

WHAT HOMEBUYERS WANT IN 2026

A Seller's Guide to Shifting Housing Markets in the South

Results from a survey of 900 prospective homebuyers in Atlanta, Tampa, and Dallas

A Mark Spain Real Estate Report

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MARKSPAIN REAL ESTATE

How Sellers Can Win in a Changing Market

Housing markets across the South are entering a new chapter. After years of frenzied bidding wars and sellers holding all the cards, conditions in Atlanta, Tampa, and Dallas have shifted toward equilibrium—creating both challenges and opportunities for homeowners preparing to sell.



Atlanta saw its active listing count rise 5.9% year-over-year in December, with homes now spending a median of 76 days on market—up nearly 14% from last year. Median listing prices dropped 4.2% to \$360,617, a steeper decline than the national average, [according to Realtor.com](#).



Tampa is experiencing some of the most significant price corrections in the country. The St. Petersburg-Clearwater-Tampa metro ranks among the top 10 U.S. markets where home prices are projected to fall in 2026, with analysts forecasting a 3.6% decline, [according to data reported by FOX 13 Tampa Bay](#). The Sarasota-Bradenton area nearby ranks second nationally, with prices expected to dip 8.9%. High inventory is putting pressure on sellers—some have converted stalled listings into rentals rather than accept lower offers.



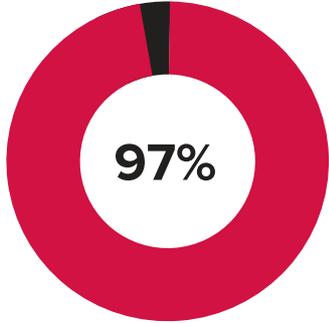
Dallas saw active listings surge 10.6% compared to last year, bringing 3,645 homes to market in December alone. The city bucked national trends with a 2.1% increase in new listings while prices edged down 1.6% to a median of \$409,350. Homes are spending 72 days on market, up 9.2% year-over-year, [according to Realtor.com](#).

Across all three metros, buyers now have meaningful negotiating power and more options than they've seen in years. Yet motivated buyers will still compete aggressively for the right home. For sellers, success now depends on strategic pricing, presentation, and a willingness to meet buyers where they are.

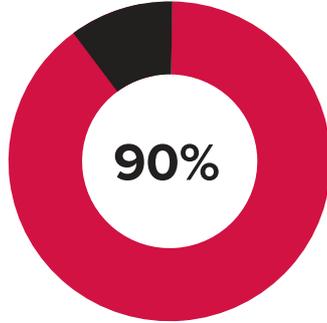
To help sellers understand exactly what today's empowered buyers want, we surveyed 900 prospective homebuyers (300 each across Atlanta, Tampa, and Dallas) who plan to purchase a home within the next 12 months. The insights that follow reveal what drives purchase decisions and what sellers can do to stand out in a more balanced market.

The Data at a Glance

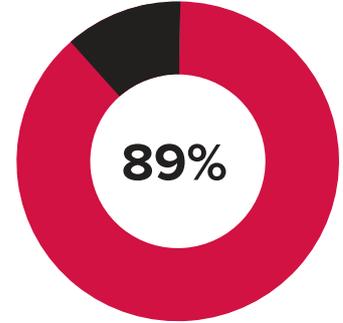
Across all respondents and markets:



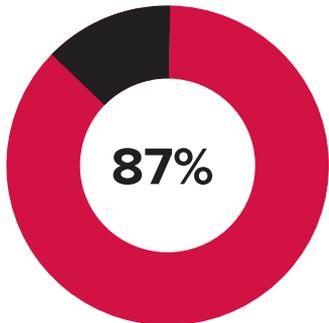
97% – say curb appeal is important when deciding whether to tour or make an offer



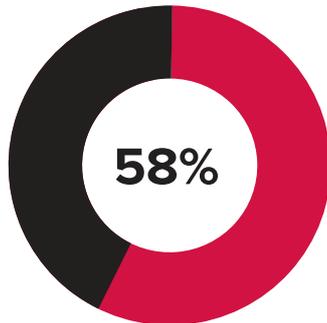
90% – say detailed seller disclosures increase their confidence in a home



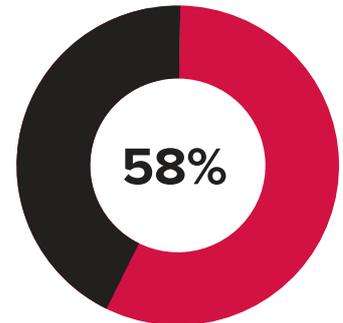
89% – would consider buying a home sold as-is if the price reflects condition



87% – of buyers plan to work with a real estate agent



58% – say price/affordability are one of their top three factors in a home search



58% – would pay above asking price for the right property

Key Findings Across All Markets

Before diving into market-specific insights, several themes emerged from the report, reflecting the mindset of prospective buyers:



Buyers Will Pay Above Asking For the Right House

Despite shifting market conditions and rising inventory, 58% of buyers across all three markets say they would pay above asking price for the right home. Dallas leads at 64%, followed by Atlanta (61%) and Tampa (50%). **The takeaway: a buyer's or balanced market doesn't mean buyers won't compete—it means they're selective about what they compete for.**



Cleanliness Beats Renovations

Odors and dirty homes turn off 66-70% of buyers. Dated kitchens? Only 35%. This inverts conventional wisdom about pre-sale investments. A deep clean matters more than a kitchen refresh and costs a fraction of the price.



Nearly 9 in 10 Would Buy As-Is If Priced Right

89% of buyers would consider purchasing a home sold as-is if the price reflects its condition. Sellers with dated or worn properties have more options than they might assume—the issue isn't condition, it's pricing.



Fenced Yards Are the Universal Must-Have

Across all three markets, **fenced yards top the outdoor wish list (48% overall)**, outranking pools, patios, and large lots. For families with children or pets, this feature is non-negotiable.



Detailed Disclosures Build Confidence

90% of buyers say comprehensive seller disclosures—with dates of repairs, documentation, and warranties—**increase their confidence in a home.** Sellers may be tempted to hold back on details, but being upfront pays off: transparency signals a well-maintained property and can reduce buyer hesitation at the negotiation table.

The Affordability Question:

73% Open to 50-Year Mortgages

As policymakers debate new approaches to housing affordability, buyers are signaling openness to unconventional solutions. When asked about a hypothetical 50-year mortgage—which would offer lower monthly payments but higher total interest over the life of the loan—**73% of buyers expressed interest (32% very interested, 41% somewhat interested).**

This appetite for extended loan terms reflects the depth of the affordability challenge. With mortgage rates still elevated and home prices slow to correct, buyers are looking for any path to manageable monthly payments.

Younger Buyers Show Strongest Interest

Interest in 50-year mortgages varies by generation, with Gen Z showing the highest enthusiasm and Gen X the most cautious. Even so, 65% of Gen X buyers express interest in 50-year mortgages, indicating that affordability challenges span generations.

Overall Interest by Market

If 50-year mortgages hypothetically became available, how interested would you be?

Response	All Markets	Atlanta	Tampa	Dallas
Very interested	32%	33%	31%	32%
Somewhat interested	41%	42%	37%	44%
Not interested	23%	21%	27%	20%
I plan to pay cash	4%	4%	5%	4%

Overall Interest by Generations

If 50-year mortgages hypothetically became available, how interested would you be?

Response	Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X
Very interested	33%	35%	29%
Somewhat interested	49%	40%	36%
Not interested	12%	23%	30%
I plan to pay cash	6%	3%	5%

Buyer Agent Commission: What Buyers Expect vs. What's Actually Happening

Only 19% of buyers across all three markets expect the seller to pay their agent's commission outright—yet in practice, sellers are typically footing the bill. According to a recent [HomeLight survey](#), 92% of top agents report that sellers are continuing to cover buyer's agent commissions. [Redfin agents confirm this trend](#), and commission rates have barely budged since the NAR settlement took effect.

Who do you expect to pay your buyer's agent commission?



