

Your Broker:



Rob Cassam

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Disclosures: What Does a Seller Have to Reveal?



A seller typically fills out a standard disclosure form with yes or no questions about their property. The form will also have space for more details and explanations. The disclosure isn't a replacement for a home inspection, but it might bring to light issues that you have an inspector take a closer look at.

A seller's disclosure requirements vary depending on your state. Some of the common issues they often include are:

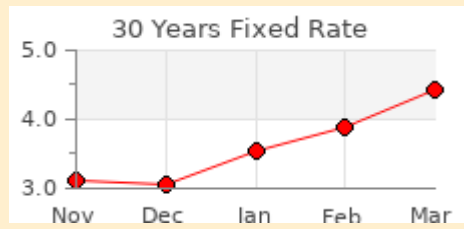
Leaks or roof problems, previous flooding or water leaks in the basement, foundation cracks or defects, issues with the air conditioning, heating, or plumbing systems, defects in doors, floors, walls, or windows, sewer or septic system problems, infestations by wood-destroying insects or damage, unsafe conditions related to lead, asbestos, or radon, boundary disputes

While most disclosure guidelines are set at the state level, under federal law, if you're selling a home built before 1978, you have to disclose that paint may be lead-based. 1978 is the year lead-based paint was banned for consumer use.

If you're a buyer, you may feel a little overwhelmed by the seller's disclosure, and again, this is where a good agent can help you. If you aren't sure about anything, don't be afraid to ask. One issue to watch for is mold or water damage. Termite damage is another red flag. If termites aren't taken care of, it can significantly impact a home's structure, and a homeowner's policy often won't cover this damage.

Mortgage Rates U.S. averages as of April 2022:

30 yr. fixed: 4.42%
15 yr. fixed: 3.63%
5/1 yr. adj: 3.36%



How to Choose the Perfect Smart Home Hub



When you're deciding whether or not you even need a hub, you want to think about the type of components that make up your smart home system and how many devices you need to control. The more smart products you add into the mix, the more you may need a hub. As you might guess, there are many hub options out there.

Amazon Echo 4th Generation is good if you're an Alexa user. The Samsung SmartThings Hub v3 is also an excellent choice. It has Zigbee and Z-Wave inside it, and you can connect to hundreds of devices. Apple HomeKit supports fewer devices than Google's platform, but it does let you create routines and scenes with more complexity.

The HomePod mini works with HomeKit, and it's a smart speaker and a HomeKit hub so you can connect your lights, locks, and other low-power devices. The Amazon EchoDot is one of the cheaper hubs, and it will work if your devices have WiFi or Bluetooth, although it doesn't have Z-Wave or Zigbee. Finally, another good choice is the Google Nest Hub Max.

The Most Coveted Kitchen Trends of 2022



If you're thinking about a kitchen refresh or a complete remodel this spring, the following are some of the top trends designers love.

Custom Organization: Organization is everything in a kitchen. When you have a well-organized kitchen, it makes cooking and everything else that much easier. In the Houzz 2022 U.S. Kitchen Trends Study, more than half of homeowners said they would be upgrading their space with built-in, custom organizers.

Welcoming Wood: Natural materials and sustainability are top priorities for many people right now, shown in kitchen design. Exposed beams and butcher block countertops are timeless additions to these spaces. Wood adds warmth and feels naturally inspired. Deep, rich wood tones are especially nice right now, even if they're just in the form of an accent piece.

Glazed Tiles: Kitchen design is moving toward a more dimensional, imperfect aesthetic and glazed tiles are part of that trend. Glazed porcelain tiles are made of clay, and they go through a firing process to get a glossy finish, making them ideal for a backsplash. Glazed tiles are also durable and long-lasting.

Well-Worn Finishes: Rather than designing kitchens to look flawless and brand new, one of the trends in design right now is creating a more well-worn, lived-in look. For example, unlacquered brass finishes are popular, as are imperfect handmade tiles. Homeowners are embracing a more natural aesthetic, so instead of polished stone, for example, they're using things like soapstone and patina metals.

