

Real Estate Reality Check

Insights from Trulia's Real Estate Realist to Make Your Real-Life Decisions Smarter



5 Ways to Know If A Home Is "The One"

With so many homes on the market, many buyers house hunt for months, even years before hitting property pay-dirt. Even for the savvy buyers who have narrowed their house hunt to an affordable price range, the condition issues so common in distressed homes can make choosing a home difficult.

And on the flip side, some subdivisions have scads of similar homes, all of which are in good shape, all listed at a similar price, making it nearly impossible to choose just one.

Here are five indicators that a particular home you're viewing might be "The One" – the property on which you'll want to place an offer:

1. You feel possessive about it, instantly. I once showed a less-than-fabulous home to a buyer who stepped in the front door, opened her eyes wide, and uttered in a much-quieter-than-normal voice, "I would cry." We got a good laugh out of this later, after she found and bought a home that made her feel virtually the opposite.

Not only did the winning home bring a smile to her face, it also made her instantly possessive. She didn't just want it - she wanted it immediately. She could barely even wait to write the offer paperwork! When another agent showed up to bring a buyer through the place while we were still there, she lingered leisurely (in hopes they would just leave) and secretly looked at them with daggers in her eyes (out of competitiveness, because in her heart, the home had already become hers).

If you walk through a place and leave wondering how quickly you can get your offer in, how much you'd offer to beat someone else out, or what you can do to lock it down quickly, it might be "The One."

2. You start rationalizing its flaws away. Train tracks 10 feet from the bedroom window? Next door neighbor that runs a pigeon-sitting service? Okay – I exaggerate. But if you find yourself viewing a home with traits that you would normally deem undesirable or as deal-killers, yet you like the place so much that you instinctively compile a mental list of reasons those traits just don't matter, you might have found "The One."

Now, smart buyers should be aware of a syndrome I like to call "Pottery Barn Psychosis," whereby the aesthetics of a wonderfully staged home with amazing curb appeal can hypnotize a buyer, rendering them blind to the negative property features, which would be glaring or grave concerns if the place weren't so stinking cute. It's fine to make a conscious decision that the pros of a place outweigh its cons, and even to consciously re-rank your priorities in light of a particular property's advantages.

But buyers should take steps to avoid falling victim to Pottery Barn Psychosis (and the Buyer's Remorse that often follows suit) by writing down your absolute musts and deal-breakers before you ever step foot in a single property – and by revisiting this document before you write an offer and again before you remove your contingencies.

3. The bathroom and kitchen don't disgust you. We humans are born with only two fears in life: the fear of falling and the fear of loud noises. By about eight months old, we start to acquire new fears, and most of us never stop. Among the first fear most people learn: the fear of other people's kitchens and bathrooms.

I exaggerate (again!), but it is true that generally speaking, other people's kitchens and bathrooms hold definite gross-out potential. There's just something about what goes on in those rooms that seems exceptionally intimate and even unsanitary. So, if you happen to find yourself falling in love with a home's river rock shower floor or drooling over the pot-filler over the stove and the built-in cookbook stand on the countertop, that's a sign that you're falling head over heels with a home that might just be "The One."

4. You involuntarily envision your own family, furniture, decor, daily activities or remodeling choices in/to the home. They say that the best staging helps prospective buyers envision their own idealized lives taking place in the staged home. But whether or not a property is staged, if you find your mind's eye Photoshopping a given property to insert your own kids and sofa into the living room, your dining table and favorite wall hangings into place in the dining room, and your daily meditation in the breakfast nook – or even start mentally removing walls entirely – it's entirely possible that the home you're in could be "The One" for you.

5. You lose interest in seeing other homes. I once took some buyers out for their first house hunt in my territory after they'd spent two years looking for homes in a neighboring area, without ever making a single offer. I'd planned to show them seven homes, but when they got to the fourth property, they declared that they'd found their home, and they neither wanted nor needed to see any more. I insisted that they finish the list, if for no other reason than to confirm their choice and to avoid feeling later that they hadn't seen enough nearby homes to compare theirs to. They humored me and saw the last three places on the list, then promptly bought house #4 and still live there, blissfully happy, to this day.

When you find "The One," continuing the house hunt you may have obsessed over for months, even years, starts to seem silly, like a waste of the energy you could be using to move into your new home.