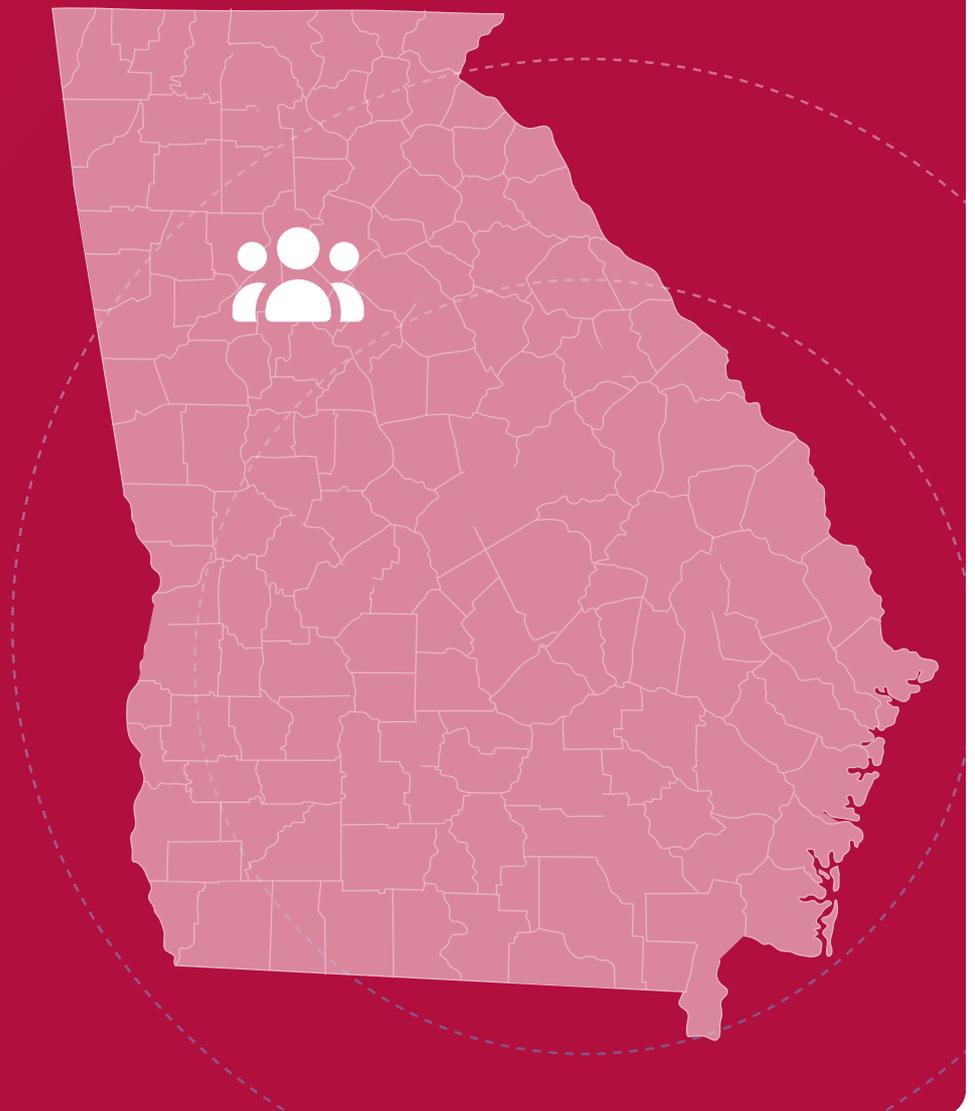
Atlanta

300

prospective buyers

Market Context

Atlanta's housing market has cooled significantly over the past year and continues to correct. The average home value sits at \$379,908, down 4.3% year-over-year according to Zillow. Homes are taking roughly 68 days to go pending, giving buyers more time and leverage. Georgia MLS data shows 62% of sold homes in 2025 included seller concessions averaging around \$4,000, while 41% of listings saw price reductions.

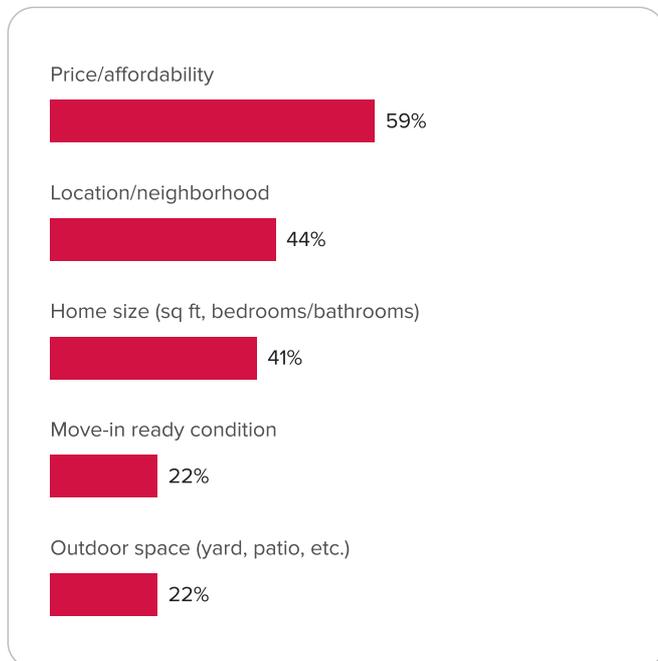


Key Finding #1:

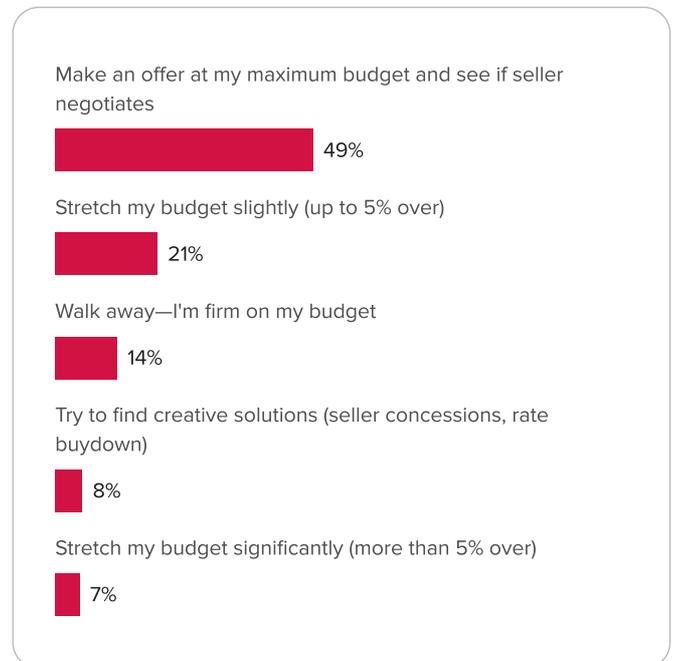
Win the Pricing War or Win the Beauty Contest

Affordability ranks as the top priority for 59% of Atlanta buyers when choosing a home. Yet **61% say they would pay above asking price for the right property**, and 49% would make an offer at their maximum budget to see if the seller negotiates rather than walk away from a home priced slightly above their budget. Buyers are price-sensitive, but they'll stretch their budget for a home that truly captures their attention.

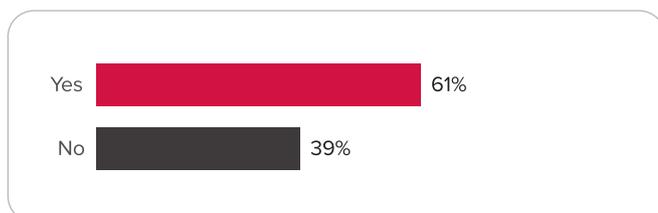
When choosing a home, which factors matter most to you?



If a home you loved was priced slightly above your budget, what would you do?



In today's market, would you be willing to pay above asking price for the right home?



Seller Strategy:

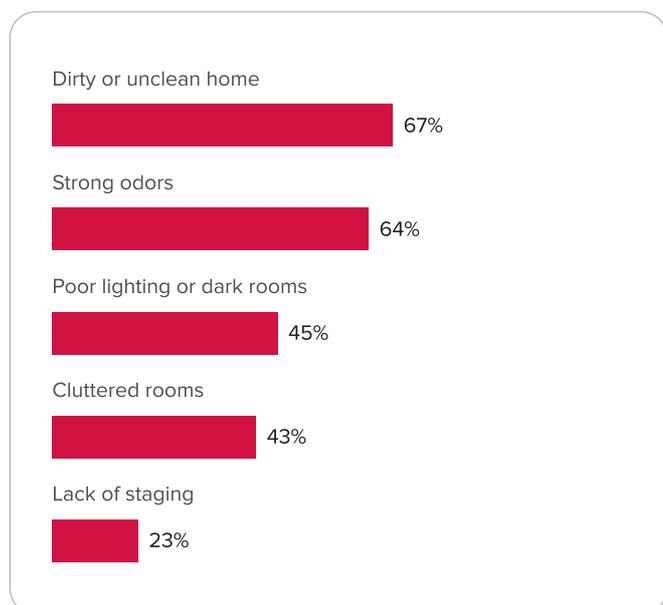
Price strategically from day one or invest in making your home the standout property that buyers will stretch their budget for. Overpricing leads to stale listings; 30% of Atlanta buyers say a home sitting on the market for a long time without a price reduction would cause them to hesitate before making an offer.

Key Finding #2:

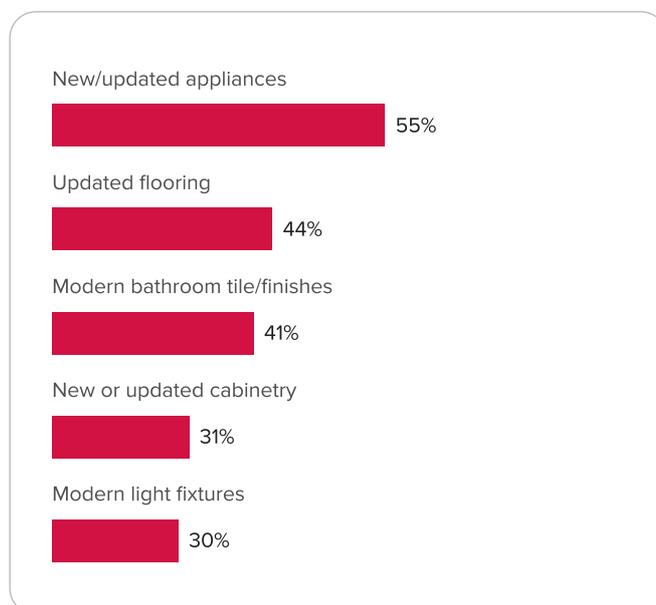
Cleanliness and Condition Trump Trendy Finishes

When Atlanta buyers walk through a home, nothing derails their interest faster than cleanliness issues. **A dirty or unclean home would negatively influence 67% of buyers, while strong odors would turn off 64%.** These factors outweigh dated design elements by a significant margin.

