HOUSE OF ZONSHINE'S
GUIDE TO

BUYING YOUR LOS ANGELES HOME

HOUSE OF ZONSHINE

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START WITH CLARITY.

Buying well is not one decision. It is a sequence of smart ones.

This guide is for Los Angeles buyers who want a clear plan before the search even starts: how to get truly ready to make an offer, how to read a neighborhood, what your budget actually buys where, what happens when you compete for a home, and how we protect the path to closing.

Los Angeles is not one market. The same budget lands somewhere completely different in Sherman Oaks than it does in Silver Lake, Studio City, Los Feliz, or Valley Village.

We will build the plan around your budget, your priorities, your timing, and what matters most once you're the one holding the keys.

THIS GUIDE WALKS WITH YOU

From the Valley and Foothills to Northeast LA, Central LA, and the Westside, strategy begins at the neighborhood—and often the block.

A NOTE FROM JULIA

My job is to make the entire purchase feel clear: honest advice before you tour a single house, a financing plan that respects your budget, a search grounded in what really matters to you, and knowledge in what the market is actually doing, offers built to get chosen, and calm guidance through every decision from inspection to keys. I've got you.

01 / read the LA market as a buyer

SAME CITY, DIFFERENT MARKETS

Los Angeles averages are useful context—not a shopping list. Your real market is the competition you're up against for the exact home you want, in the exact neighborhood you want it in.

READ YOUR REAL MARKET

SUPPLY + DEMAND

How many comparable homes are active?
How long are they taking to sell?
Are sellers accepting at, above, or below list?
Which price bands are moving?
What condition is actually worth paying full price for?

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Rates affect what you can actually afford. Inventory affects how much real choice you have. Seasonality affects how much competition you're facing. But a well-prepared buyer can still move first when the right home enters the market.

WHAT THE DATA MEANS

Days on market, sale-to-list ratio, and median price only become meaningful when the sample actually resembles the home you're trying to buy. I will translate the numbers into plain language, explain what is signal versus noise, and update the strategy as the market moves.

START WITH THE RIGHT COMPARISON

Before we talk about an offer number, we need to understand the market this home is entering—not the market from six months ago and not a headline about all of Los Angeles.

I will study active competition, recent comparable sales, pending activity, price reductions, days on market, and the details a spreadsheet cannot fully capture: street, light, architecture, condition, parking, privacy, views, lot utility, insurance considerations, and how many other buyers are likely circling the same home.

Then we look at your priorities. Do you need to close by a specific date? Are you willing to compete hard on your top choice, or wait for the right one at the right price? Do you want maximum certainty, room to negotiate, or flexibility around move-in? The strongest strategy connects the market reality to your real-life goal.

This is also why copying what a friend paid rarely works. Their timing, financing, competition, and leverage may have been completely different.

We will define the probable value range, the risks of going in above or below it, and the evidence behind the recommendation—then keep reading the market from search through closing. As a rule of thumb, most lenders cap your total housing payment at 28% of gross income, and that number, not the sale price alone, is what actually decides how much house you can afford in LA.

THE LOCAL MARKET LENS

ACTIVE COMPETITION — Which other buyers are looking at the exact homes you are, and how many offers is this seller likely to get?

RECENT SALES — What have truly comparable homes actually closed for, not asked for?

PENDING CLUES — Which homes went into contract fast, and what did their price, condition, and presentation signal about what's working?

PRICE REDUCTIONS — Where did the market push back on a seller's number, and what does that tell you about your leverage?

MICRO-MARKET FACTORS — School boundaries, hills, freeway access, street noise, insurance, views, lot utility, and even the side of the street can matter.

POSITIONING TIP — Sellers see the entire field of buyers at once. You should see the entire field of competing homes just as clearly. Sherman Oaks vs. Studio City, or Los Feliz vs. Silver Lake, can mean the same budget buying two completely different homes.

The goal is not to chase a broad citywide number. It is to understand the exact choices you're weighing against every other buyer circling the same home.

02 / THE STEP-BY-STEP LA BUYING PROCESS

See the whole road before you take the first step. We will connect financing, searching, offers, escrow, and closing into one clear plan built around your timing and goals.

BEFORE THE OFFER

1 – CONSULT
Goals, timing, budget, priorities, and decision criteria.

2 – GET READY
Pre-approval, proof of funds, lender choice, and paperwork organized.

3 – POSITION
Comparable sales, competition, value range, and where your budget lands.

4 – SEARCH
Smart alerts, agent outreach, and a focused target list.

