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THE HOME PLAYBOOK · VOLUME ONE

The Buyer's Playbook

How to buy a home in Miami, Coral Gables & Miami Beach — the process, the pitfalls, and what to ask before you sign.

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JESSICA AND JASON ADAMS

A NOTE BEFORE WE BEGIN

Welcome home.

Buying a home in South Florida is one of the most exciting things you'll ever do — and one of the most detail-heavy. I wrote this playbook so you can walk into the process knowing exactly what's coming.

Over the years I've watched buyers lose great homes because their financing wasn't ready, overpay for insurance they didn't price in advance, and inherit open permits that turned a dream renovation into a year of paperwork. Almost every one of those problems was avoidable.

Miami, Coral Gables and Miami Beach each play by their own rules. Coral Gables reviews the color you paint your house. Miami Beach has historic districts where windows are a design decision. Waterfront homes come with county environmental permits. Condos come with new state safety laws. None of that should scare you — it should just be on your radar before you make an offer.

Read this front to back once, then keep it handy. The checklists at the end are the same ones my team uses with every client.

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How to use this playbook. Each chapter ends with the official sources behind it, so you can check anything yourself. Laws and local rules change; I re-verify these every quarter. Facts in this edition were checked in November 2026.

THE BIG PICTURE

Your buying journey at a glance

Every purchase follows the same nine stages. Your timeline depends on financing, the contract terms you negotiate, and the type of property.

1. **Build your team**
   Agent agreement, lender, attorney or title company
2. **Get pre-approved**
   Know your number and your real monthly cost
3. **Search & tour**
   Shortlist homes; check flood zone and permit history early
4. **Make an offer**
   Price, deposit, inspection period, financing and closing date
5. **Due diligence**
   Inspections, survey, permits, HOA/condo documents
6. **Insure the home**
   Wind, flood and liability quotes in hand
7. **Appraisal & loan approval**
   Underwriting, appraisal, clear to close
8. **Closing**
   Final walk-through, verified wire, signing, keys
9. **First 90 days**
   Homestead filing, records, maintenance plan

> Where buyers lose time: stages 5 and 6. The inspection period is short and it's when every question about the house needs an answer — inspections, insurance quotes, permit history, and association documents. Start the insurance and permit research the day your offer is accepted.



I

PART I · CHAPTERS 01–02

Prepare

Build your team, know your number, and understand the cash you'll need at the table — before you fall in love with a house.

CHAPTER 01

Your buying team

A great purchase is a team effort. Here's who should be on yours, and what each person is responsible for.

ROLE	WHAT THEY DO FOR YOU	WHEN TO ENGAGE
Buyer's agent	Strategy, pricing, negotiation, managing deadlines, coordinating everyone below	Before you tour
Lender or private bank	Pre-approval, loan terms, rate lock, underwriting	Before you search seriously
Real estate attorney or title company	Title search, title insurance, escrow, closing documents	At contract
Home inspector & specialists	General, roof, wind mitigation, pool, sewer, mold, seawall as needed	Booked the day your offer is accepted
Insurance agent	Wind/homeowners, flood and umbrella quotes	During the inspection period
Surveyor	Boundary, encroachments, elevation (for flood)	Ordered by title or your attorney

The agreement you'll sign before touring

Since August 17, 2024, agents working with buyers must have a written agreement with you before you tour a home together.[1] The agreement spells out what the agent will do and how they'll be paid. Compensation is fully negotiable — it isn't set by law, and you can ask questions about any term before you sign.[2]

> **My advice:** read the agreement like any contract. Look at the term (how long it lasts), the area or property types it covers, how compensation works if a seller offers to pay part of it, and how either of us can end it.

[1] Florida Realtors — NAR Settlement FAQs: https://www.floridarealtors.org/law-ethics/nar-settlement-faqs
[2] NAR — Consumer Guide to Written Buyer Agreements: https://www.nar.realtor/the-facts/consumer-guide-to-written-buyer-agreements

CHAPTER 02

Money first

Pre-qualified is not pre-approved

A pre-qualification is an estimate. A pre-approval means a lender has actually reviewed your income, assets and credit. In competitive Miami markets, sellers expect a full pre-approval — or proof of funds for cash buyers — with every offer.

Plan your real monthly cost

Your payment is more than principal and interest. In South Florida it also includes property taxes, wind and flood insurance, and HOA or condo fees — and in some buildings, special assessments. Get insurance quotes before you commit to a price range.