When viewing homes, which of the following issues are most likely to influence your opinion of a home?



Which cosmetic or design features have the biggest impact on whether a home is appealing to you?



Seller Strategy:

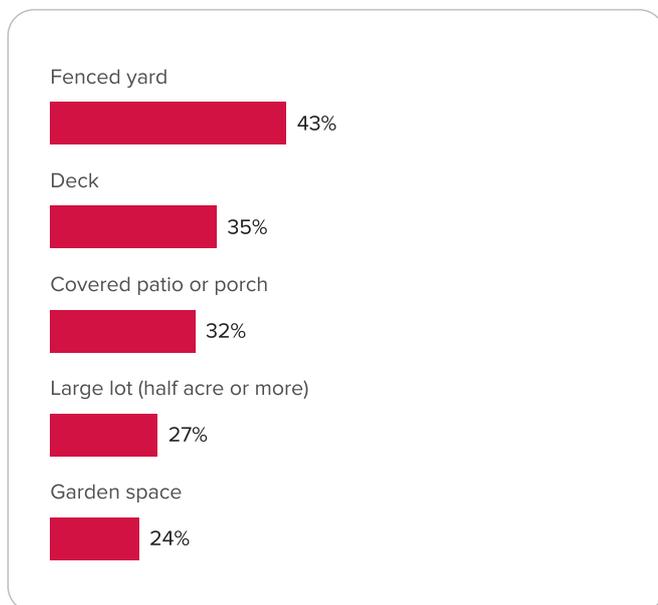
Before spending on major renovations, invest in a deep clean and address any odor issues (pets, mildew, cooking). Updated appliances and flooring can also tip buyers in your favor. If full renovation isn't in the budget, focus on neutralizing the most off-putting dated elements—dated flooring (36%) and dated kitchen counters/cabinetry (34%) rank highest on buyer turn-off lists for Atlanta.

Key Finding #3:

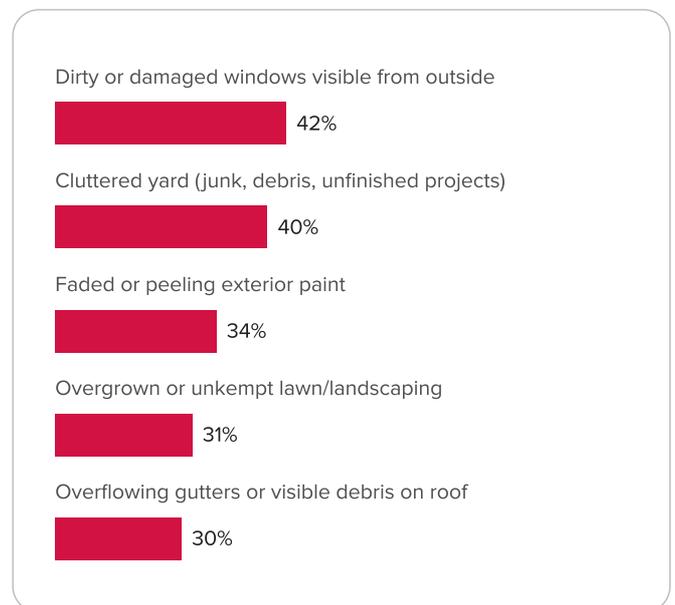
Fenced Yards and Decks Top the Outdoor Wish List

Despite the summer heat, outdoor living is a priority for Atlanta buyers. **A fenced yard is the most sought-after outdoor feature, prioritized by 43% of respondents.** This is followed by decks (35%), covered patio or porch (32%), and large lot size (27%).

Which outdoor features and amenities are you prioritizing most?



Which outdoor issues would make you less likely to make an offer on a home?



Seller Strategy:

Clear the yard completely before listing. If you've been meaning to finish that outdoor project, now's the time—or remove evidence of it entirely. A pressure wash of exterior surfaces, fresh paint on peeling areas, and clean windows can significantly improve first impressions. Ninety-seven percent of Atlanta buyers say curb appeal is somewhat or very important.

Key Finding #4:

Seller Concessions Open Doors

Among the offerings that would entice Atlanta buyers to submit an offer, completing repairs before closing ranks highest (48%), followed by covering closing costs (42%). Home warranties and move-in timeline flexibility each appeal to 32% of buyers.

Which seller action(s) would make you most likely to make an offer?



If a home inspection revealed moderate issues, which seller response would you prefer?



Seller Strategy:

Be prepared to negotiate, but understand what buyers actually want. Completing known repairs before listing removes a major friction point. Offering to cover closing costs can be the tipping point for price-sensitive buyers.

Key Finding #5:

Smart Inclusions Sweeten the Deal

Items left behind by sellers can positively influence purchase decisions. Appliances not typically included (like washer/dryer) appeal to 49% of Atlanta buyers, followed by storage solutions (43%), smart home devices (43%), and lawn/garden equipment (38%).

Which of the following items, if left behind by the seller as part of the sale, would positively influence your decision to buy?

Appliances not typically included (washer/dryer, extra refrigerator)



Storage solutions (shelving, garage organization systems)



Smart home devices (thermostat, doorbell camera, etc.)



Lawn and garden equipment (mower, tools, etc.)



Game room items (pool table, ping pong table, etc.)



Seller Strategy:

If you have appliances you're willing to leave behind or have invested in smart home technology, highlight these in your listing. These items can differentiate your property from competing listings and add perceived value without requiring additional investment.

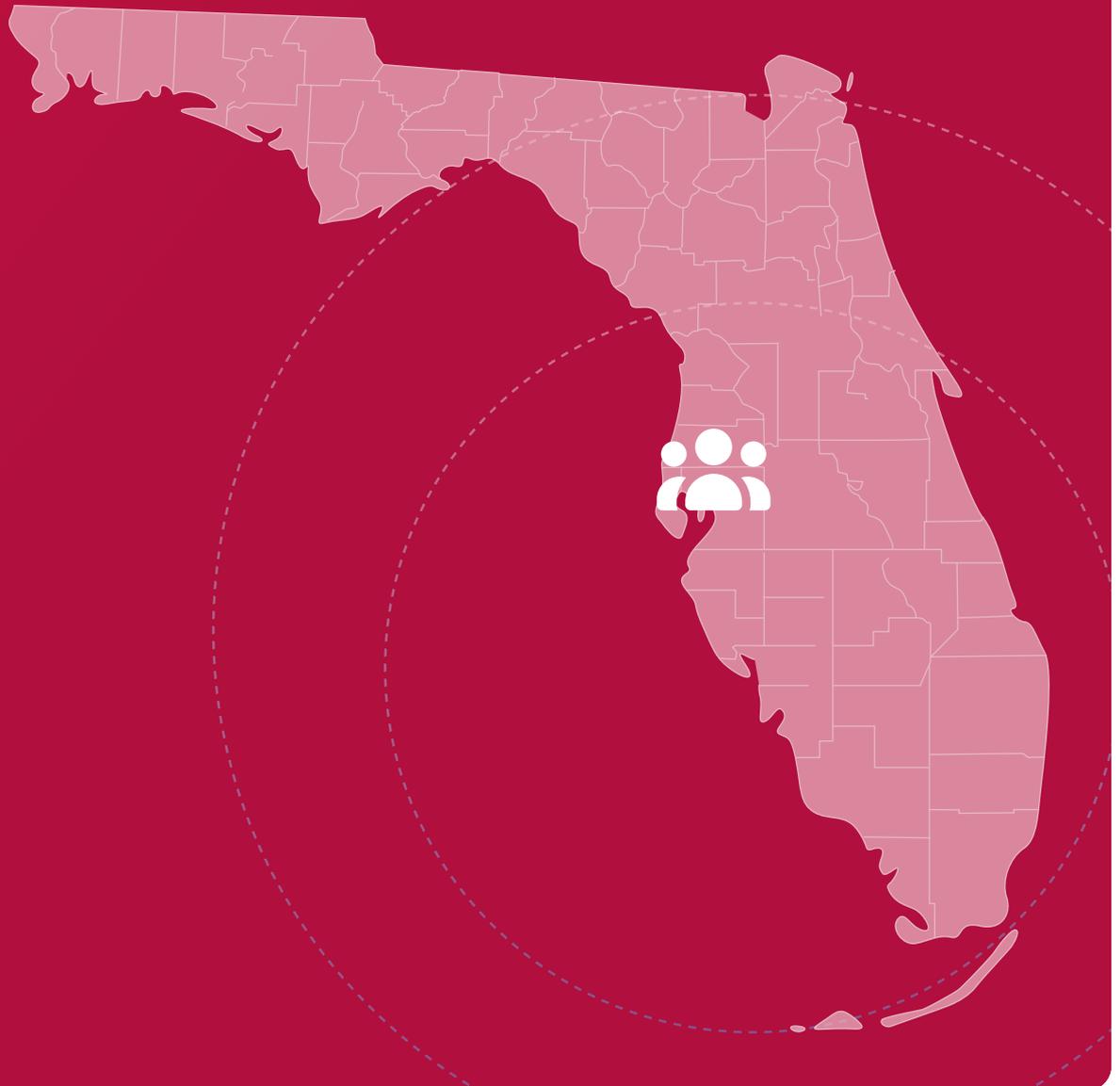
Tampa

300

prospective buyers

Market Context

Tampa home values currently average \$365,037, representing a 4.4% decline over the past year, according to Zillow. Homes typically go under contract in about 44 days. This price softening creates opportunities for buyers who've been waiting on the sidelines, while sellers may need to adjust expectations from the peak market highs. For homeowners considering a sale, the extended days-on-market figure suggests pricing strategy and presentation matter more than ever in attracting serious buyers.