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How to Save for a Down Payment While You're Renting By Ashley Sutphin

Rent prices continue to rise throughout the U.S., which creates a disheartening and discouraging scenario for many people. As of February 1, median rents for one- and two-bedroom units are up 13% and 16%, respectively, since 2019. One-bedroom rentals are at an all-time median high right now.

High rental prices coincide with a housing market that's overheated. Demand, inflation, and reductions in home construction have led to record-setting home prices. Potential homebuyers are being priced out, requiring them to stay in the rental market, putting pressure on rent prices.

For renters, it can seem like a difficult cycle to break—how can you save for a down payment when such a large chunk of your income is going toward rent? Homeownership feels unattainable for a large portion of the population. It's decidedly not an easy issue to work your way out of, but it is possible.

Figure Out What You Need

The first thing you can do is start to crunch the numbers. If you have a concrete number for the down payment you need, it will be easier to work toward your goals. If you don't have a plan in mind or a set number to work toward, you're going to feel scattered, and it will be much harder to get out of the rent cycle.

The down payment will depend on the type of loan you hope to get and where you plan to buy. There are mortgages with a down payment as low as 3%, giving you opportunities to save up in a shorter period of time. You may have to pay for private mortgage insurance if you don't put down 20%, however. You have to think about other costs that you'll need upfront money for to buy a home. These costs include closing fees and the costs of moving.

Open a Dedicated Down Payment Savings Account

Once you have a concrete number in mind and have explored the mortgage options available to you, and know which you'd like to ultimately get, you can create a savings account. This account will only be for your down payment and nothing else. It should be liquid but separate from anything else so that you aren't tempted to spend the money in it.

Deal with Debt

You're going to need to find ways to cut costs if you want to put more money aside to buy a house. Cutting your debt is going to be one way to do that. If you have a balance on a credit card with a high interest rate, you might try to do a balance transfer. You can transfer the expensive debt to a card with a zero-percent interest period. If buying a house is your goal, try not to add any more debt during this time. To qualify to get a mortgage, you'll have to meet the debt-to-income requirement.

Find Ways to Cut Back

It's hard to give things up, but if you're putting a fair amount of money into your rent, there's not a lot you can do about that unless you're willing to move. You'll have to find other ways you can cut your costs. That might mean skipping meals out or delivery food or going through your subscriptions to see what you can eliminate.

Think About Moving

We mentioned moving above, and you may not be willing or able to do it, but if you can, cutting down on what you're paying for rent is one of the best ways to have more money to put toward a down payment.

If you can't move to a smaller or less expensive home, you might try to renegotiate your lease with your landlord, or you could get a roommate. If you can move, along with getting a smaller place, another option is to move outside of the center city area, if you live there currently. Typically, the further out you move from the central area of your town or city, the lower the rent.

Explore Assistance Programs

Finally, many mortgage lenders have programs and loans for first-time homebuyers that cover part or all of a down payment. There are also grants, which require you to complete a homebuyer education course before you get the financial assistance.

If you work in certain fields, like as a first responder or teacher, homebuying assistance programs are often available. A lot of lenders are looking to reach out to underserved communities to help them make homeownership a reality, so make sure to explore everything that's out there.

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What to Know About Smart Appliances By Ashley Sutphin

Everyone wants a "smart home," but this can have different meanings and implications for different people. One place you can make your home smarter is your appliances.

Smart appliances broadly let you connect your mobile device to the appliance for information, control, and convenience. A smart appliance will help automate daily tasks in your life. For example, if you get a smart oven, you can use your phone to start preheating before you even get home.

What Types of Smart Appliances Are Available?