Don't budget on the seller's tax bill

The seller's taxes reflect their exemptions and caps. Florida's Save Our Homes cap limits annual increases on a homesteaded home's assessed value to 3% or the CPI change, whichever is lower.[1] When a home sells, the prior owner's homestead exemption and cap don't transfer, so your taxes are often recalculated at market value.[2]

> Use the county's tax estimator with the purchase price — not last year's bill — when you run your numbers.[2]

Florida closing taxes you should know

ITEM	RATE	NOTE
Documentary stamp tax on the deed (Miami-Dade)	$0.60 per $100	Plus a $0.45 per $100 surtax, except on single-family homes[3]
Doc stamp tax on a new mortgage	$0.35 per $100	Applies when you finance[3]
Intangible tax on a new mortgage	$2 per $1,000	Applies when you finance[4]

Who pays each closing cost is set by your contract and negotiable. Ask your agent and closing attorney how it's handled on your deal.

[1] Miami-Dade Property Appraiser — Property Value & Save Our Homes: https://www.miamidadepa.gov/pa/real-estate/property-value.page
[2] Miami-Dade Property Appraiser — Property Tax Estimator: https://apps.miamidadepa.gov/PaOnlineTools/Taxes/TaxEstimator.aspx
[3] Florida Dept. of Revenue — Documentary Stamp Tax: https://floridarevenue.com/taxes/taxesfees/pages/doc_stamp.aspx
[4] Miami-Dade Clerk — Official Records (recording fees & taxes): https://www.miamidadeclerk.gov/clerk/official-records.page

A worked example

Below is an illustration only, using the state rates above. These are calculated figures for a hypothetical purchase — not a quote for any specific property.

HYPOTHETICAL PURCHASE
$1,000,000

NEW MORTGAGE
$800,000

CALCULATED ITEM	FORMULA	AMOUNT
Mortgage doc stamps	$800,000 ÷ 100 × $0.35	$2,800
Intangible tax	$800,000 ÷ 1,000 × $2	$1,600
Deed doc stamps — single-family home	$1,000,000 ÷ 100 × $0.60	$6,000
Deed doc stamps — condo (with surtax)	$1,000,000 ÷ 100 × $1.05	$10,500

Not included: title insurance, lender fees, prepaid insurance and taxes, recording fees, association estoppel and transfer fees, survey and inspections.

Homestead: the most valuable form you'll file

If the home will be your permanent residence, apply for the homestead exemption with the Miami-Dade Property Appraiser by March 1 of the year after you close.[1] Voters approved Amendment 3 on November 3, 2026. It raises the exemption for non-school taxes to up to $150,000 in 2027 and up to $250,000 in 2028 for people who are residents as of December 31, 2026. New residents from January 1, 2027 receive up to $50,000.[1]

Moving within Florida? Ask about portability

If you already have homestead elsewhere in Florida, you may be able to carry up to $500,000 of your Save Our Homes benefit to your new home if you re-establish homestead within three years.[2] Non-homestead properties have a separate 10% annual cap on assessment increases.[2]

[1] Miami-Dade Property Appraiser — Homestead Exemption: https://www.miamidadepa.gov/pa/exemption/homestead.page
[2] Miami-Dade Property Appraiser — Property Value & Save Our Homes: https://www.miamidadepa.gov/pa/real-estate/property-value.page



II

PART II · CHAPTERS 03–04

Find & offer

The right home isn't only about the house. It's about the city's rules, the flood zone, and the terms you negotiate.

CHAPTER 03

Searching smart

Three cities, three rulebooks. Before you write an offer, I want you to know what the house will let you do.

Coral Gables

Design-controlled. All exterior paint requires Board of Architects approval.[1] The Board meets weekly, and most new construction and additions need preliminary and final approval before a permit.[2] Designated historic homes need a Certificate of Appropriateness before most exterior work.[3]

City of Miami

Neighborhoods from Coconut Grove to the Upper Eastside. Any work on a historic property requires a Certificate of Appropriateness;[4] major projects go to the Historic & Environmental Preservation Board, which can take up to about two months.[5]

Miami Beach

Historic districts and strict design review. A new home that meets code can be approved by staff, but waivers or variances go to the Design Review Board, and hearings take about three to four months. Total demolition in a historic district requires the Historic Preservation Board.[6]

Check the flood zone on day one

Look up any address on FEMA's Flood Map Service Center[7] or call Miami-Dade's flood zone line at 305-372-6466.[8] The zone drives whether your lender requires flood insurance and how much it costs.