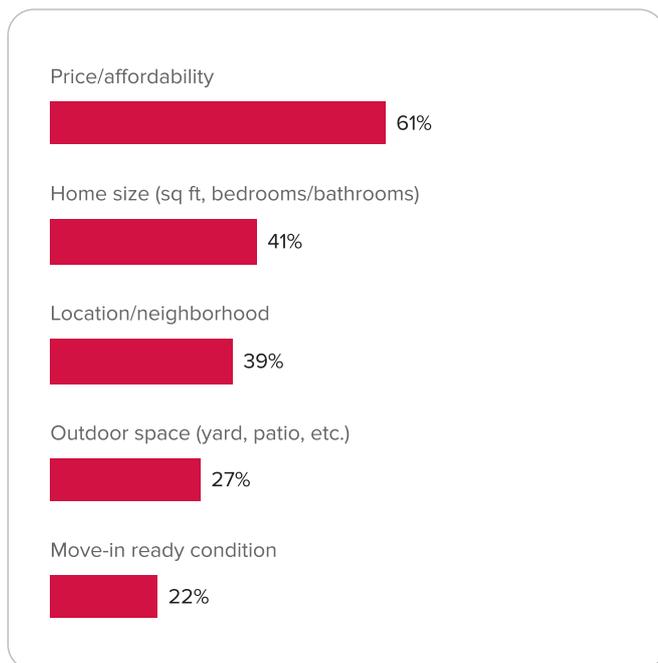
Key Finding #1:

Price-Conscious Buyers Will Still Compete for the Right Home

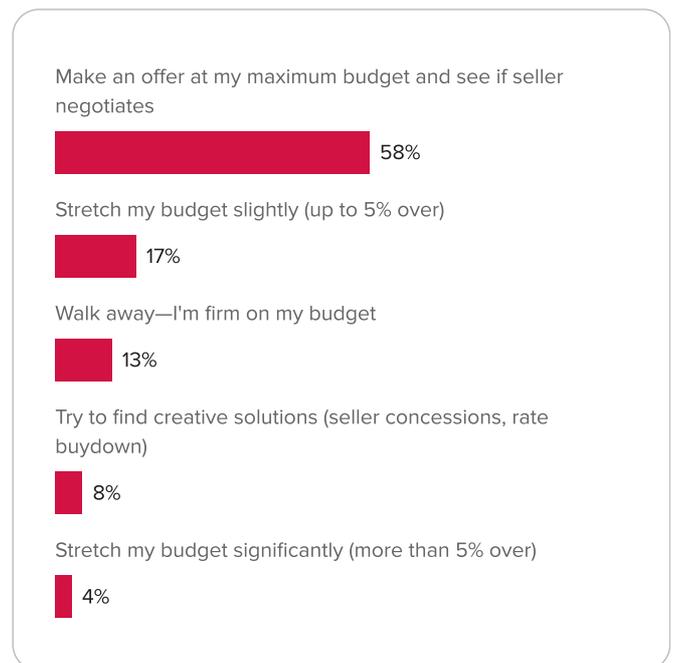
Affordability is the top priority for 61% of Tampa buyers—the highest rate among all three markets. Yet 50% would pay above asking price for the right home, and 58% would make an offer at their maximum budget and hope the seller negotiates rather than walk away from a home they love.

All in all, Tampa buyers are watching prices closely, but they'll compete when a property checks their boxes. Your home needs to be either the best-priced option in its category or compelling enough to justify stretching the budget.

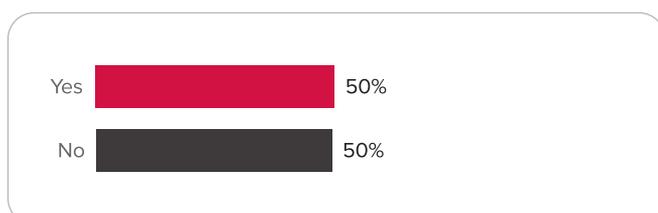
When choosing a home, which factors matter most to you?



If a home you loved was priced slightly above your budget, what would you do?



In today's market, would you be willing to pay above asking price for the right home?



Seller Strategy:

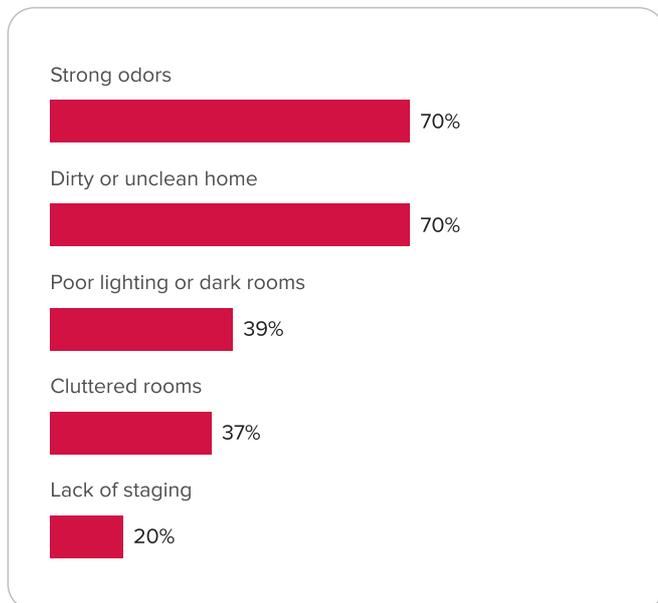
Tampa buyers are actively comparing your listing to others. Price your home based on current sold comparables, not 2022 peaks. Coming in slightly under market value can generate more interest and potentially multiple offers, even in this environment. If you're not the best-priced, make sure you're the most beautiful home on the block.

Key Finding #2:

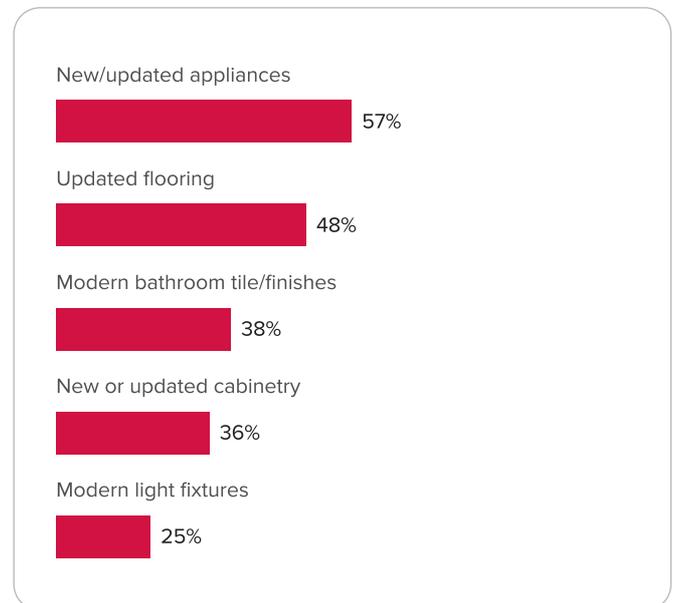
Cleanliness Issues Are Deal-Breakers

Tampa buyers are the most sensitive to property condition at showing time. Seventy percent say strong odors would negatively influence their opinion, and **70% cite a dirty or unclean home as a turnoff**. These numbers exceed both Atlanta and Dallas.

When viewing homes, which of the following issues are most likely to influence your opinion of a home?



Which cosmetic or design features have the biggest impact on whether a home is appealing to you?