5 – TOUR
Private showings, open houses, second looks, and the questions that matter.

We move at a pace that protects your clarity without losing the right home.

AFTER THE OFFER

6 – OFFER
Price, financing, contingencies, deposit, timing, and the terms that strengthen your position.

7 – NEGOTIATE
Counters, leverage, and the line between winning and overreaching.

8 – ESCROW
Deposit, disclosures, inspections, appraisal, loan, title, and deadlines.

9 – CLOSE
Final walkthrough, signing, funding, recording, possession, and keys.

The best offer is the one that delivers the result you actually want.

YOUR TIMELINE

We identify fixed dates, flexible dates, and pressure points from day one–especially when a lease, sale, relocation, job start, or family change affects the plan.

ONE CLEAR ROAD FROM CONSULT TO CLOSE

YOUR CUSTOM PLAN STARTS HERE

READY BEFORE THE HOUSE

A printable decision map for the details that matter before a listing makes everything feel urgent.

TARGET PRICE	MAX ALL-IN MONTHLY	CASH TO CLOSE	CASH LEFT AFTER CLOSE	MOVE-IN TARGET

01 BEFORE SEARCHING SERIOUSLY

Build a file that can survive underwriting—not merely start a conversation.

- ☐ **Full pre-approval:** income, assets, credit and debt reviewed; expiration date known.
- ☐ Save current pay stubs, W-2s/tax returns and every page of recent account statements.
- ☐ Document gifts, large deposits and transfers; confirm which funds must be seasoned or sourced.
- ☐ Freeze avoidable changes: no new credit, financed purchases, job changes or money movement without asking.
- ☐ Compare rate, APR, points, fees, loan structure, communication and ability to meet LA timelines.
- ☐ Discuss bonus, RSU, commission, freelance, rental, support, trust or foreign income early.
- ☐ Separate cash-to-close, appraisal-gap, repairs/moving and the money that must remain afterward.
- ☐ Know bank transfer limits and how long investment funds take to liquidate and settle.

02 BEFORE LOVING A PROPERTY

Test the address against real life—not showing-day chemistry.

- ☐ Price the **whole monthly life:** taxes, insurance, HOA, mortgage insurance, utilities and maintenance.
- ☐ Review earthquake coverage separately; standard homeowners insurance excludes earthquake damage.
- ☐ Verify parking dimensions, guest/street rules, garage access, EV path, cell signal and internet options.
- ☐ Check permits and intended use for additions, conversions, ADUs, bedrooms and finished garages.
- ☐ Start the actual insurance quote early; check wildfire exposure and FAIR Plan/DIC possibility.
- ☐ Experience the street at commute, school, evening and weekend hours; listen with windows open.
- ☐ Flag slope, drainage, retaining walls, foundation, sewer, retrofit, roof and major-system questions.
- ☐ Independently verify boundaries/services important to you; consider heat, sun, privacy and delivery access.

03 BEFORE WRITING THE OFFER

Set the guardrails before competition starts negotiating with you.

- ☐ Write both the walk-away price and maximum all-in monthly payment.
- ☐ Understand inspection, appraisal and loan contingencies; choose protections intentionally.
- ☐ Confirm deposit funds are available on the contract timeline—not merely visible in an account.
- ☐ Name the compromise you are making, why it is worth it and the fact that would turn it into "no."
- ☐ Set separate ceilings for appraisal gap, deposit, repair exposure and immediate improvements.
- ☐ Decide credit-versus-price preference, closing range, possession and leaseback limits.
- ☐ All decision-makers agree who can say yes, who needs a call and how quickly to respond.
- ☐ Ask: would I still want this if the kitchen photographed worse and no one else were bidding?

PRICE CEILING	APPRAISAL-GAP CEILING	REPAIR CEILING	DEPOSIT READY

04 BEFORE CLOSING

Small operational details can become very expensive.

- ☐ Refresh requested statements and pay stubs quickly; document any new deposit or changed circumstance.
- ☐ For HOA property: review budget, reserves, assessments, litigation, minutes and master insurance.
- ☐ Names on ID, loan and contract match; discuss vesting with the appropriate legal/tax professional.
- ☐ Verify wire instructions by calling a known escrow number—never accept a change by email alone.
- ☐ Confirm insurance binder, deductible, exclusions and rebuilding coverage—not only premium.
- ☐ Confirm parking/storage, pets, rentals, renovations, move fees and EV rules fit the plan.
- ☐ Block time for inspections, appraisal access, signing, final verification and moving logistics.
- ☐ Protect a post-close cushion for move-in, urgent repairs, insurance deductibles and the first surprise.

