

The commit, even though it is usually the



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The pre-search stages of buying a home are filled with dreams of quiet cul-de-sacs and wrap-around porches, granite countertops and cozy reading nooks.

The actual search may yield one or two of your must-haves, but the realities of homebuying can be much different than expected. Let's face it: it's not every day that we commit to something so entirely as we do our first home. The choice you make up now will have an impact on your life for the next several years or even decades. We don't even necessarily spend significant time in a home before we commit, even though it is usually the largest financial obligation many of us will ever see. In a still-smoking real estate market, it can be tempting to just jump.

Finding that middle ground between careful, intentional searching and impulsive grabbing is key. We gathered some solid professional advice for first-time home buyers about four steps to take before you jump into buying a home. Be Willing to Compromise A first home doesn't have to have everything you ever dreamed about.

You may have always pictured yourself in a quaint bungalow, only to find yourself in a sprawling ranch that is conveniently located near your office. Instead of a half-acre lot, you may end up with a small fenced yard outside a house with the kitchen you'll need in order to host family Thanksgivings. Overall, make sure your functional and practical priorities don't get overshadowed by all the bells and whistles that can present themselves in your search. Do you really need two showerheads in one shower if it means adding an extra 45 minutes to your commute? Keep in mind that you can

always add the extra funstuff, but price and location can't be changed once you have the key in your hand. Pay Attention to the Money-Pit Details Once you come up with a downpayment and closing costs, your bank account may be a little fragile for a while. When looking at homes, pay close attention to items that represent added maintenance costs. Educate yourself on homeowner's insurance—what's covered and what's not. Take a look at the trees on the property.

How old are they? While mature trees are a lovely addition to a property, if they're close to the house and untrimmed, they can cause major problems in a windstorm. Their roots can cause some major headaches in terms of sewer line invasions. And speaking of sewers, ask some important questions about their condition. A clogged sewer can create an expensive and smelly start to your life as a homeowner. The key word here is, anticipate. Look for a House that Matches Your Lifestyle Do you have kids or plan to have kids? Look for parks, pools, and schools.

Enjoying the single life? Maybe a condo downtown is right for you. Do you work 70 hours a week? A huge yard with 13 trees may not be what you need right now in terms of the time commitment. Think about where you are now, but don't forget that change is constant. Where might you be in five years, and will this new home suit your needs then? The typical homeowner lives in a house for an average of ten years. How different is your life now than it was ten years ago? Keep Resale in Mind Looking at a home for its value to YOU is important, but any agent will tell you that looking at it through the lens of a buyer in general becomes paramount. The first home is rarely the last home. Does the house have little quirks that you are willing to overlook or even

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enjoy? Consider whether most buyers would agree as you look. Are you touring the only house on the block without a basement or an enclosed garage? Unique is fine—too quirky, and you may have challenges.

Look at the standard set by the neighborhood and decide how much it might take to meet that standard with the house you're considering. Conversely, if you buy a home that is priced much higher than the neighbors, be ready for an uphill battle to recoup your costs when you sell. The bottom line is, be ready to compromise and keep your head on straight when buying. It may be more important to adjust your dreams than to find perfection.