Seller Strategy:

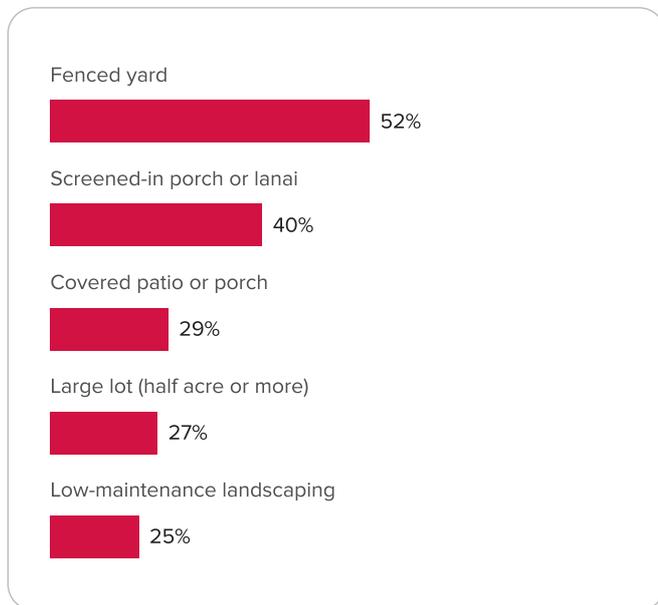
In Florida's humid climate, odor and moisture issues are particularly pronounced. Address any mold, mildew, or mustiness before listing. Professional cleaning is worth the investment—Tampa buyers will notice, and a dirty home will likely cost you the sale.

Key Finding #3:

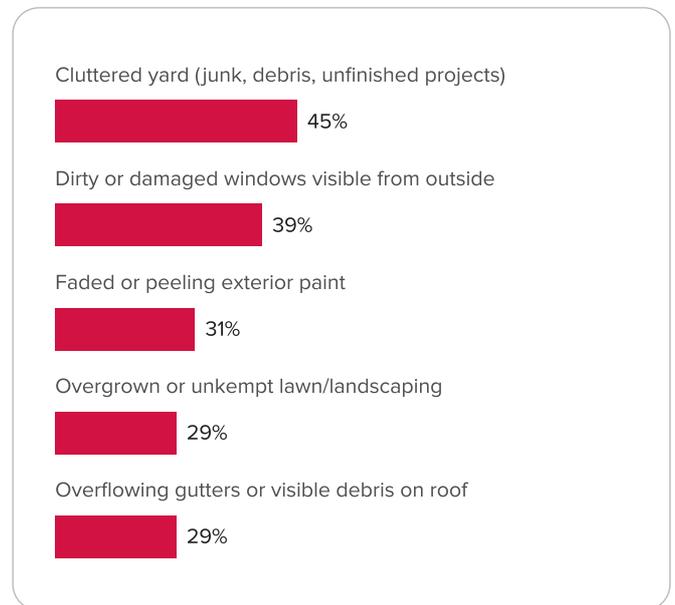
Florida Buyers Prioritize Fenced Yards and Screened Porches

Tampa's outdoor priorities reflect the Florida lifestyle. **Fenced yards lead at 52%, but screened-in porches (lanais) rank twice as popular here compared to Atlanta and Dallas.** Covered patios (29%) and large lots (27%) round out the top outdoor features.

Which outdoor features and amenities are you prioritizing most?



Which outdoor issues would make you less likely to make an offer on a home?



Seller Strategy:

If you have a screened porch or lanai, make sure it shines in photos and showings—it's a major selling point unique to Florida. Address any exterior paint issues before listing, as buyers may interpret deferred maintenance as a sign of potential storm damage or neglect.

Key Finding #4:

Closing-Cost Help and Home Warranties Attract Offers

Tampa buyers want sellers to cover closing costs (48%) and complete repairs before closing (47%). Home warranties appeal to 33%, reflecting concerns about Florida's aging housing stock and major systems.

Which seller action(s) would make you most likely to make an offer?



If a home inspection revealed moderate issues, which seller response would you prefer?



Seller Strategy:

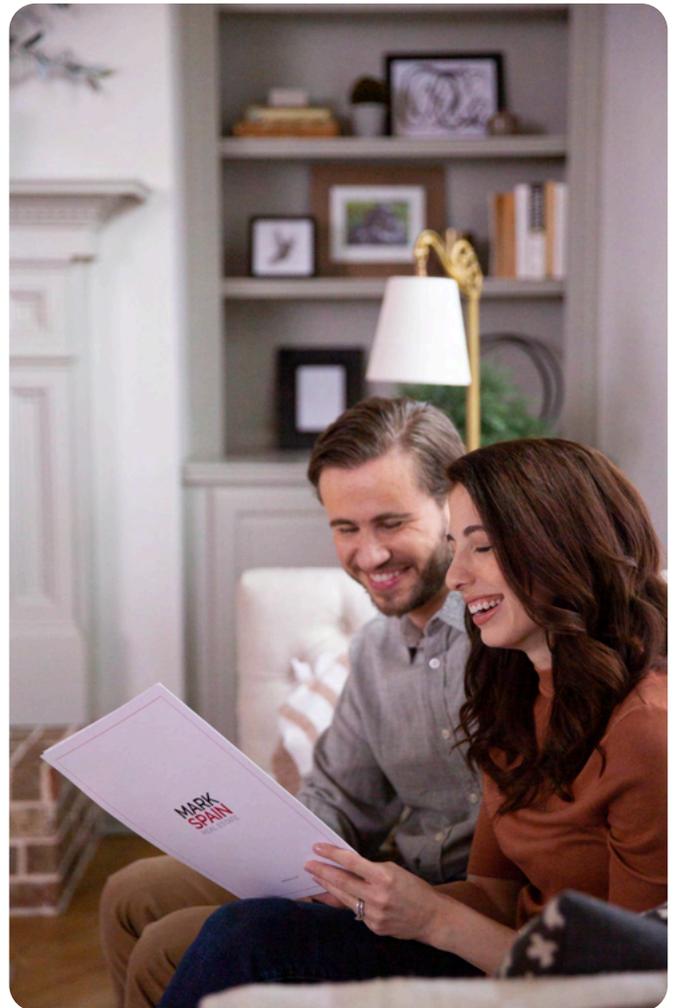
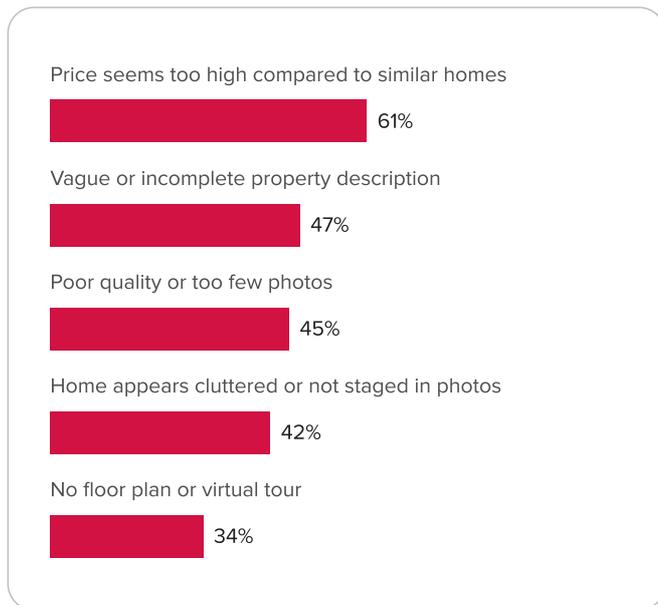
Consider offering a home warranty proactively—it addresses buyer concerns about major systems and costs relatively little. Be prepared for inspection negotiations; Tampa buyers are split between wanting repairs completed (36%) and preferring a price reduction (31%).

Key Finding #5:

Listing Quality Determines Whether Buyers Schedule a Showing

Before buyers ever set foot in a home, they're making judgments based on the listing. **A price that seems too high would cause 61% of Tampa buyers to skip scheduling a showing**—the highest rate among all three markets. Vague descriptions (47%) and poor photos (45%) also lead buyers to pass.

What would make you skip a listing without scheduling a showing?



Seller Strategy:

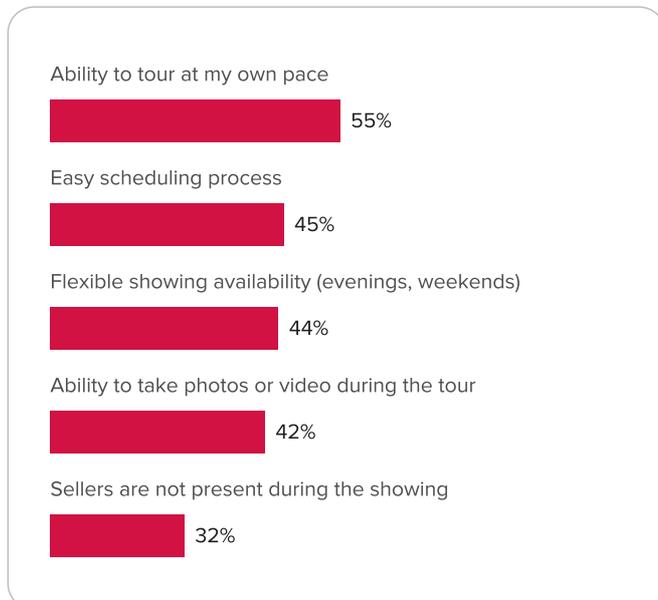
Professional photography is non-negotiable. Work with your agent to create a detailed, accurate property description that gives buyers reasons to visit. In Tampa's current market, properties that sit start to lose favor quickly—price to generate activity in the first few weeks.

