



BEFORE YOU BUY

*A Westside Homebuyer's Guide to
Search, Value & Negotiating Strategically*

**THE DECISIONS TO MAKE BEFORE
YOU TOUR, OFFER AND COMMIT**

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The strongest purchase begins before the first tour.

The most expensive buyer mistakes are often made before an offer is written: searching without a clear budget, confusing list price with value, overlooking carrying costs, reacting emotionally to competition, or treating inspections as a formality.

This guide is designed to help you buy with clarity. It is not simply a list of homes to see. It is a framework for choosing the right property, protecting your leverage and understanding the commitment behind the purchase price.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Which property best fits your life, financial comfort and long-term plans – and what is the right strategy to acquire it?

Your buyer strategy snapshot

Complete this before your first strategy conversation.

My ideal timing to purchase is:

My comfortable total monthly cost is:

My three non-negotiables are:

The locations I am considering are:

The result that would make this purchase successful is:

BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE SEARCH

Five decisions to make first

1

Purpose and time horizon - Decide whether this is primarily a home, an investment, a future residence or a combination - and how long you expect to hold it.

2

Financial comfort - Set a purchase range and a comfortable total carrying cost, not merely the maximum a lender will approve.

3

Geography - Choose the two or three areas that best support your daily life, privacy, commute, schools, amenities and future plans.

4

Priorities - Separate true requirements from preferences so you can evaluate tradeoffs without losing the objective.

Readiness and pace - Confirm financing, decision-makers and timing so you can act confidently when the right property appears.

VALERIE'S PERSPECTIVE

The right home is not simply the most impressive one. It is the property whose value, lifestyle and long-term fit make sense together.

Questions to bring to your consultation

- What would make now a strong or weak time for me to buy?
- Which neighborhoods best fit my priorities and budget?
- What tradeoffs am I willing to make?
- How quickly should I be prepared to act?

BUDGET AND OWNERSHIP

What will the home actually cost?

The purchase price is only one part of the decision. A financially comfortable purchase accounts for the recurring, variable and property-specific costs of ownership before an offer is written.

The costs to evaluate

COST AREA	WHAT TO REVIEW
Financing	Principal, interest, rate structure, points and loan fees
Property taxes	Current assessment, supplemental taxes and local assessments
Insurance	Availability, premiums, deductibles and property-specific risks
HOA or services	Dues, reserves, planned assessments and included amenities
Operations	Utilities, landscaping, pool, security, staffing and routine upkeep
Capital needs	Near-term repairs, deferred maintenance and future improvements

THE USEFUL NUMBER

The best budget is the amount that leaves room for ownership, maintenance and life after closing - not simply the highest approval amount.

Be ready before the right home appears

Preparation creates confidence and speed. In a competitive market, buyers should know what they can do, what they will not do and who must approve each decision.

- 1

Financing - Secure a current pre-approval or proof of funds and understand rate, down payment and appraisal implications.
- 2

Decision team - Identify every decision-maker and line up your agent, lender, attorney or business manager as appropriate.
- 3

Documents - Know which financial records, entity documents or trust approvals may be needed.
- 4

Offer boundaries - Set your comfortable price, cash requirement, contingency position and preferred timing before emotion rises.

Why readiness matters

- Some luxury sellers require financial verification before granting access.
- A complete offer can be evaluated faster and may appear more credible.
- Clear limits reduce the risk of making a decision you regret under pressure.
- Your advisors can respond quickly when the right opportunity appears.

THE GOAL

Arrive at the offer stage informed, organized and calm enough to negotiate strategically.

LIFESTYLE AND LOCATION

Choose the neighborhood before the house

A home can be changed. Its street, setting and relationship to your daily life cannot. The right search begins by understanding the micro-markets within each neighborhood.

EVALUATE THE LOCATION	EVALUATE THE TRADEOFF
✓ Commute patterns at the hours you travel	- More space versus a better location
✓ Privacy, traffic, noise and street activity	- Views versus privacy or outdoor usability
✓ Walkability, schools, services and recreation	- Turnkey condition versus customization potential

- ✓ Sun orientation, weather and view direction
- ✓ Future construction and nearby development
- ✓ Resale depth for this property type
- Walkability versus quiet and seclusion
- Prestige address versus everyday convenience
- Lower price versus higher future improvement cost

Use this three-part test

- ☐ Does this location improve my daily life?
- ☐ Will the tradeoffs still feel acceptable in five years?
- ☐ Would future buyers value the same qualities?