MY DECISION LINES

THREE NON-NEGOTIABLES

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____

SMARTEST COMPROMISE I WOULD MAKE

____

QUIET QUESTIONS MOST BUYERS FORGET

- Who owns the decision if one buyer is unavailable?
- What cash must never be spent at closing?
- What insurance exclusion would change the answer?
- What HOA project could produce an assessment?
- Could a lease ending or rate-lock date create pressure?
- What repair would make ownership feel immediately hard?
- Will a future life change make this home stop working?
- Anything needs an expert—not an assumption?

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Educational planning worksheet—not lending, insurance, tax or legal advice. Requirements and availability change. Confirm borrower- and property-specific details with the appropriate licensed professionals.

The cash plan

Know the real number before the right house makes everything feel urgent.

20%

IS A BENCHMARK—NOT A RULE.

Twenty percent can reduce the loan balance and may avoid mortgage insurance, but **it is not the only responsible way to buy.** The right down payment protects both the offer and the life you want after closing.

$900,000 PURCHASE
FHA · 3.5% DOWN
$49.5K–$76.5K

Down payment	**$31,500**
Base loan	**$868,500**
Est. closing 2–5%	**$18K–$45K**

$1.5 MILLION PURCHASE
LOW-DOWN JUMBO · 5%
$105K–$150K

Down payment	**$75,000**
Base loan	**$1.425M**
Est. closing 2–5%	**$30K–$75K**

$2.5 MILLION PURCHASE
JUMBO ILLUSTRATION · 20%
$550K–$625K

Down payment	**$500,000**
Base loan	**$2M**
Est. closing 2–5%	**$50K–$125K**

Illustrations add the stated down payment to an estimated 2–5% for closing costs. They exclude reserves, moving, immediate work, appraisal gaps, financed mortgage-insurance premiums and property-specific costs. Approval, pricing and actual cash-to-close vary.

OTHER WAYS IN

3% — **ELIGIBLE CONVENTIONAL**
Some HomeReady, Home Possible and first-time-buyer options allow as little as 3% down. Mortgage insurance and program rules may apply.

3.5% — **FHA**
Eligible borrowers may qualify with 3.5% down, subject to borrower, property and FHA loan-limit requirements.

DPA — **CALHFA + LOCAL ASSISTANCE**
MyHome may provide a deferred junior loan up to 3% with a conventional first mortgage or 3.5% with FHA. Income, occupancy, education and loan rules apply.

+ — **GIFTS, GRANTS + EMPLOYER HELP**
Approved gift funds, grants and other assistance can sometimes be paired with the right loan. Every source must be documented.

WHAT THE LENDER IS REALLY TESTING

01 — **INCOME + DEBT**
Is the income stable, usable and documented—and does the full monthly payment fit?

02 — **CREDIT + LOAN STRUCTURE**
Score, history, rate, mortgage insurance, points and loan limit all change the plan.

03 — **SOURCE OF FUNDS**
Down payment, deposit and closing funds must be traceable; gifts and large transfers need a paper trail.

04 — **RESERVES AFTER CLOSING**
A strong plan leaves room for moving, repairs, insurance deductibles and the first surprise.

05 — **THE ACTUAL PROPERTY**
Condo approval, appraisal, condition, insurance and occupancy can affect which loan works.

WHY NOT 5% ON $1.5M?
That would create a $1,425,000 base loan—$175,875 above LA County's 2026 one-unit conforming limit of $1,249,125. It would require a lender-specific jumbo option; availability and minimum down payment vary.

PROGRAMS MOVE. *Guidelines, funding and local assistance change often—and new programs open. Ask us to check today's options with a qualified lender before planning around one.*

Educational overview—not a loan quote or lending, tax or legal advice. Eligibility is borrower- and property-specific. Confirm current program terms, limits and total costs with a qualified lender.

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The number you live with

A purchase price is the headline. Your real budget is the monthly life—and the flexibility left after the keys.

YOUR ALL-IN FORMULA

Price is only the beginning.

+ **LOAN PAYMENT**
  Rate, term, points + down payment
+ **PROPERTY TAX**
  Purchase price + local assessments
+ **INSURANCE**
  Homeowners, wildfire + earthquake choices
+ **HOA + MORTGAGE INSURANCE**
  When applicable to the property or loan
+ **OWNERSHIP**
  Utilities, maintenance + the first repair

THE NUMBER THAT MATTERS

Monthly life

A beautiful home can still be the wrong plan. These four decisions turn a qualification number into a buying strategy you can live with.