Key Finding #4:

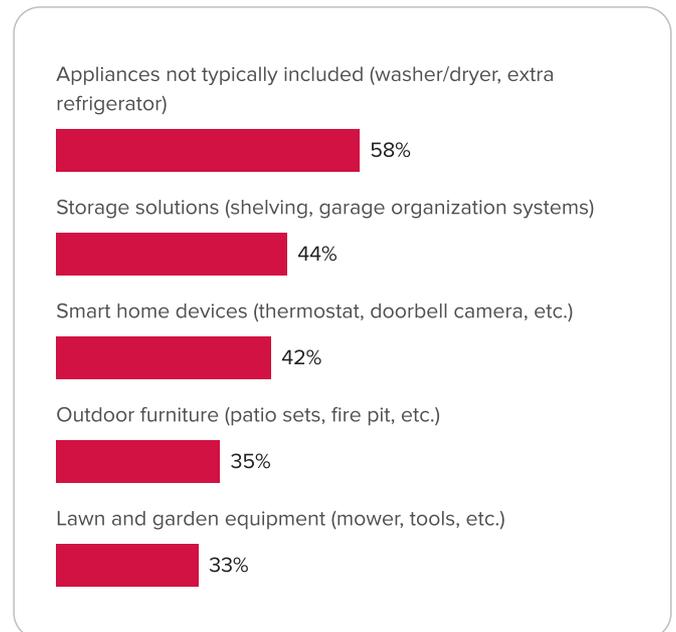
Buyers Prefer to Tour Without Sellers Present

Tampa buyers are notably more likely to want sellers absent during showings—32% express this preference, the highest among all three markets. The ability to tour at their own pace matters to 55%, and easy scheduling ranks at 45%.

What matters most to you when touring a home?



Which of the following items, if left behind by the seller as part of the sale, would positively influence your decision to buy?



Seller Strategy:

Plan to leave during all showings. In a market where buyers are taking their time to decide, they need space to envision themselves in your home. If you have appliances you're willing to include, mention it in the listing—58% of Tampa buyers say this would positively influence their decision.

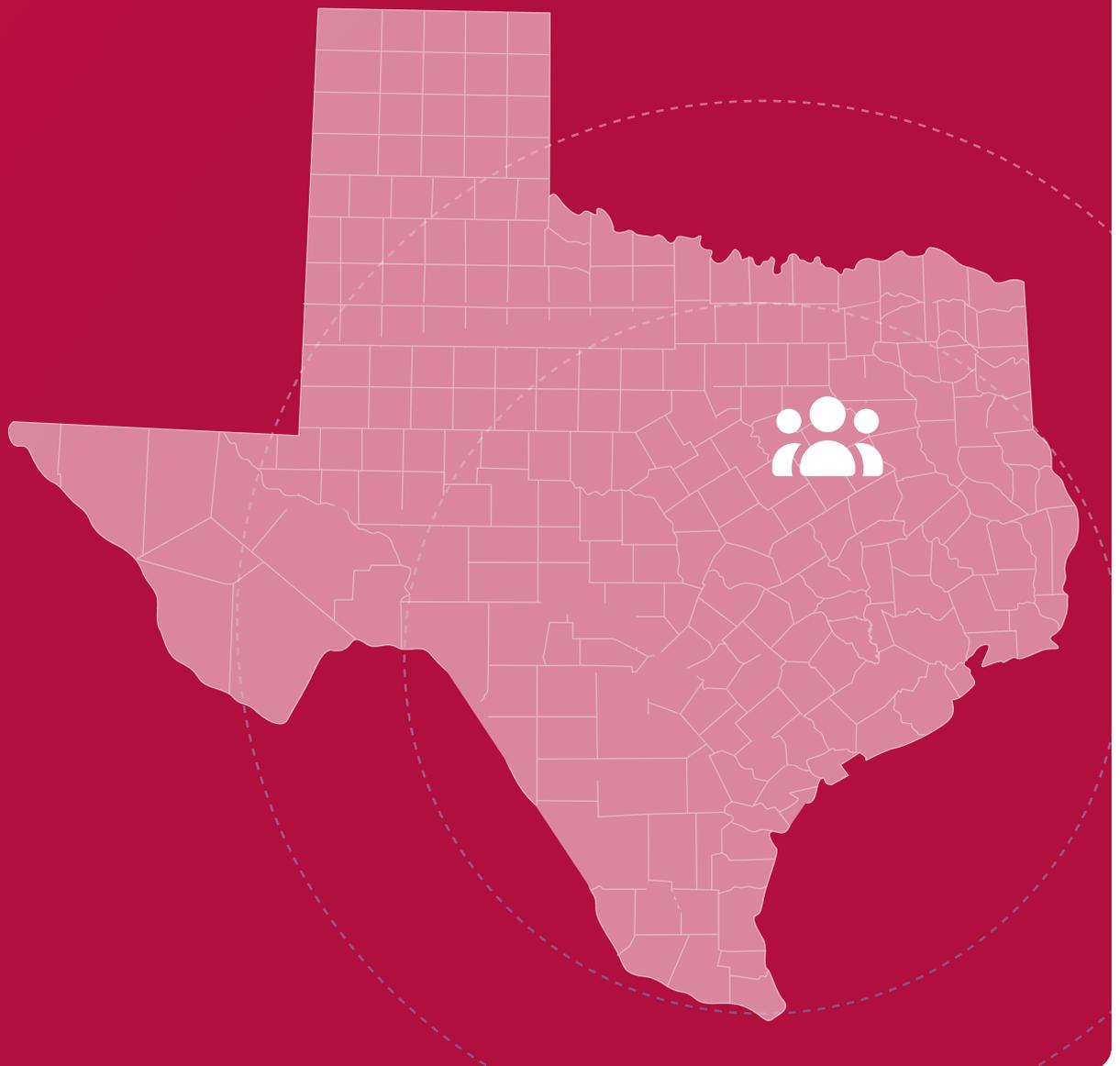
Dallas

300

prospective buyers

Market Context

The Dallas housing market is experiencing a cooling trend, with the average home value at \$300,462—down 4.1% year-over-year according to Zillow's Home Value Index. Homes typically go pending in approximately 48 days, indicating moderate buyer activity. This price decline reflects broader market adjustments as the region moves away from the rapid appreciation seen in recent years. For buyers, the current conditions may present opportunities to negotiate, while sellers should prepare for longer listing periods and more competitive pricing expectations.

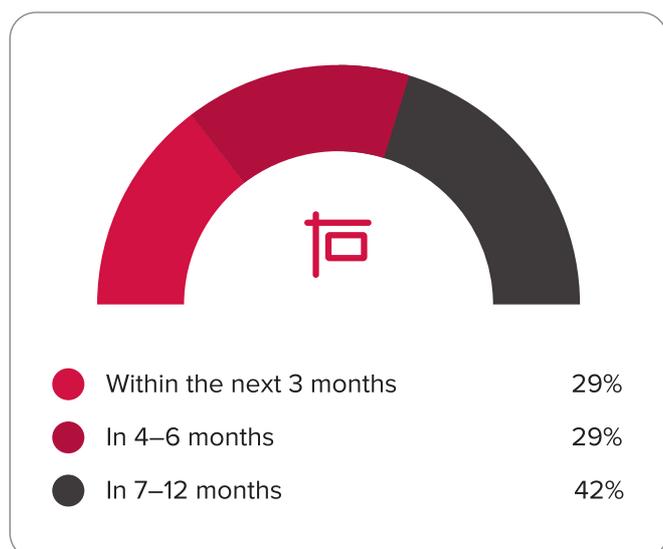


Key Finding #1:

Motivated Buyers Face Unprecedented Selection

Dallas buyers show urgency: **58% plan to purchase within six months**, with 29% targeting the next three months. This is the highest short-term buying intent among all three markets. Yet they're shopping in a market with unprecedented selection—active listings have surged compared to last year.

When are you planning to purchase a home for personal use?



Seller Strategy:

Dallas buyers are serious but not desperate. With so many options available, your home needs to stand out on features, condition, and price. Don't assume urgency will override selectivity—these buyers will keep looking until they find the right fit.

Key Finding #2:

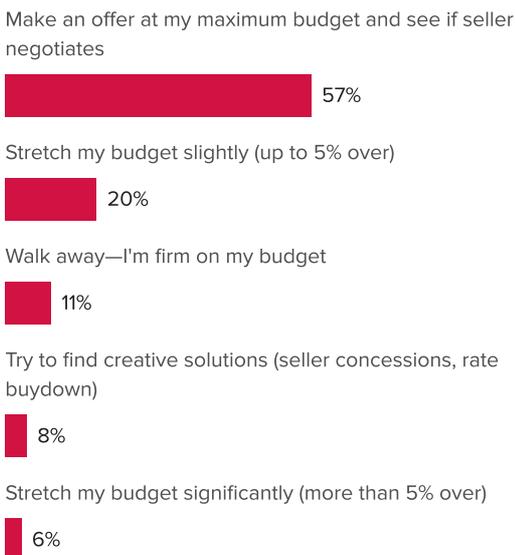
Buyers Will Compete for the Right Home

Despite price softening in the market, **64% of Dallas buyers say they would pay above asking price for the right home**—the highest rate among all three metros. When a home exceeds their budget, 57% of buyers would make an offer at their maximum and negotiate, while 20% would stretch their budget up to 5% over.