Waterfront? Add the county

Docks, seawalls, boat lifts and any work over tidal water need a Miami-Dade environmental (Class I) permit in addition to a city permit.[9] If a new dock or seawall repair is part of your plan, budget time for it.

> **Try the Permit Navigator.** Our free companion tool shows the approval path, documents and pitfalls for common projects in all three cities. Try it at comehometoluxury-permit-navigator.pplx.app.

[1] Coral Gables — Development Services FAQ: https://www.coralgables.com/department/development-services/development-services-faq
[2] Coral Gables — Board of Architects: https://www.coralgables.com/department/development-services/board-architects
[3] Coral Gables — Preserving Our Past (COA guide): https://www.coralgables.com/sites/default/files/2025-05/Preserving-Our-Past-CH.pdf
[4] City of Miami — Repair or Renovate a Historic Property: https://www.miami.gov/Permits-Construction/Historically-Designated-Properties/Repair-or-Renovate-a-Historic-Property
[5] City of Miami — Special Certificate of Appropriateness: https://www.miami.gov/Permits-Construction/Historically-Designated-Properties/Get-a-Special-Certificate-of-Appropriateness-SCOA
[6] Miami Beach — Planning FAQs: https://www.miamibeachfl.gov/city-hall/planning/planning-faqs/
[7] FEMA Flood Map Service Center: https://msc.fema.gov/portal/search
[8] Miami-Dade County — Flood Zone Maps: https://www.miamidade.gov/global/economy/building/flood-protection/flood-zone-maps.page
[9] Miami-Dade — Class I Environmental Permits: https://www.miamidade.gov/permits/environmental-one-time.asp

CHAPTER 04

Making an offer

Price gets the attention. The terms decide whether the deal works for you.

Price

Based on recent comparable sales your agent pulls and reviews with you — not automated online estimates.

Escrow deposit

Shows commitment. Know exactly when it's due, who holds it, and under which conditions it's refundable.

Inspection period

Your window to investigate everything. Make it long enough to get inspections, insurance quotes and association documents back.

Financing contingency

Protects your deposit if your loan isn't approved by a set date. Track the date closely.

Appraisal terms

Decide in advance how you'll handle an appraisal below the price — renegotiate, cover the gap, or walk.

Closing date & possession

Coordinate with your rate lock, lease end, and any move or renovation plans.

"As is" doesn't mean "don't inspect"

Many South Florida contracts are written so the buyer can cancel during the inspection period for any reason, while the seller isn't obligated to make repairs. That makes the inspection period your most important protection. Use every day of it.

> **Make your offer stronger without overpaying:** a full pre-approval letter, a clean and organized offer package, a realistic inspection period, and a closing date that works for the seller.



III

PART III · CHAPTERS 05–07

Protect

Inspections, permits, association documents, insurance and financing. This is where good buyers become great ones.

CHAPTER 05

Due diligence

Inspections to order

- General home inspection
- Roof inspection and age verification
- Wind mitigation and four-point inspections (insurers often ask for them)
- Pool and equipment
- Sewer or septic camera scope
- Mold or moisture, if anything looks off
- Seawall and dock evaluation on waterfront homes

The survey

A current survey shows boundaries, easements, encroachments and setbacks. Compare it to what's actually built — fences, pools and additions sometimes sit where they shouldn't.

Permit history: the check most buyers skip

Pull the permit record for the address and compare it to the house. An addition, enclosed patio, new windows or a pool with no permit on file is a red flag. So is an open or expired permit — it can follow the property to you.

If you plan to renovate, now is when to learn the approval path. A historic home in Miami may need a Special Certificate of Appropriateness for major work,[1] and in Coral Gables even a new exterior color goes to the Board of Architects.[2]

> Thinking of acting as your own contractor later? Florida's owner-builder rules require you to personally supervise the work, and selling or leasing within one year of completion is presumed a violation.[3]

[1] City of Miami — Special Certificate of Appropriateness: https://www.miami.gov/Permits-Construction/Historically-Designated-Properties/Get-a-Special-Certificate-of-Appropriateness-SCOA
[2] Coral Gables — Development Services FAQ: https://www.coralgables.com/department/development-services/development-services-faq
[3] Florida Statutes §489.103 — Owner-Builder: https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2026/0489.103

Condo and HOA documents

Florida tightened condo safety laws after 2021. As a buyer, these documents are your best protection.