There are a lot of available smart appliances, including:

- **Instant Pot:** The Instant Pot's unconnected version is already wildly popular, and now, you can enjoy the smart version with WiFi connectivity that lets you cook, adjust, schedule, and monitor the progress of what you're making from your phone.
- **Microwaves:** Some companies like Sharp are offering smart microwaves. Sharp's device integrates with Amazon Alexa, and it recognizes over 70 voice commands, so you have hands-free and perfectly-timed control over cooking in your microwave.
- **Toasters:** Smart toasters are pricey, but consumers fall in love with them. They have image-based touch screens, so you can choose your type of bread and preferred perfect shade of toast. Smart toasters use sensors to give you the ideal result matching your settings.
- **Refrigerators:** One of the priciest investments into smart appliance technology you can make is with a fridge. For example, Samsung's Family Hub refrigerator includes a WiFi connection and touchscreen. The Family Hub can connect with other smart devices in your home, you can shop for groceries directly from the fridge, and you can look up recipes and create a grocery list using the appliance. With the Family Hub, the fridge automatically scans everything you put in and keeps track of it.
- **Washer/dryers:** Samsung and LG added AI to their high-end machines. The laundry machines now automatically detect the texture of the fabric and the size of the load, customizing wash and dry modes.

Other smart appliances include dishwashers, ovens, and coffee makers.

Why Spend the Money on Smart Appliances?

Smart technology does tend to get cheaper every year as it advances and becomes more mainstream, but these appliances are more expensive than their non-smart counterparts. So what are the benefits of paying more? There are a few key reasons people are willing to pay top dollar for smart appliances.

First, they're the newest, best thing on the market, and people like the idea of being on the cutting edge. They're also efficient. For example, smart washing machines have water-saving features that are automatically built-in. They're also safer in many cases, plus they make your life a little easier and more convenient. If, for example, the dishwasher is the wrong temperature or there's a sign of trouble, the appliances will let you know right away.

Smart appliances make meal prep and cooking that much easier, which most people are looking for. You can access and monitor your appliances no matter where you are as well.

Before buying a smart appliance, research the manufacturer and its reputation.

If your goal is to have a smarter home overall, you also want to make sure that everything in your ecosystem is compatible. Smart appliances require connectivity to a WiFi-enabled smart device, but some smart devices might not be compatible. Check on all the connectivity and compatibility requirements before you make a buying decision.

The three main ecosystems are Google Nest, Apple HomeKit, and Amazon Alexa. If you pick one main ecosystem, everything in your smart-connected home is going to run more smoothly.

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Should You Buy an Airbnb Investment Property? By Ashley Sutphin

Since 2008, Airbnb has been an exciting innovator. Airbnb has changed how we vacation throughout the world, but it's also created diversified opportunities to invest in real estate. With the online marketplace, property owners became able to rent out their spare rooms or entire homes, and now millions of people stay in an Airbnb on any given night.

Some real estate investors have entirely moved away from traditional leasing in favor of Airbnb, but there are risks, and it's not right for everyone as with any investment.

While you can certainly rent out a home you already own, what if you want to buy a property for that specific purpose?

How It Compares to Traditional Property Investment

Previously, the only way you could make a reliable income stream off a residential investment property was to own it and then find long-term tenants. Those tenants needed to be trustworthy and dependable.

There are some serious downsides to long-term tenants. One is the fact that you have to find them. You run the risk of your property being vacant for long periods, during which you're losing money daily.

You can pay a property management company or realtor to help you, but that's going to chip away at your profit. You're also responsible for maintaining the property, and there's always the potential of dealing with a client who doesn't pay their rent for any number of reasons.

Some of the frustrations of traditional property investment are alleviated with Airbnb. It can be much easier to find a renter for a few days or sometimes even a few months as compared to someone who's going to sign a lease for a year or more.

You also have a unique way to market your property and get right in front of your targeted audience. Airbnb takes care of some of the toughest parts of renting to long-term tenants. They vet the renters, accept payments for you, and on both sides of the transaction, the experience can be rated.