In today's market, would you be willing to pay above asking price for the right home?



If a home you loved was priced slightly above your budget, what would you do?



Seller Strategy:

Dallas buyers are willing to compete for the right property. If your home is priced appropriately and shows well, you may still generate strong interest despite the broader market slowdown. This is a market where the beauty contest strategy can pay off—if you're not the best-priced home, be the most beautiful.

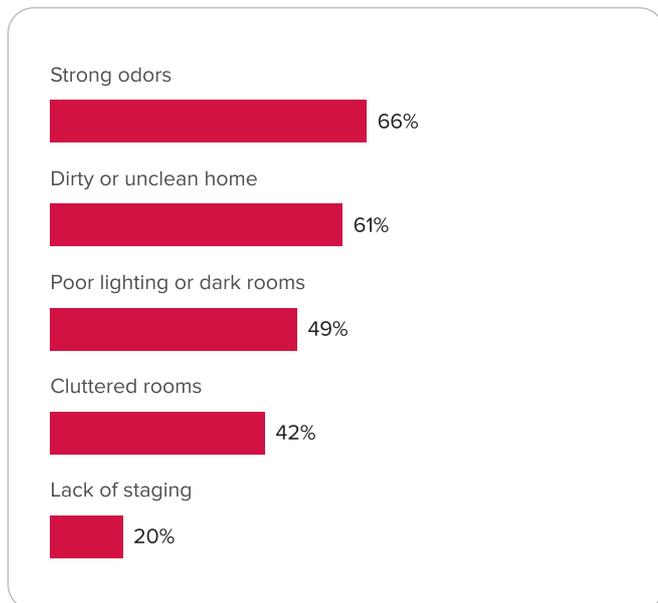


Key Finding #3:

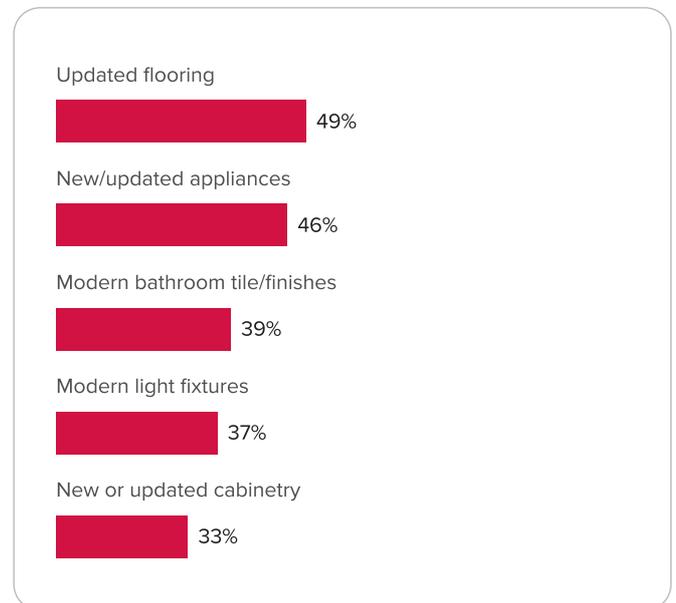
Dark Rooms and Poor Lighting Hurt More in Dallas

Dallas buyers cite strong odors (66%) and dirty homes (61%) as top concerns during showings—consistent with other markets. But Dallas stands out for sensitivity to poor lighting: 49% say dark rooms negatively influence their opinion, the highest rate among all three metros.

When viewing homes, which of the following issues are most likely to influence your opinion of a home?



Which cosmetic or design features have the biggest impact on whether a home is appealing to you?



Seller Strategy:

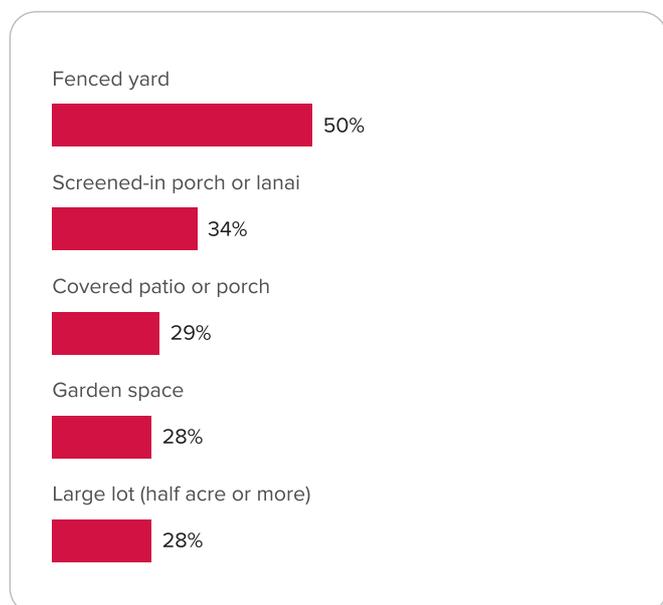
Maximize natural light before showings: open all blinds and curtains, turn on every light, and consider adding lamps in dim corners. If your home has inherently dark rooms, updated light fixtures can make a meaningful difference. Dallas buyers notice lighting more than their counterparts in other markets.

Key Finding #4:

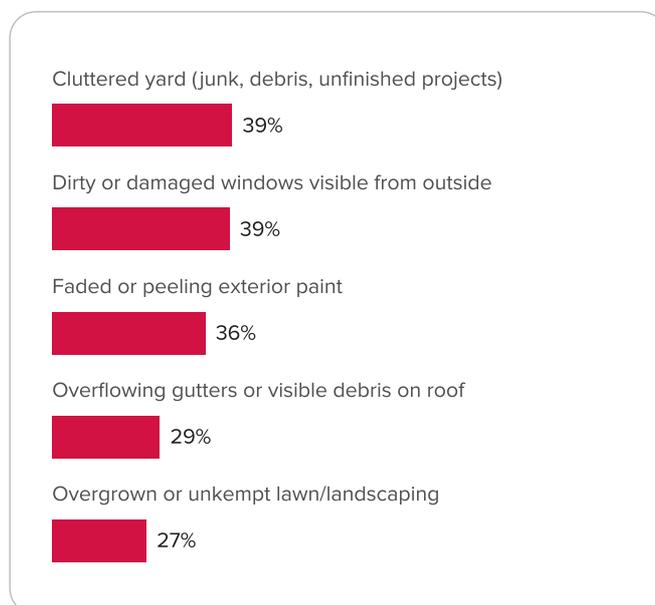
Covered Patios and Fenced Yards Drive Outdoor Appeal

Dallas outdoor priorities align with Texas living: **fenced yards top the list at 50%**, followed by covered patio or porch (34%) and low-maintenance landscaping (29%)—the highest rate among all three markets, likely reflecting the region's hot summers and water-conscious approach to yards.

Which outdoor features and amenities are you prioritizing most?



Which outdoor issues would make you less likely to make an offer on a home?



Seller Strategy:

Stage your outdoor spaces for entertaining. Clean and repair any outdoor lighting—Dallas buyers notice it more than other markets (25% cite broken outdoor lighting as a negative). With Texas summers, a functional covered patio is a major selling point; make sure it shows well in photos and in person.

Key Finding #5:

Timeline Flexibility Sets Dallas Apart

When it comes to available concessions, **Dallas buyers are most likely to want sellers to cover closing costs (43%) and complete repairs before closing (41%)**. Move-in timeline flexibility matters to 34%—the highest among all three markets—suggesting many Dallas buyers are coordinating complex relocations or managing existing property sales.

Which seller action(s) would make you most likely to make an offer?



If a home inspection revealed moderate issues, which seller response would you prefer?



Seller Strategy:

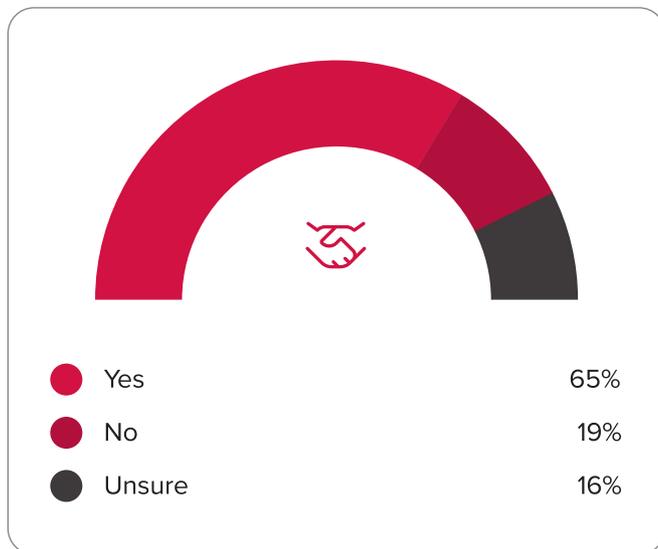
Flexibility on closing timeline can be a significant differentiator in Dallas. If you're able to accommodate buyer timing needs—whether fast closes or extended timelines—mention it in your listing. Pre-inspection before listing allows you to address issues proactively or price accordingly.