01 CHOOSE THE MONTHLY MAXIMUM
Start with the payment that feels sustainable—not merely the largest loan available.

02 PROTECT THE AFTER-CLOSE CUSHION
Separate closing funds from moving, repairs, insurance deductibles and emergency reserves.

03 LET EVIDENCE SET THE RANGE
Use true comparable sales, active competition, pending clues, condition, street and buyer demand.

04 SET GUARDRAILS BEFORE COMPETITION
Name the walk-away price, appraisal-gap and repair ceilings, deposit, contingencies and timing.

THREE CEILINGS—NOT ONE

LENDER CEILING	What underwriting may approve.
COMFORT CEILING	What leaves room for your actual life.
OFFER CEILING	What this exact property is worth to you.

STRESS-TEST THE ANSWER
Would the plan still feel comfortable after a higher insurance quote, an HOA increase or one major repair?

Price is a strategy, not a wish.

Go too aggressive and you can pay beyond the evidence or weaken protections you need. Go too cautious and a better-positioned buyer may take the home. **The right offer balances value, urgency, terms and your real ceiling.**

Same price. Different LA life.

We compare the home you get—not just the address or square footage.

LOCATION
Commute, schools, noise

CARRYING RISK
Insurance, HOA,

CONDITION
Turnkey, cosmetic or major work

COMPETITION
Who wants this exact home

PROPERTY
Lot, light, parking, privacy

FUTURE FIT
How long the home works

MY WALK-AWAY PRICE ____________

MY ALL-IN MONTHLY MAX ____________

CASH I WILL KEEP AFTER CLOSING ____________

“The question is not only ‘Can I qualify?’ It is ‘Can I own this comfortably after I get the keys?’”

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Educational planning guide—not lending, appraisal, tax or legal advice. Market value and loan terms are property- and borrower-specific. Confirm current figures with the appropriate licensed professionals.

05 / MAKE YOUR OFFER IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE

OFFER WITH INTENTION

Your offer should feel coordinated, not improvised. We will align your financing, your price, your terms, your timeline, and your letter (when it helps) around one clear story: you are the buyer this seller wants to say yes to.

A strong pre-approval earns the first look. Clean, specific terms give the seller a reason to trust you. A fast, clear response turns interest into an accepted offer.

OFFERS TO CLOSING

06 / LA NEGOTIATE + CLOSE

1 — BUILD THE WHOLE OFFER

First, we build the complete offer—not just the price. I calculate what you can truly afford, confirm your financing and proof of funds, set your deposit, and decide on contingencies, credits, appraisal language, closing date, and possession—everything that could affect how strong your offer looks next to the others.

Then you can see exactly what you're putting forward, and why.

2 — NEGOTIATE + OPEN ESCROW

Next, we decide how to respond if the seller counters, and how far your ceiling actually goes. A counter can change price, credits, contingencies, deposit, closing, possession, or several terms at once.

Once accepted, escrow begins. You deposit funds, review disclosures, complete inspections, and move through appraisal, loan, and title milestones while we track every deadline.

3 — PROTECT THE RESULT + CLOSE

Inspection findings and appraisal gaps are negotiations, not automatic dealbreakers. We return to the contract, the evidence, the home's condition, your leverage, your alternatives, and the net effect of each option.

After contingencies are removed, we coordinate signing, final verification, funding, recording, possession, and keys. The goal is a closing that supports what comes next—not merely a signed agreement.

OFFER STRATEGY
We build price + terms, financing strength, proof of funds, deposit, contingencies, appraisal terms, credits, closing, possession, and how it all reads next to competing offers.

NEGOTIATION
We decide what to offer, hold, or concede. Every term has value. A higher price may carry more risk to your budget; cleaner terms can win without needing the highest number.

ESCROW
The deposit is delivered. Disclosures are reviewed. Inspections, requests, appraisal, loan, and title milestones move on contract deadlines. Contingencies are removed only when the agreement allows.

CLOSING
You complete final verification. Documents are signed, funds arrive, title records, and possession and keys transfer according to the contract.

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I WILL EXPLAIN WHAT IS HAPPENING, WHAT DECISION IS YOURS, WHAT I RECOMMEND, AND WHAT COMES NEXT

THE ANSWERS, BEFORE YOU ASK

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BUY A HOME IN LA?
Financing readiness can take days or weeks depending on your lender. Search time and escrow depend on inventory, competition, and the terms we agree to. We will build the timeline backward from your ideal move-in date.

