you'll see

- **TDS**, Transfer Disclosure Statement. Seller's signed list of known issues.
- **SPQ**, Seller Property Questionnaire. The longer, more detailed cousin to the TDS.
- **NHD**, Natural Hazard Disclosure. Flood, fire, seismic, environmental zones.
- **AVID**, Agent Visual Inspection Disclosure. What the listing agent saw walking through.
- **Preliminary Title Report**, liens, easements, recorded restrictions.
- HOA documents if applicable: CC&Rs, budgets, reserves, minutes, special assessments.

■ Third-party reports typically included

- General home inspection
- Pest report (wood-destroying organisms)
- Roof inspection
- Sewer lateral scope (critical in older Bay Area neighborhoods)
- Chimney, pool, foundation, or structural where flagged

HEADS UP

A clean disclosure package is not the same as a clean property. Read every report. Ask why anything was redacted. I'll do the heavy lifting and call out the items that need real attention.

RULE 02

Read the disclosures. Full stop. This is the page where Rule 2 lives. The TDS, SPQ, NHD, AVID, and inspection reports tell you what you're actually buying.

[SEE ALL THREE RULES · PAGE 22](#)

YOUR TURN

What categories of issues would be deal-breakers for you (foundation? roof? sewer lateral)? Knowing this in advance speeds up our offer decision.

07 UP NEXT, READ IT TWICE Know your contingencies. The clauses that keep your deposit safe.



07 The clauses that keep your deposit safe.

Contingencies are your built-in exit ramps. Each one comes with a time limit. Removing them is a decision, not a checkbox. This is the single most important page in this book.

■ The three you'll typically see

- **Investigation (inspection) contingency.** Default 17 days in CA. Time for you to inspect, review disclosures, and decide if the condition works.
- **Loan contingency.** Default 17 days under the current CAR RPA (sometimes negotiated to 21). Time for your lender to fully approve the loan.
- **Appraisal contingency.** Default 17 days. Protection if the appraiser values the property below your purchase price.

■ What "removing" a contingency actually means

When you remove a contingency in writing, you're telling the seller you've satisfied yourself on that condition and your earnest money is now at risk for that issue. Remove the investigation contingency, and you can't back out later because of an inspection finding without losing your deposit.

HARD RULE

We never remove a contingency until we're genuinely ready. In hot markets, some buyers waive contingencies up front to compete. That's a strategy I'll walk you through carefully, with the trade-offs spelled out. It is not the default.

■ My job during this window

I track every deadline. I push for reports you want. I help you decide what's a real risk versus typical for the age of the home. I tell you when I'd remove and when I wouldn't.

YOUR TURN

If an inspector found a \$20,000 issue you didn't know about, what would you want to happen: ask for a credit, ask for a repair, or walk?

08

UP NEXT, PHASE 4

Make an offer. Price is one lever. There are several others.



08 Price is one lever. There are several others.

A winning offer in the Bay Area is rarely just the highest number. It's the cleanest, most credible, best-fit-for-the-seller package. We craft yours like that on purpose.

■ What goes into an offer

- **Price.** Anchored to comparable sales, days on market, and competition.
- **Earnest money deposit** (usually 3% of price in the Bay Area).
- **Down payment** and loan amount.
- **Contingency timelines** (or strategic waivers).
- **Close of escrow date.**
- **Seller-rent-back** if needed (free or paid, length).
- **Pre-approval letter** from your lender.
- **Proof of funds** for down payment and closing costs.

■ Levers that aren't price

A faster close. A shorter contingency window. A larger deposit. A free or low-cost rent-back. A clean letter from a known lender. I tune these to what the seller and listing agent actually care about. Sometimes I know because I've called them. That's part of the work.

The best offer is the one the seller can say yes to without worry.

FAIR HOUSING NOTE

Personal "love letters" to sellers are out. They expose buyers and sellers to fair housing risk and many brokerages now prohibit them. We win on terms, not stories.