RULE OF THUMB

Do not let an impressive interior distract you from a location compromise you cannot change.

TOURING WITH PURPOSE

10 things I would evaluate at every home

1

Arrival and street - Notice traffic, neighboring properties, access, parking and sense of privacy.

2

Light and orientation - Track natural light, sun exposure, views and how the home changes through the day.

3

Floor plan - Evaluate circulation, ceiling height, room scale and indoor-outdoor connection.

4

Condition - Separate cosmetic taste from material, system and construction concerns.

5

Noise - Pause inside and outside to listen for roads, aircraft, schools, equipment and neighbors.

6

Lot and landscape - Consider slope, drainage, usable yard, trees, privacy and maintenance.

7

Systems - Note apparent age of roof, HVAC, plumbing, electrical, windows and smart-home components.

8

Documentation - Ask about permits, plans, renovations, warranties and known repairs.

9

Ownership cost - Identify HOA, insurance, utilities, staffing and likely maintenance demands.

10

Resale - Consider what future buyers may value or resist, even if you plan to hold long term.

FINDING THE OPPORTUNITY

On-market vs. off-market

A complete search should include public inventory and qualified private opportunities. Each route offers different information, access and negotiating dynamics.

CONSIDER	ON-MARKET	OFF-MARKET / PRIVATE
Access	Publicly discoverable and easier to schedule	Requires relationships, qualification and permission
Information	More visible market history and listing data	Details may be limited or shared selectively
Competition	Potentially broader buyer attention	May have fewer buyers, but not necessarily less leverage
Price discovery	Market response may help reveal value	Requires careful comparable analysis
Best use	Broad search and real-time comparison	Specific opportunities, privacy or early access

Questions to ask about an off-market home

- Why is the seller choosing private exposure?
- How was the asking price established?
- What property information and access will be provided?
- Could the home later come to the open market?

VALUATION

List price is not the same as value

The asking price is a seller's positioning decision. A buyer's value analysis should interpret comparable evidence, current competition and the property's unique strengths and liabilities.

1

Comparable sales - Identify the truly relevant closings and adjust for timing, location, site, condition and design.

2

Current competition - Compare what buyers can purchase today, including new listings, reductions and pending homes.

3

Property-specific value - Interpret architecture, lot, views, privacy, quality, floor plan and improvement needs.

4

Seller motivation - Understand market time, prior pricing, timing needs and the seller's likely alternatives.

5

Future marketability - Consider how rare the property is and which features may help or hurt eventual resale.

6

Buyer utility - Decide what the property is worth to you without confusing urgency with value.

A USEFUL VALUATION

A credible analysis should show a range, explain the adjustments and distinguish market evidence from negotiation strategy.

Ask before deciding on a number

- ☐ Which comparable sales matter most?
- ☐ How does current competition affect leverage?
- ☐ What future work should be reflected in value?
- ☐ What would make this property difficult to replace?

NEGOTIATION

A strong offer is more than a price

The best offer structure protects what matters to you while solving the seller's priorities. Price matters, but so do certainty, timing, contingencies and the credibility of the buyer.

OFFER TERM	WHAT TO DECIDE	WHY IT MATTERS
Price	Opening position, ceiling and support from comparable evidence	Defines the financial proposition
Financing	Loan amount, proof of funds, appraisal and lender readiness	Signals ability and certainty
Contingencies	Inspection, loan, appraisal and review periods	Allocates risk and decision time
Deposit	Amount, timing and contractual treatment	Demonstrates commitment

Timing	Closing date, possession and seller transition needs	Can create value beyond price
Property terms	Included items, credits, repairs and other conditions	Shapes the true economics

THE STRATEGIC QUESTION

Which terms improve acceptance without taking on risks that are not justified by the property or competition?