Key Finding #6:

Dallas Buyers Know They Have Leverage

Dallas buyers are most confident in their position: **65% believe they have significant negotiating power, compared to 62% in Atlanta and Tampa.** Only 16% are unsure about their leverage. This confidence reflects the market data—homes are sitting longer and price cuts are common.

Do you feel you have significant negotiating power as a buyer in today's market?



Which of the following would be most likely to cause you to hesitate before making an offer?



Seller Strategy:

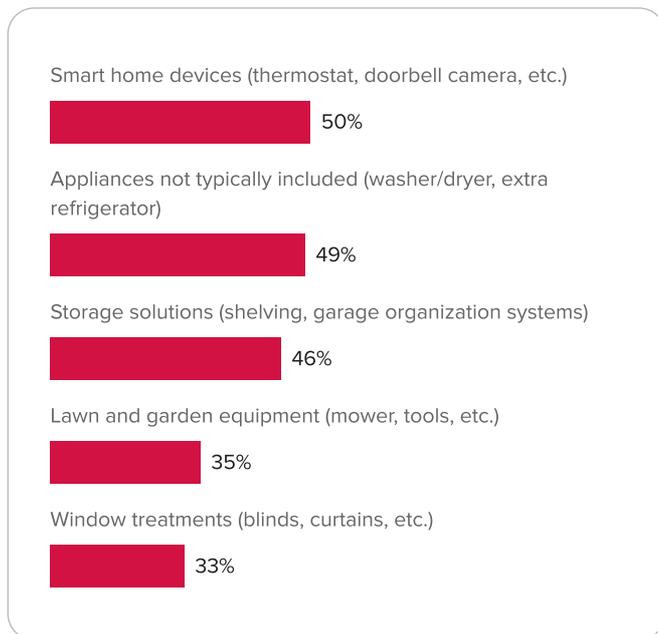
With nearly two-thirds of Dallas buyers confident they hold negotiating power, overpricing or holding firm on list price is likely to backfire. Price competitively from day one and be prepared to negotiate — buyers in this market expect it. If your home has been sitting, a proactive price reduction signals you're realistic, which is more likely to attract serious offers than waiting buyers out.

Key Finding #7:

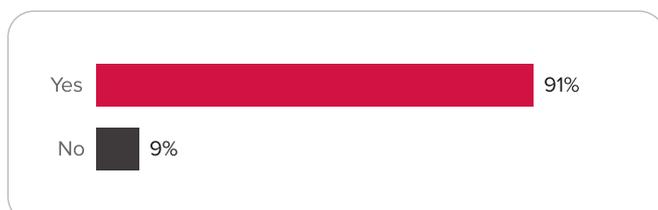
Smart Home Features Build Trust and Value

Dallas buyers respond strongly to extras that signal a well-maintained, move-in-ready home. Half say smart home devices like thermostats and doorbell cameras would positively influence their decision, and nearly as many (49%) value appliances not typically included in the sale. But the biggest trust signal isn't a gadget — it's documentation. **A striking 91% of buyers say a detailed seller's disclosure with repair dates, warranties, and records makes them more confident in the home.**

Which of the following items, if left behind by the seller as part of the sale, would positively influence your decision to buy?



Does a seller's disclosure with detailed explanations (e.g., dates of repairs, documentation, warranties) make you more confident in the home?



Seller Strategy:

If you've invested in smart home technology, consider leaving it as part of the sale and highlighting it in marketing. Compile comprehensive documentation on your home's major systems, repairs, and warranties. In a market where buyers have many options, trust and transparency can be the deciding factor.

Selling Successfully in Today's Market

The shift toward balanced conditions across Atlanta, Tampa, and Dallas doesn't mean selling is impossible—it means selling successfully requires strategy, preparation, and realistic expectations.

The data from 900 prospective buyers points to clear themes sellers should embrace:

Universal Priorities Across All Three Markets:



Win the pricing war or win the beauty contest.

Buyers are comparing your listing to abundant alternatives. Either be the best-priced home in your category, or invest in making your property so compelling that buyers will stretch their budgets. Trying to be somewhere in the middle often means sitting on the market.



Invest in modern light fixtures.

Odors and uncleanliness derail more deals than dated finishes. Deep cleaning, odor elimination, and exterior maintenance deliver outsized returns compared to major renovations.



Provide comprehensive documentation.

90% of buyers across all three markets say detailed disclosures increase their confidence. Go beyond minimum requirements with repair receipts, warranty information, and maintenance records.



Prepare for negotiation.

Seller concessions have become common in these markets. Think ahead of time about what you're willing to offer—closing cost assistance, repairs, home warranties, or timeline flexibility.



Make showing easy.

Vacate during showings, keep your schedule flexible, and let buyers explore at their own pace. Poor listing photos and vague descriptions cost you showings before they even begin.

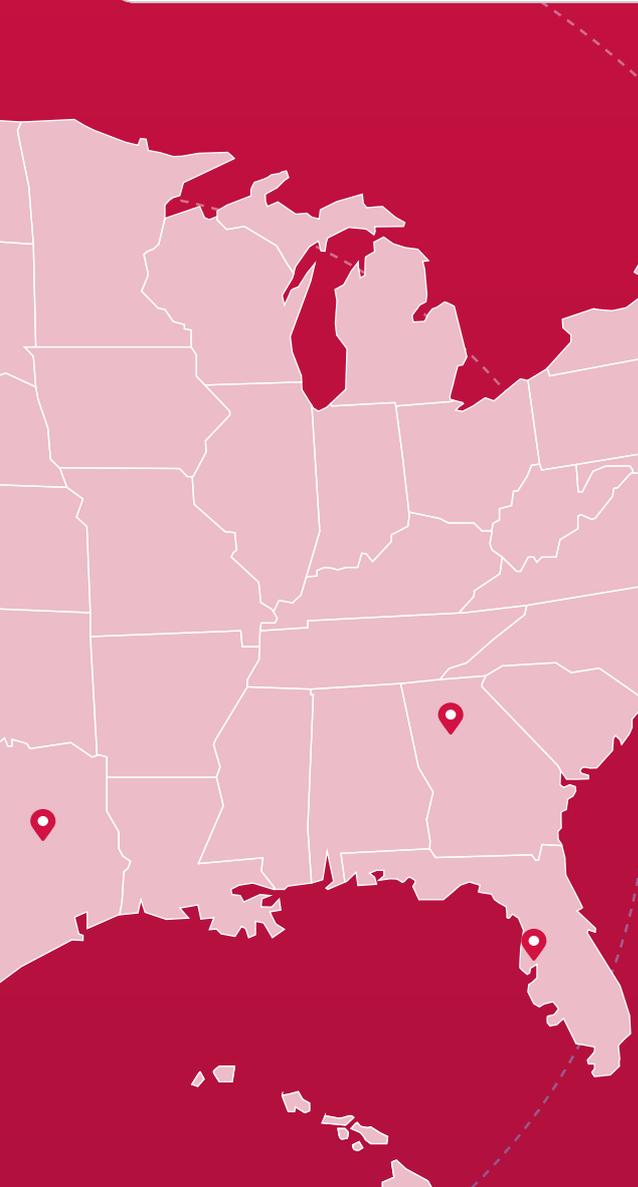


Work with an experienced agent.

Across all three markets, 87-88% of buyers plan to work with an agent. Your listing agent's expertise in pricing, presentation, and negotiation matters more than ever in a competitive environment.

Preparing for Today's Buyer

Buyers in Atlanta, Tampa, and Dallas are ready to purchase—but they're more selective, more informed, and more willing to negotiate than at any point in recent memory. Sellers who adapt to this reality by pricing correctly, presenting their homes professionally, and meeting buyers where they are will succeed. Those who cling to 2021-2022 expectations will watch their listings sit while better-prepared competitors close deals.



Methodology

Mark Spain Real Estate conducted an online survey of 900 people who indicated they are actively planning to purchase a home for personal use within the next 12 months. Respondents were evenly distributed across three metro areas: 300 in Atlanta, 300 in Tampa, and 300 in Dallas. The survey was fielded in January 2026.

All percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Some questions allowed respondents to select multiple answers (e.g., "select all that apply" or "select up to three"), which is why totals for certain questions may exceed 100%.



About **MARKSPAIN** REAL ESTATE

Mark Spain Real Estate is a residential real estate brokerage serving homeowners across the Southeast and Texas. Founded in 2016, the company has helped thousands of families buy and sell homes through both traditional listings and its signature Guaranteed Offer program, which connects sellers with multiple competitive cash offers from a network of pre-vetted investors.

Our commitment is to serve as trusted advisors who present all available options, simplify complex processes, and deliver exceptional value. Whether you're exploring a cash offer for speed and convenience or listing on the market to maximize your return, Mark Spain Real Estate agents guide you through every step with specialized expertise and genuine care for your goals.

For more information, visit markspain.com or contact us to schedule a consultation.