YOUR TURN

If you had to choose: bigger budget with longer contingencies, or smaller budget with shorter contingencies, which way do you lean and why?

09 UP NEXT

Get into contract. Acceptance, executed contract, and opening escrow.



09 Acceptance, executed contract, and the start of escrow.

Your offer was accepted. Now the clock starts on every contingency window, and the dance with escrow, title, and lender begins. Here's exactly what happens in the first 72 hours.

■ The first 72 hours

- I confirm executed contract is delivered to both sides.
- We open escrow with a title and escrow company (often, but not always, the seller's choice).
- I send you the escrow officer's introduction and the timeline.
- You'll get wire instructions for your earnest money deposit (we'll go over these by phone).
- Your lender's processor reaches out for any remaining documentation.
- I send a calendar with every key date so nothing surprises you.

■ Who's on your team now

By the end of week one you'll be in regular contact with your loan officer, the loan processor, the escrow officer, sometimes a transaction coordinator on my side, and me. It feels like a lot. It's normal. I quarterback the group so you don't have to. (See the **Cast of Characters** on page 4 for the full picture.)

WHAT THIS FEELS LIKE

A flurry of forms in the first few days, then it gets quieter while inspections, appraisal, and loan processing run in parallel. The waiting is normal. Trust the calendar.

YOUR TURN

Once we're in contract, what's the best way for me to reach you during business hours for time-sensitive items: text, call, email? And what's the best way after hours, if something can't wait until morning?

10 UP NEXT, IMPORTANT

Wire your EMD. Earnest money, done safely. Read the wire-fraud rule twice.



10 Your earnest money. Done safely, on time.

The Earnest Money Deposit is your "I'm serious" check, typically 3% of the purchase price in the Bay Area. It usually wires within three business days of acceptance. This is where wire fraud strikes. We will not let that happen.

WIRE FRAUD IS THE #1 FINANCIAL THREAT IN REAL ESTATE

Criminals impersonate escrow officers and send fake wire instructions by email. The money is gone within minutes and is almost never recovered. Read the next paragraph twice.

■ The non-negotiable rule

Before you wire a dollar, you call the escrow officer at a phone number you got from a source other than the email containing the wire instructions, and you verbally confirm the wiring instructions. I'll provide that verified number. If anything in any email about wires looks off, you call before doing anything. There are no exceptions.

! RISK & WATCH-OUT

Earnest money has to be liquid before you need it.

The trap: funds for EMD or down payment sitting in a CD, brokerage with settlement delay, retirement account, or a pending sale. Sellers don't wait.

What we do: we map your funding sources at pre-approval. If a source has a settlement window, we move that money to a checking or money-market account two to three weeks before we write an offer.

■ What the EMD does

- Sits in the escrow company's trust account, not the seller's pocket.
- Is fully refundable if you exit while a contingency is still active.
- Is at risk if you exit after the related contingency has been removed.
- Counts toward your down payment at closing.

SIGN IT

I will call to verbally verify every wire instruction before sending money.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

11 UP NEXT, PHASE 5

Appraisal and underwriting. The lender pressure-tests the deal.



11 The lender pressure-tests the deal.

Behind the scenes, your loan goes through final scrutiny. An appraiser values the property. An underwriter approves you and the property together. We watch every deadline.

■ The appraisal

An independent licensed appraiser values the home for the lender. If the appraisal comes in at or above your purchase price, the loan moves forward unaffected. If it comes in below, you and the seller have a conversation: renegotiate, bring more cash, ask for a re-appraisal, or in some cases walk away under your appraisal contingency.

■ Underwriting

The lender's underwriter re-verifies your income, assets, credit, and the property's value, title condition, and insurability. They may ask for additional documents at the last minute. Send them fast.

! RISK & WATCH-OUT

Lender paperwork mistakes don't stop the contractual clock.