Buying a condo

- **Milestone inspection.** Buildings three stories or taller need a milestone structural inspection at 30 years of age and every 10 years after.[1]
- **Structural Integrity Reserve Study (SIRS).** Associations that existed on or before July 1, 2022 had to complete one by December 31, 2025 — or together with a milestone inspection due by the end of 2026, but never later than December 31, 2026. After that, a new one is due every 10 years.[2]
- **Your right to the reports.** Buyers are entitled to the milestone inspection summary and the SIRS with the resale documents.[3]
- **Your cancellation window.** On a resale, you can generally cancel within 7 business days after receiving the required documents.[4]

Buying in an HOA community

- **Disclosure summary.** The seller must give you the HOA disclosure summary. If you don't get it before signing, you may be able to cancel within 3 days of receiving it.[5]
- **Rules and approvals.** Read the rules on leasing, pets, vehicles, boats and exterior changes. Many associations must approve renovations before the city will.
- **Money.** Ask for the budget, reserves, any pending special assessments and litigation.

> **What I read first in condo documents:** the reserve funding plan, any approved or proposed special assessments, the date of the last milestone inspection and its findings, insurance coverage, and board minutes from the past 12 months.

[1] Florida Statutes §553.899 — Milestone Inspections: https://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0500-0599/0553/Sections/0553.899.html
[2] Florida DBPR — Condominium FAQs (SIRS): https://condos.myfloridalicense.com/faqs/
[3] Florida Condo Law for Buyers (summary): https://realestatelawfl.com/florida-condo-law-for-buyers/
[4] Florida Statutes §718.503 — Condo Resale Disclosure: https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2026/718.503
[5] Florida Statutes §720.401 — HOA Disclosure Summary: https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2026/720.401

CHAPTER 06

Insurance & flood

In South Florida, insurance can shape your budget as much as your interest rate. Price it before your inspection period ends.

What to quote

- Homeowners / windstorm (or HO-6 for condos)
- Flood — even outside a high-risk zone
- Umbrella liability, especially with a pool or dock

What lowers premiums

A newer roof, impact windows and doors, and roof-to-wall connections documented in a wind mitigation report. Give your insurance agent the inspection reports as soon as you have them.

Flood disclosure is now required

Since October 1, 2025, Florida sellers of residential property must give buyers a flood disclosure at or before the contract is signed, covering past flood claims and federal flood assistance.[1]

Look it up yourself

Check FEMA's flood map[2] and Miami-Dade's flood zone resources.[3] Ask for an elevation certificate if one exists; it can affect your flood premium.

> A home with a high flood or wind premium isn't a bad home. It's a cost to plan for. Knowing it during the inspection period gives you leverage — or a reason to walk away with your deposit.

[1] Florida Statutes §689.302 — Flood Disclosure: https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2025/689.302
[2] FEMA Flood Map Service Center: https://msc.fema.gov/portal/search
[3] Miami-Dade County — Flood Zone Maps: https://www.miamidade.gov/global/economy/building/flood-protection/flood-zone-maps.page

CHAPTER 07

Appraisal to clear-to-close

The appraisal

If you're financing, your lender orders an appraisal. If it comes in below the price, your options usually include renegotiating with the seller, paying the difference in cash, or using your contract protections. Decide your plan before you sign the contract.

Underwriting

Respond to lender requests the same day. Don't open new credit, change jobs, or move large sums of money until after closing — any of these can delay or derail approval.

Clear to close

Once the lender issues a clear to close, review your closing disclosure carefully and compare it with your loan estimate.

WIRE FRAUD WARNING

Never trust wiring instructions in an email

Real estate is a top target for wire fraud. FBI figures for 2025 reported $275.1 million in real estate fraud losses from 12,368 complaints.[1]

- Call your title company or attorney at a phone number you already know — not one in an email — to confirm wiring instructions.[2]
- Be suspicious of any last-minute change to instructions.[2]
- Confirm with the recipient that the funds arrived.[2]
- If something goes wrong, contact your bank immediately.[2]

[1] FBI IC3 2025 figures, as reported by Calo News: https://www.calonews.com/online_features/press_releases/taylor-weiner-team-marks-cybersecurity-awareness-month-with-a-closing-funds-warning-as-fbi-reports/article_251603e7-b3d6-5f94-85af-42c7cb01836a.html

[2] CFPB — Mortgage Closing Scams: https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/cfpb_mortgages-scams_one-pager.pdf



IV

PART IV · CHAPTERS 08–10

Close & settle in

Keys are the beginning. Then the pitfalls to avoid and the checklists my team uses with every client.