PROTECTING THE PURCHASE

Due diligence is more than an inspection

- 1 Physical condition** - Inspect structure, roof, drainage, major systems, pools, landscape and other property-specific components.
- 2 Permits and records** - Review available permits, plans, additions, renovations, warranties and known work.
- 3 Insurance** - Confirm availability, expected premiums, deductibles and any property-specific requirements.
- 4 Title and boundaries** - Review title matters, easements, surveys, access and ownership restrictions with the appropriate professionals.
- 5 HOA or community** - Study financials, reserves, assessments, rules, litigation and planned work when applicable.
- 6 Future projects** - Price likely repairs, updates and improvements using credible scope and timing assumptions.
- 7 Professional advice** - Use qualified inspectors, attorneys, accountants, lenders and specialty experts as the property requires.

REMEMBER

The objective is not to eliminate every imperfection. It is to understand the property, quantify the meaningful risks and decide whether the purchase still makes sense.

Before removing contingencies

- What remains uncertain?
- Which findings change value, cost or safety?
- Which specialists should review the issue?
- Am I comfortable accepting the known risks?

ROADMAP

Your buyer timeline: strategy to closing

STEP 1

STRATEGY

Define purpose, budget, total carrying cost, neighborhoods, priorities and timing.

STEP 2

READINESS

Complete financing or proof of funds and organize the decision team and documents.

STEP 3

SEARCH

Monitor public, private and pre-market opportunities with real-time property alerts.

STEP 4

TOUR & COMPARE

Evaluate lifestyle, condition, cost, value and resale using consistent criteria.

STEP 5

OFFER & DUE DILIGENCE

Structure terms, negotiate, inspect, review records and complete financing or appraisal.

STEP 6

CLOSING & MOVE-IN

Complete final verification, insurance, escrow, funds, handoff and vendor coordination.

TIMING NOTE

The search may take days or months. Readiness lets you move quickly without allowing speed to replace judgment.

THE VALERIE FITZGERALD APPROACH

Access, intelligence and calm execution

Buying a Westside home requires more than receiving listings. It requires understanding micro-markets, recognizing value, gaining access, investigating risk and negotiating from evidence.

1

Public and private access - Monitor active inventory while using relationships to uncover pocket listings and pre-market opportunities.

2

Lifestyle alignment - Connect neighborhood, privacy, schools, walkability, wellness, views and commute to the buyer's real priorities.

3

Value and price insight - Review comparable sales, pending activity, competition and property-specific adjustments.

4

Ownership-cost analysis - Consider financing, taxes, HOA, insurance, utilities, upkeep and likely capital needs.

5

Negotiation strategy - Structure price and terms around evidence, competition, seller priorities and buyer risk.

6

Vetted resources - Coordinate inspectors, lenders, attorneys and trusted vendors through closing and move-in.

EXPERIENCE IN PRACTICE

The objective is not simply to find a home. It is to recognize the right opportunity, acquire it intelligently and understand what you own.

About Valerie

Valerie Fitzgerald is a Beverly Hills luxury real estate advisor, founder of The Valerie Fitzgerald Group, author of *Heart and Sold*, TEDx speaker and former star of HGTV's *Selling LA*. She has advised buyers, sellers and leading residential developments across Los Angeles.

BONUS TOOL

The Buyer Pre-Tour checklist

Use this before a day of property tours.

- ☐ Confirm current proof of funds or lender pre-approval.
- ☐ Choose the neighborhoods and route for the day.
- ☐ Review your must-haves, preferences and acceptable tradeoffs.
- ☐ Study each listing's price, market time, history and available records.
- ☐ Prepare property-specific questions about renovations, permits and condition.
- ☐ Bring a phone charger, water, sunglasses, comfortable shoes and notes.
- ☐ Photograph or label notes so details from different homes do not blur together.
- ☐ Pause inside and outside to evaluate light, noise, views and privacy.

- ☐ Look beyond staging to floor plan, systems, construction and improvement needs.
- ☐ Allow space between showings to compare homes thoughtfully.
- ☐ Keep your agent, lender or attorney available if quick advice is needed.
- ☐ Rate lifestyle fit, property value and risk separately before choosing a favorite.

Notes

YOUR NEXT STEP

Build your Westside buying strategy

A confidential Real Estate Strategy Call is designed to help you clarify:

- The neighborhoods and property types that best fit your life and budget
- Your comfortable purchase range and total ownership-cost framework
- How public, private and pre-market opportunities will be identified
- A search, valuation and negotiation plan built around your priorities

CONFIDENTIAL INVITATION

Request your personalized Westside Real Estate Strategy Call.

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