DO I NEED TO BE FULLY PRE-APPROVED BEFORE WE TOUR?
Not to look, but to write a competitive offer, yes. An unprepared buyer can lose a home to a prepared one before price is even the deciding factor.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY IN LA?
The best window is where the market and your life overlap. Fall and winter often bring less competition and more motivated sellers; spring brings more inventory and more competing buyers. We will weigh neighborhood activity, your timeline, and your leverage.

WHAT DOES IT COST TO BUY IN LA, BEYOND THE PRICE?
Common costs can include your down payment, closing costs, loan fees, inspections, escrow and title charges, insurance, and moving costs. I'll estimate these early; your lender, escrow, and title team confirm final figures.

SHOULD I WAIVE CONTINGENCIES TO COMPETE?
Not automatically. We decide which protections you can genuinely afford to waive and which ones matter too much to give up, deal by deal.

WHAT CREDIT SCORE DO YOU NEED TO BUY A HOUSE IN CALIFORNIA?
Conventional loans typically start near 620; FHA can go lower with a bigger down payment. A higher score means a better rate, not just a yes.

WHAT IF I'M SELLING AND BUYING IN LA?
We coordinate the sale, purchase, financing, possession, and moving timelines as one plan.

The buyer's dictionary

Real estate has its own language. These are the words worth understanding before they appear in a deadline, disclosure or decision.

01 Money + loan

The language that shapes qualification, cash-to-close and the monthly payment.

PRE-QUALIFICATION
An early estimate based largely on information you provide. Useful for orientation, but not the strongest offer evidence.

PRE-APPROVAL
A lender's written review of income, assets, credit and debt. It expires and can still carry conditions.

DEBT-TO-INCOME RATIO · DTI
Your qualifying monthly debt divided by gross monthly income. Lenders use it to evaluate repayment capacity.

CLOSING COSTS
Costs beyond the down payment, which may include lender, appraisal, escrow, title, insurance, tax and prepaid items.

PROOF OF FUNDS
Statements or other documentation showing the cash available for deposit, down payment, closing and any agreed gap.

MORTGAGE INSURANCE · MI / MIP
Coverage that protects the lender on certain lower-down-payment loans. Cost and cancellation rules depend on the loan.

02 Offer + value

The terms that shape price, protection and competitiveness.

EARNEST MONEY DEPOSIT · EMD
Good-faith funds delivered after acceptance and credited at closing. Amount, timing and refundability come from the contract.

CONTINGENCY
A contractual condition—often for investigation, appraisal or financing—with specific rights and deadlines.

COMPARATIVE MARKET ANALYSIS · CMA
An agent's analysis of relevant sales and competition used to estimate value and shape offer strategy.

APPRAISAL
A licensed appraiser's independent opinion of value, commonly required by the lender; it is not the same as an inspection.

APPRAISAL GAP
The difference when appraised value is below the contract price. Your options depend on cash, negotiation and contract terms.

ESCALATION CLAUSE
Language intended to raise an offer under stated conditions, up to a ceiling. Use, structure and acceptance vary by deal.

03 Escrow + keys

The language that appears after acceptance and before possession.

ESCROW
The neutral process and holder coordinating funds and documents while the parties complete the contract.

TITLE
Legal ownership of the property. A title search and title insurance address certain ownership claims and defects.

DISCLOSURES
Information and reports the seller and other parties provide about known facts, conditions and required notices.

FINAL VERIFICATION
The buyer's pre-closing check of the property's condition; it is not a new inspection or a chance to reopen every term.

POSSESSION DATE
When the buyer is entitled to occupy and receive keys. It may differ from the signing, funding or recording date.

RECORDING
When the deed is entered into the county's public record. In California, this generally marks completion of the transfer.

No pretending required.

If a term is unclear, stop and ask. My job is to explain what it means here, what decision is yours and what happens next. I've got you.

SIGNING ≠ RECORDING
You may sign before the loan funds and title officially records.

CREDIT ≠ PRICE REDUCTION
A credit changes cash due; a price change affects the contract price.

SHORTEN ≠ WAIVE
A shorter contingency keeps a protection for less time; a waiver gives it up.

Educational glossary—not lending, appraisal, tax or legal advice. Contract rights, deadlines and loan terms are transaction-specific. Confirm questions with the appropriate licensed professionals.

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