CHAPTER 08

Closing & your first 90 days

Closing week

- Final walk-through: agreed repairs done, systems working, nothing removed that should stay
- Verified wire (by phone, to a known number)
- Government-issued ID for signing
- Utilities, internet and insurance start on closing day
- Association move-in rules, elevator booking and gate access

Your first 90 days

- File for homestead by March 1 if it's your primary residence[1]
- Change locks, gate codes and garage remotes
- Store the deed, title policy, survey, inspections and permits together
- Close any open permits the seller agreed to handle
- Set up hurricane prep: shutters, generator, supplies
- Plan renovations around city approvals — check the Permit Navigator first



> *"The best time to find out what a home needs is before you own it. The second-best time is your first 90 days."*
>
> — JESSICA

[1] Miami-Dade Property Appraiser — Homestead Exemption: https://www.miamidadepa.gov/pa/exemption/homestead.page

CHAPTER 09

The 12 pitfalls I see most

01 **Shopping before you're pre-approved**
You lose leverage — and sometimes the house.

02 **Budgeting on the seller's tax bill**
Taxes are often recalculated at sale.[1]

03 **Skipping insurance quotes until after inspections**
Get them during the inspection period, not after.

04 **Ignoring the flood zone**
It drives lender requirements and premiums.[2]

05 **Not pulling permit history**
Unpermitted work and open permits can become your problem.

06 **Assuming you can renovate freely**
Historic status and design boards can change the plan.[3]

07 **Skimming condo documents**
Read the SIRS, milestone findings and assessments.[4]

08 **Missing your cancellation windows**
Condo and HOA timelines are short.[5]

09 **Too-short inspection period**
Leave time for specialists and quotes.

10 **No appraisal-gap plan**
Decide your response before signing.

11 **Changing finances before closing**
No new credit, job changes or big transfers.

12 **Trusting emailed wire instructions**
Always verify by phone.[6]

[1] Miami-Dade Property Appraiser — Property Tax Estimator: https://apps.miamidadepa.gov/PaOnlineTools/Taxes/TaxEstimator.aspx
[2] FEMA Flood Map Service Center: https://msc.fema.gov/portal/search
[3] Coral Gables — Development Services FAQ: https://www.coralgables.com/department/development-services/development-services-faq
[4] Florida Condo Law for Buyers (summary): https://realestatelawfl.com/florida-condo-law-for-buyers/
[5] Florida Statutes §718.503 — Condo Resale Disclosure: https://www.flsenate.gov/Laws/Statutes/2026/718.503
[6] CFPB — Mortgage Closing Scams: https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/cfpb_mortgages-scams_one-pager.pdf

CHAPTER 10

Your checklists

Before you make an offer

- ☐ Buyer agreement signed and understood
- ☐ Full pre-approval or proof of funds
- ☐ Monthly cost estimated with taxes, insurance and fees
- ☐ Flood zone checked
- ☐ Permit history pulled
- ☐ Historic status and design-board rules confirmed
- ☐ Comparable sales reviewed with your agent
- ☐ Renovation goals tested against city rules

During the inspection period

- ☐ General, roof, wind mitigation and four-point inspections
- ☐ Specialists ordered (pool, sewer, seawall, mold)
- ☐ Insurance quotes: wind, flood, umbrella
- ☐ Survey ordered and reviewed
- ☐ Condo: SIRS, milestone summary, budget, minutes
- ☐ HOA: disclosure summary, rules, assessments
- ☐ Open permits and violations researched
- ☐ Go / renegotiate / cancel decision made in time

Closing week

- ☐ Clear to close received
- ☐ Closing disclosure reviewed
- ☐ Wire instructions verified by phone
- ☐ Final walk-through completed
- ☐ Insurance binder delivered to lender
- ☐ Utilities and services scheduled
- ☐ ID ready for signing
- ☐ Homestead filing date on your calendar

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Ready when you are.

Whether you're six months out or ready to tour this weekend, I'd love to help you buy with confidence in Miami, Coral Gables or Miami Beach.

BOOK A CALL AT **COMEHOMETOLUXURY.COM**

Important. This playbook is general educational information, not legal, tax, insurance, lending or permitting advice. Laws, rates and local requirements change, and every property and transaction is different. Consult a Florida real estate attorney, tax professional, licensed insurance agent, lender and the applicable building department before relying on any information here. Facts verified November 2026.

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