You can let renters know about additional charges and communicate with them solely through the platform. If someone trashes your property or damages it, the host guarantee offers up to \$1 million in property damage protection for property owners.

If you invest in a property that's in an in-demand location, you're not likely to have a hard time renting it out. That's a big if, though. Not every area is going to hold appeal for Airbnb renters. Traditional renters want somewhere quiet and safe in many cases. Airbnb renters want somewhere centrally located and close to the action of whatever the city is. If you're thinking about buying a property exclusively for Airbnb, you're likely going to pay a premium to secure a location that people on Airbnb will find appealing.

The Other Risks of Buying a Home for Airbnb

If your goal is to invest in a home and list it on Airbnb, along with location being paramount, there are other possible risks. You or someone you hire needs to be available on-demand. If someone is on vacation and a pipe bursts in your home that they're paying to stay in, it has to be fixed immediately.

There are also legal restrictions, particularly in certain locations. In some regions, you can't list a property at all as an Airbnb rental. In others, you might need licenses and permits to do so. You're also at the mercy of your guests' reviews. One bad review which could occur because of something totally out of control can make it extremely hard to book new guests, particularly if there's a lot of other competition in your area.

Airbnb does have what's known as a double-blind system so that both guests and hosts have to leave their reviews before they can see what the other said about them. If there is a dispute, the parties can communicate before reviews go public.

If you aren't sure whether buying a property for Airbnb is right for you, think about trying things out with something you already own. For example, if you have a spare room and you're comfortable doing so, maybe you rent it out for a while to get a feel for what it's like.

One more note—since the start of the pandemic, people have been working remotely more than ever, and that may not change any time soon. That has led to an uptick in people wanting longer-term Airbnb stays for several weeks or even months, creating a new opportunity for investors that's worth considering.

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5 Ways a Home Garden Can Boost the Aesthetic Value of Your House By Kimberly Evans

A well-spruced and aesthetically-pleasing garden enhances the value of your property, especially if you plan to sell it anytime soon. Here are some things you can do to boost the value of your property with a well-maintained home garden.

De-clutter and maintain

Just like the interiors of your house, your garden also has to be de-cluttered and maintained. Winters can be harsh on your gardens, especially if you live in a place that is cold and snowy. In particular, it can affect the fences and trellis along with large shrubs and trees. Once the winter ends, make sure you repair the damaged structures and clean the fallen leaves and other debris to prepare your garden for the beautiful spring and summer months.

Make it colorful

Humans are genetically predisposed to colors and this is why it plays a big role in triggering emotions in us. To make your garden attractive and also a great place to relax and unwind, opt for colorful flowers.

For example, a blooming purple flower not only adds elegance to your garden but also soothes and calms your mind, especially when you've had a bad day. Likewise, pink flowers are known to induce romance and kindness while red is sure to excite you. Depending on the kind of impact you need in your life, choose the right flowering plants. You can, in fact, combine many colors to add to the synergy of emotions and vibrations.

Add a focus area

When someone walks into your garden, what is the first thing they see? The answer to this question can determine the chances of selling your house. For example, if a beautiful fountain is the focus area of your garden, it is sure to boost your property value and the chances for it to sell. That's why it's important to have a clear focus area that is stunning and attractive for even passers-by.

Paint the fences

When you paint the cabinets and walls of your home, they look bright and fresh, right? The same applies to your fences and garden walls too. It can, in fact, be a cheap way to spruce up your garden and make it more inviting for you and your guests. The best part is you can do it by yourself too, as a hobby!

Consider some furniture

Imagine you're a buyer. You're walking into a house full of furniture and another one that is completely empty. Which of the two would appeal to you?

Most people would like to see a house with the furniture as it can give them a perspective of the layout and different rooms. Similarly, when you add some garden furniture, it is sure to spruce up the entire place and make it more inviting to your guests. It can also double-up as a cozy place for you to relax and read a book or maybe even listen to some music at the end of a long day.

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