

Open House Etiquette

What to bring, what to ask, what to skip — and how to read a house in forty minutes without falling in love with the wrong one.

Before you walk in

- ☐ Know your number. Have a written pre-approval, not a pre-qualification, and know the monthly payment you will actually accept.
- ☐ Photograph the listing so you can compare, not recall. Twenty phone photos beat memory.
- ☐ Bring a tape measure, a phone charger (test the outlets), and a folded floor-plan printout.
- ☐ Decide your three non-negotiables and your two nice-to-haves before you see anything.
- ☐ Arrive ten minutes early and drive the street once before you park.

At the door

- ☐ Sign in politely, then ask the agent one question: how long has it been listed, and has the price changed?
- ☐ Do not let an agent lead the tour. Say you would like a few minutes alone first — that is normal and expected.
- ☐ Open every window, every cabinet, every closet. A stuck window tells you more than a granite counter.
- ☐ Ask to see the utility bills and the age of the roof, HVAC and water heater.
- ☐ On the Gulf Coast, ask specifically about flood zone, elevation certificate, and whether the seller carries flood insurance.

What not to do

- ☐ Do not discuss your budget, timeline, or motivation with the listing agent. They work for the seller.
- ☐ Do not bring a large group. Two decision-makers is ideal; a crowd clouds judgment and annoys other visitors.
- ☐ Do not critique the décor out loud. It is the seller's home, not yours, and it sets the tone for the visit.
- ☐ Do not sign anything on the spot, and do not hand over a blank check.
- ☐ Do not visit twice in the same week without sleeping on it once.

Read the house, not the staging

Staging hides three things reliably: smell, sound, and storage. Turn the faucets on and listen for pressure and drain noise. Stand in the largest bedroom with the windows closed and notice what you hear. Then count

hanging space in the closets and check whether the bedroom furniture is oversized — a king bed in a 10×10 room is a design trick, not a fact.

Water is the Alabama Gulf Coast question. Look for staining under sinks, a sump pump, fresh caulk in the shower pan, and a dehumidifier running in a closed home. Ask what the home has been through — a hurricane history is not a dealbreaker, but it should be priced and insured knowingly.

Questions worth asking the listing agent

Why are they selling?	The answer shapes your offer more than the list price does.
What offers have already been turned down?	Tells you the real floor, not the printed one.
What updates were done with permits?	Unpermitted work becomes your problem at resale.
What is the HOA fee and what does it cover?	Beach condos vary enormously; ask for the minutes.
How soon can they close?	Flexibility on dates is often worth more than a few thousand dollars.

After you leave

- ☐ Write your notes within fifteen minutes, before the next house overwrites them.
- ☐ Score it 1-5 on location, condition, and price — separately. A home can win two and lose one.
- ☐ If you would not be disappointed to lose it, do not offer on it.
- ☐ Send your agent one clear instruction, not three.

Work with Jennifer

Jennifer Lynn Sage is a Broker with Call It Closed International Realty serving Fairhope, Point Clear, Daphne, Spanish Fort, Orange Beach, Gulf Shores, Ono Island and the wider Alabama Gulf Coast. Call or text 251.751.3839, or email jennifer.sage@callitclosed.com, for a no-pressure conversation about buying, selling or investing on the coast.