The trap: you submit documents, the lender uses a specific template you didn't see, the paperwork comes back rejected days later. The contract deadline doesn't care why the delay happened.

What we do: we ask the lender for the exact template and document list upfront. We submit within 48 hours. We confirm in writing that every submission was accepted. We build buffer into the loan contingency. If a date looks tight, we request an extension in writing before it passes.

DON'T DO THIS BETWEEN OFFER AND CLOSE

Don't open new credit, don't quit your job, don't make large unexplained deposits, don't co-sign anything, don't buy a car, don't move money between accounts without telling your lender. Any of these can stall or kill the loan.

■ If the appraisal comes in low

- **Option A.** Seller reduces the price to the appraised value.
- **Option B.** You bring extra cash to bridge the gap.
- **Option C.** Both sides meet in the middle.
- **Option D.** Buyer exits under the appraisal contingency (deposit refunded).

12 UP NEXT Remove contingencies. The point of no return, in the best way. →

12 The point of no return. In the best way.

Once you're satisfied with the inspections, the loan, and the appraisal, you sign contingency removals. This is a meaningful step. We treat it as one.

■ The order of removals

- **Investigation first**, once disclosures and inspections are reviewed and any negotiations settled.
- **Appraisal next**, once the appraisal is received and any value gap resolved.
- **Loan last**, once the lender has issued a final loan approval clear of conditions.

■ What I check before recommending removal

- All requested reports are in hand and reviewed.
- Any negotiated credits or repairs are documented in writing.
- Your lender has confirmed in writing that the loan is approved.
- Title is clear and acceptable.
- You've slept on it (where we have the time).

Removal happens when we're confident, not when the calendar says we have to.

IF WE'RE NOT READY

Contingency periods can be extended in writing if both sides agree. Extensions are normal. Pushing past a deadline without an extension is not. I'll never let that slip.

YOUR TURN

What would have to be true for you to feel confident removing your contingencies on the right home?

13 UP NEXT

Wire the balance. Down payment plus closing costs. Same wire-fraud rules.



13 Down payment plus closing costs. Same wire-fraud rules.

Three days before closing, you receive your final Closing Disclosure showing the exact dollar amount you owe to close. A day or two before recording, you wire that amount to escrow.

■ The Closing Disclosure (CD)

Federal law gives you a three-business-day review window once the CD is issued. Don't sleep on it. Compare it line-by-line to your last Loan Estimate. We're looking for unexpected fees, miscredited closing-cost contributions, or transposed numbers. Mistakes on closing statements are not rare, and they're entirely fixable when caught.

WIRE FRAUD, AGAIN

The closing wire is the second target for wire-fraud criminals. Call the verified escrow number. Verbally confirm the wiring instructions before you send a dollar. Same rule as the EMD. There are no exceptions.

■ What's in the closing number

- Remainder of your down payment (purchase price minus loan amount minus EMD already paid)
- Lender fees (origination, underwriting, appraisal balance if any)
- Title insurance (lender's policy required, owner's strongly recommended)
- Escrow fees
- Prepaid property taxes and homeowner's insurance
- Prorations between buyer and seller (taxes, HOA dues)
- Recording and notary fees

MICHAEL'S TIP

Get your down payment balance to escrow with plenty of time to close. A few days early is better than a few minutes late. Account for bank hours, transfer delays, and holidays, especially when funds come from a brokerage account or credit union where moves can take several business days to settle.

14 UP NEXT Fund and record. The two-step that makes the house officially yours. →

14 The two-step that makes the house officially yours.

"Closing day" is actually two events. First the loan funds. Then the county records the deed. The moment the deed records, you legally own the home.

■ Funding

Your lender wires the loan proceeds to escrow. Combined with your wired down payment and the EMD already on deposit, escrow now has the full purchase price plus all closing costs. This usually happens the morning of close.

