

Living Here

WHAT TO KNOW before you go house hunting

Be prepared with a realistic sense of budget, needs/wants, expectations and timing

CHRISTINE GRITMON
CGRITMON@LOHUD.COM

It's spring, and the "for sale" signs are sprouting up amid the daffodils. But what should you know — and do — before you go out house hunting? And what should you even be looking for once you're out? We asked Gary Herbst of Buyer's Edge Realty in Tarrytown, an agency which only represents buyers, not sellers, what prospective homeowners should know before they hit the hunt.

See HOUSE, Page 2C



Levy and Jadera Garcia bought their first home with the help of Gary Slutsky, left, and Gary Herbst, realtors with Buyer's Edge Realty, Inc. They are photographed April 30 in White Plains. TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS

House

Continued from Page 1C

All about the money, honey

Understand your borrowing power: obtain pre-approval from a bank or mortgage company, and figure out what you can afford to spend on a monthly PITI (Principle, Interest, Taxes and Insurance) payment.

Don't give the bank a number you're looking to hit when you apply for pre-approval. Instead, let them tell you how much they're willing to lend based on your income, assets, employment and credit history. "That amount may be too high, so establish the maximum monthly PITI that would be comfortable, and use that as a guideline to help set the price range so the buyer doesn't end up buying something that they can't handle financially," says Herbst.

You don't need to use the same lender for your mortgage as you used for your pre-approval. Get just one pre-approval, then shop around with numerous mortgage lenders later once you're actually in contract. "Find a loan officer who is responsive to answering questions, gets back relatively soon to phone messages or emails, and seems to be genuinely interested in helping that buyer find the best loan product relative to their age, their income bracket and how much savings they have," says Herbst.

What you want (what you really, really want)

Pinpoint the areas you're most interested in. "Concentrate on the inventory in those top one, two or three areas of choice," says Herbst.

Anyone who's ever watched "House Hunters" knows you have to give serious thought to your "must haves" (as

well as a few "like to haves"). "It could be the neighborhood, schools, commuting distance, style of home, how many bedrooms, things like that," says Herbst. "Top three items that are non-negotiable, and then three or four items that are on a wish list."

Jadera and Levy Garcia worked with Herbst to find their White Plains home. "We were looking for something with a backyard, at minimum two levels — a main level with kitchen, living room, formal dining room and bedrooms upstairs — and minimum of three bedrooms," says Jadera Garcia of their non-negotiables. They also needed easy access to the city. "Nice to haves" included a bonus room, a full basement, and a wood burning fireplace — all of which they wound up finding.

Make sure you're really looking at the features and amenities of the home itself, not its owner's style. "They should view property as though the house is vacant, devoid of any personal property and furnishings," says Herbst. "Some people can't see beyond that, so we go in and do a final walk through and the house is empty and they say, 'The house doesn't look as nice as it did!'"

Get real with your expectations

"Depending on price range, first-time home buyers may find homes in an area needing more updating, needing certain repairs, and they have deferred maintenance. The repairs in the house, especially deferred maintenance that haven't been done by the homeowner, should be closely looked at," says Herbst, who points out that homeowners should consider the differences between necessary repairs and improvements or remodeling.

"A first-time home buyer should really be more flexible; there is no such thing as buying a



TANIA SAVAYAN/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Levy and Jadera Garcia, who bought their first home with the help of Buyer's Edge Realty, Inc., are photographed April 30 in their home in White Plains.

perfect home, so buying a home does involve compromise," says Herbst. "If you find a house that has all of your needs, and at least two or maybe three of what's on your wish list, that's a home you should consider putting an offer on."

Jadera Garcia originally wanted a colonial-style home. "I came around, because we do not have a colonial home," she says. The couple wound up in a split-level. Another compromise was on location. "My husband wanted to go further up: more like Cortlandt, Somers, those areas that I consider to be a little more country," she says. "But then I think we realized how far it would be (to the city) if we went to some of those neighborhoods further up, even though we would get more property."

Leave yourself time

While it would be great to fall in love with the first vacant house you see, have your offer immediately approved, and move in by the end of the week, that's not generally how it

works.

"We have buyers who go out and look at several homes and are able to find and buy in a very short period of time. Other people can take a couple of months. And some people take substantially longer; everyone is different," says Herbst. "Spend probably minimally a couple of weeks to a month or so to look. I would say look at least four to six homes in your top area of choice and price range — that can generally be done in one outing — and then go from there."

Don't forget that there are usually at least 45 to 60 days between contract and closing. You need to have the home inspected; run various environmental tests; shop around for, apply, and obtain a mortgage; hire a real estate attorney; have the home appraised; set up homeowner's insurance; etc. — and that's not even getting into whatever snags may arise. Leave yourself a bare minimum of three months for your home search if you can swing it; more if at all possible.

The Garcias found

their home after just a few months, but their offer was rejected. Then the buyer fell through, and a month later, the Garcias' offer was approved. "It actually took longer from the time that they accepted our offer to the time that we closed than the time we were out looking," says Jadera Garcia.

Go in with your eyes open

Ultimately, the more realistic a house hunter gets ahead of time, the more smoothly the process is going to go. "I think one of the big variables is what their expectations are relative to their pocketbook — that's a biggie," says Herbst. "Especially somebody coming out looking for a starter home in the lower price range; it's going to be more challenging because they may not like the location, they may not like the condition, and then they may need to consider a different type of housing instead of a single family house, maybe consider a condo or a co-op."

Realism and compro-

Pre-qualification vs. pre-approval

"A pre-qualification letter is really when a person calls up a mortgage company or a bank and they have a phone conversation without any supporting written documentation to back up income, assets, employment history or credit, and the mortgage company will issue a letter based on the conversation that you are pre-qualified to borrow X amount of dollars, but nothing has been substantiated with written documentation; they may want a credit check, that's it," Herbst said.

"A pre-approval, on the other hand, is when a prospective buyer calls the bank or mortgage company and they send in written documentation to support their income, their assets, employment history and also a credit report is run. So after a credit or mortgage company analyzes the written documentation and it's substantiated, then they'll issue a pre-approval letter. It carries a lot more weight with any listing agent; most agents will not accept a pre-qualification letter and will only accept a pre-approval with any offer to purchase."

Gary Herbst
Buyer's Edge Realty
104 South Broadway,
Tarrytown
914-407-2546
www.buyersedgerealty.com

mise worked out well for the Garcias. "I love everything about it; I'm kind of in this honeymoon stage with our home," says Jadera Garcia, who fell in love with the home's brick face, nice sized property with mature trees and somewhat formal layout. "It has such charm and character."

THE BRISTAL ASSISTED LIVING | WHERE EVERY DAY MEANS MORE™

I am living a new chapter in my LifeStory

"Though I worked for Nikon until 1991, I have many interests that have added color to my life and that I still pursue, thanks to The Bristol. My husband and I traveled widely with Elderhostel and I miss that. But I'm still learning. I love

