

Buyers often are reluctant to make an offer to buy a home they find early on in their search. After looking for months and not finding anything comparable, some buyers regret not having moved quickly on a listing even though they saw it early on.

In most cases, you should consider yourself lucky if you find the home you want to own for years relatively quickly. It's not uncommon in some low-inventory markets for buyers to look for a year or more before they are able to buy.

For the last few years, sellers who haven't had a pressing need to sell have been waiting for a better market before putting their homes on the market.

In one case, the inventory was so paltry that buyers who purchased in the Upper Rockridge area of Oakland, Calif., looked for four years before finding the house that would work for them in the long term.

In high-demand niche markets, there can be a shortage of listings and a lot of buyers waiting for the same kind of home. A couple who purchased in the Oakland Hills looked for more than a year in an area where not much that suited their needs was available. They made two offers during that time and ended up losing in multiple-offer competitions before they were finally able to secure a new home.

HOUSE HUNTING TIP: Buyers who find the right home soon after starting their search need to get a quick education about the local market in order to be able to keep from making a bad decision.

You don't want to pass on a house and kick yourself later for doing so. You also don't want to buy a house that doesn't work out for you, particularly in the current market. You'd be unlikely to sell the home again soon and break even.

Find out how often a listing like the one you're considering comes on the market. High-quality, well-located homes in coveted locations come on the market infrequently in some areas.

Ask your real estate agent how many listings like the one you're interested in came on the market in the last six months or one year. How long did it take them to sell? Were there multiple offers?

In other areas that have lots of homes for sale similar to the one you like, you have the luxury of shopping the market awhile. If someone else buys this home, you'll be able to find another in a reasonable period of time.

There's no urgency, unless interest rates are rising and locking in a low rate is key to being able to afford the home you want.

To ease your concern about buying a home before you've seen many, scour the Internet for other similar homes for sale in the area. Ask your agent to show you any other homes currently on the market that might work for you. This is how to determine the range of housing options in the area as well as understand local pricing.

Buyers from out of the area are at a disadvantage if they are not familiar with the housing market in the new location. The Internet helps buyers gain information about what kinds of homes and how many are available in the new location.

THE CLOSING: Although no one likes to make an interim move to a rental before buying, it does have the benefit of letting you live in the new community and decide which neighborhood will work best for you.

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