■ Recording

Once escrow confirms funds are in, the title company sends the executed deed to the county recorder. The recorder time-stamps it. The clock on that stamp is the legal moment of transfer.

! RISK & WATCH-OUT

Loan funding can slip 24 to 72 hours, and sellers can lose patience.

The trap: the lender clears to close, but the actual wire to escrow lands a day or two later than expected. Sellers can pressure for a per-diem charge, a price bump, or in rare cases, the right to back out.

What we do: we confirm the lender's funding timeline 5 to 7 days before closing, not the day of. We track the wire status hour by hour. We negotiate per-diem language into the contract upfront so a small slip stays manageable. We keep the listing agent informed in real time.

■ What you'll receive

- Confirmation of recording from the title company
- A signed and stamped copy of the recorded deed
- A final closing statement
- Title insurance policy in the weeks following close
- Loan welcome packet with your first payment date

When the deed records, you've done it. The house is yours.

TWO SIDEBARS, THEN KEYS



Insurance and home warranty. Two things every Bay Area buyer should understand before close.



A Insurance: what it covers, what it costs, and why we shop early.

Your lender requires a bound policy before they'll fund the loan. In California, this used to be routine. In 2026, it's often the most surprising line item in a buyer's close-out budget.

■ The standard policy (HO-3)

A standard homeowner's policy covers the dwelling, other structures, personal property, loss of use, liability, and medical payments. Replacement cost on the dwelling is what we care about most. Get this number right and most claims are simple. Get it wrong (under-insured) and a partial loss can leave you exposed.

■ The California fire problem

Since 2022, several major carriers have stopped writing new policies in California or have pulled coverage in higher-risk zip codes. Many homes, especially in the East Bay hills, the Peninsula foothills, parts of Marin, Wine Country, Santa Cruz Mountains, and anywhere in or near CAL FIRE's High or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones, can no longer get a standard policy. The fallback is the California FAIR Plan.

WHAT THE FAIR PLAN IS

A state-mandated insurer of last resort for fire coverage. It is fire-only, which means you'll usually need a companion "Difference in Conditions" (DIC) policy to cover liability, water damage, theft, and other perils.

■ Cost reality

- A standard CA homeowner's policy on a \$1.5M home: roughly \$1,500 to \$3,500 per year.
- FAIR Plan plus DIC on the same home: commonly \$4,000 to \$10,000+ per year.
- This shows up in your monthly payment via escrow, so a higher premium can move your monthly by hundreds.

MICHAEL'S RULE

We get insurance quotes before we remove the inspection contingency, not after. If a home will require FAIR Plan + DIC, that changes the real monthly cost and sometimes the decision on whether the home pencils out.

B UP NEXT, SIDEBAR B
Home warranty. Optional but useful, especially in the first year.



B Home Warranty: the optional safety net for your first year (and beyond).

A home warranty is a service contract, not insurance. It covers the breakdown of major systems and appliances. In most Bay Area transactions, the seller pays the first year as part of the deal we negotiate.

■ What's typically covered

- **HVAC.** Heating, air conditioning, ductwork.
- **Plumbing.** Built-in systems, water heater, stoppages within the main line.
- **Electrical.** Built-in wiring, panel, switches, outlets.
- **Major appliances.** Refrigerator, range, oven, dishwasher, microwave, washer/dryer.
- Often included with upgrade: roof leak repair, pool/spa equipment, well pump, septic, garage door opener.
- Quiet bonuses: rekey of exterior locks, code violations on covered systems, modifications for replacement equipment.

■ What's typically not covered

- Pre-existing conditions the seller knew about and didn't disclose
- Cosmetic damage
- Structural issues (walls, foundation, framing)
- Roof replacement (vs leak repair, which some plans cover)
- Items improperly installed or maintained

■ How it works in practice

Something breaks. You call the warranty company. They dispatch a network contractor. You pay a "service call fee," typically \$75 to \$150 per visit. The contractor diagnoses and repairs or replaces the covered item. Total out-of-pocket for a covered water heater replacement: the service fee, instead of the \$1,500 to \$3,500 cost of the unit and install.

MICHAEL'S TIP

Read your specific plan's exclusions and service-fee structure before you assume something is covered. Plans vary widely (First American, 2-10, Old Republic, Fidelity National, others). Most useful in the first year while you're still learning the home's quirks.



15 Final walkthrough, possession, and the part where you exhale.

A few days before close we do a final walkthrough to confirm the property is in the agreed-on condition. Then, once recording is confirmed, you get the keys. The moment is yours.

■ Final walkthrough checklist

- Property is in substantially the same condition as when offered (or improved per any repair agreement).
- Agreed-on personal property is present (or removed).
- Appliances and major systems work (heat, AC, water heater, garbage disposal, fans).
- Every outlet, every faucet, every toilet, every window. Yes, all of them.
- No new damage from move-out (scratched floors, holes in walls, missing fixtures).
- Garage opener, gate fobs, mailbox key are present or accounted for.

■ Possession

Most Bay Area contracts give the buyer possession at recording or after a short agreed rent-back. You get the keys the moment possession transfers. Sometimes that's the same day as recording. Sometimes it's a few days later if there's a rent-back.

DAY-ONE MOVES

Rekey the deadbolts. If you opted for a home warranty, check the policy first, most plans cover rekeying as a benefit. Walk the property in the daylight. Find the main water shutoff, the gas shutoff, and the electrical panel. Take pictures of every meter reading. Then sit on the floor in an empty room and let it land.

RULE 03

The scammers don't stop at closing. Watch your mailbox over the next 6 to 12 months for fake invoices, bogus property tax bills, and fraudulent "second mortgage" letters. They look official. Same rule as before, if you don't recognize it, don't sign or pay. Call me.

SEE ALL THREE RULES · PAGE 22

YOUR TURN

When you get the keys, what's the first thing you want to do in your new home? Write it now. We'll laugh about it at the closing dinner.



YOU DID IT
Welcome home.



Three rules to carry with you, **end to end.**

If you forget everything else in this book, remember these. They apply from our first conversation, through escrow, and into the months after you have the keys.

"You provided a lot of early warnings and pro tips. It may have been unmanageable without you, and we are so grateful to have you."

— A FIRST-TIME BAY AREA BUYER

01

Don't sign or pay for anything you don't understand or expect.

If a document feels confusing or a charge looks unfamiliar, stop. Call me. We'll go through it together, line by line, dollar by dollar. There's no question too small, and there's no penalty for asking. The only penalty is signing something we didn't read together.

WHERE THIS MATTERS MOST · BRBC · DISCLOSURES · WIRES · CLOSING STATEMENT

02

Read the disclosures. Full stop.

The TDS, SPQ, NHD, AVID, and the inspection reports tell you what you're actually buying. They're the most important reading you'll do in the whole process. Don't skim them. I'll translate anything technical, but the words on the page are yours to know.

WHERE THIS MATTERS MOST · STEP 06 · BEFORE YOU WRITE AN OFFER · BEFORE YOU REMOVE CONTINGENCIES

03

The scammers don't stop at closing.

Wire fraud, fake invoices, bogus "second mortgage" letters, and fraudulent property tax notices show up after you close, too. They'll look official. They'll mention your address. Same rule as before, if you don't recognize it, don't sign or pay. Call me first. I'd rather get a hundred questions you didn't need to ask than miss the one that mattered.

WHERE THIS MATTERS MOST · THE FIRST 6 TO 12 MONTHS AFTER CLOSE

YOUR NEXT MOVE

Let's go find your home.

When you're ready to start, text or call. I'll send you the BRBC to review, intro you to the Zillow Home Loans team, and we'll set up a sit-down to map your search. The whole first conversation takes about 45 minutes.

Michael Fielden

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