

LAMORINDA

Home Buyer's Checklist

Your Complete Guide to Buying in Lafayette, Moraga & Orinda

STEP 1: GET PRE-APPROVED (Do This First!)

In Lamorinda's competitive market, sellers often won't consider offers without pre-approval. Start here.

Check credit scores (aim for 720+ for best rates)

Gather documents: 2 years tax returns, W-2s, pay stubs, bank statements

Calculate debt-to-income ratio (should be under 43%)

- Get pre-approved by 2-3 lenders to compare rates
- Understand the difference: pre-qualification vs pre-approval
- Ask about: jumbo loan requirements (most Lamorinda homes exceed conforming limits)
- Lock in rate timing strategy with your lender

Lamorinda-Specific Financing Notes:

- Most homes here exceed \$1.5M, requiring jumbo loans with different requirements
- Down payments typically 20%+ for jumbo; some lenders require 25%
- Some hills properties may have limitations on certain loan types
- Cash offers common—discuss competitiveness strategies with your agent

STEP 2: UNDERSTAND LAMORINDA-SPECIFIC CONCERNS

Hills & Terrain

- Understand grading and drainage issues common in hillside homes
- Check for retaining wall conditions and history
- Assess driveway steepness and winter weather impact
- Verify structural engineering if home is on slope
- Check soil stability reports if available

Older Homes (Many Built 1950s-1980s)

- Original plumbing (galvanized pipes may need replacement)
- Electrical panel age and capacity (100 amp may not support modern needs)
- Foundation type and condition (many have post-and-pier or raised)
- Insulation adequacy (many older homes lack proper insulation)
- Seismic retrofitting status

Septic vs. Sewer — Critical for Lamorinda

- Determine if property is on septic or public sewer
- If septic: Get septic inspection (separate from home inspection)
- If septic: Verify tank size is adequate for home (3+ bedrooms need larger)
- If septic: Check when last pumped and serviced
- If septic: Understand leach field location and condition
- If septic: Budget \$20K-\$50K+ for potential replacement

Fire Zones & Wildfire Risk

- Check if property is in State Responsibility Area (SRA) or fire hazard zone
- Verify fire insurance availability and cost (some areas difficult to insure)
- Assess defensible space around property
- Check for fire-resistant roofing, vents, and siding
- Review Moraga-Orinda Fire District or ConFire requirements
- Understand evacuation routes

& p Important: Fire insurance has become extremely expensive or unavailable in some hillside areas. Research this BEFORE making an offer.

📌 STEP 3: INSPECTIONS — LAMORINDA EDITION

Standard inspections plus Lamorinda-specific concerns. Budget \$1,500-\$3,000+ for comprehensive inspections.

Essential Inspections

- General home inspection (3-4 hours for older/larger homes)
- Pest/termite inspection (WDI/WDO report)
- Roof inspection (especially for shake or tile roofs common here)
- Sewer lateral inspection (camera scope)—CRITICAL for older homes
- Chimney inspection if wood-burning fireplace

Recommended Additional Inspections

- Foundation/structural engineer (if hillside or concerns noted)
- Pool/spa inspection (common in Lamorinda)
- Septic inspection (if applicable)
- Geological/soils report (for hillside properties)
- Radon testing (elevated levels found in some areas)
- HVAC inspection (especially if system is 15+ years old)

What to Look For in Lamorinda Inspections

- Water intrusion signs in basements and lower levels
- Evidence of settling or movement (cracked stucco, sticky doors)
- Condition of wood decks and exterior wood (dry rot common)
- Hot tub and pool equipment age and condition

- Irrigation and landscaping water usage

📅 STEP 4: TIMELINE FOR COMPETITIVE MARKET

Lamorinda moves fast. Well-priced homes often receive multiple offers within days. Here's what to expect:

Pre-Approval	1-2 weeks	Get finances in order before you start looking
Home Search	2-8 weeks	Depends on inventory and your flexibility
Make Offer	1-3 days	Move quickly when you find "the one"
Under Contract	21-30 days	Inspections, appraisal, loan processing
Closing	1 day	Sign papers, get keys!

Competitive Offer Strategies

- Get fully underwritten pre-approval (stronger than standard)
- Write a personal letter to sellers (still works in Lamorinda!)
- Consider removing/shortening contingencies strategically
- Have funds ready for appraisal gap coverage
- Be flexible on closing date and rent-back
- Respond quickly—hours matter in multiple offer situations

📅 STEP 5: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR AGENT

About the Property

- How long has it been on market? Any price reductions?
- Are there any offers? What's the offer deadline?
- Why are the sellers moving?
- What's included vs. excluded in the sale?
- Any known issues or recent repairs?
- What are the HOA fees and rules? (if applicable)
- Property tax amount and any special assessments?

About the Neighborhood

- Which school attendance area is this property in?
- What's the commute like to SF/Oakland at rush hour?
- Any development planned nearby?
- How's parking during school drop-off/pickup? (relevant for many areas)
- Wildlife issues? (deer, turkeys, occasional mountain lions)

About the Offer Process

- What's the likely competition level?
- What terms would make our offer stand out?
-

Should we do pre-inspections before offering?

What's your recommended offer strategy?

QUICK REFERENCE: LAMORINDA AT A GLANCE

Lafayette

Most walkable, BART access
Median: \$2.0M-\$2.8M

Moraga

Quieter, larger lots
Median: \$1.8M-\$2.4M

Orinda

Classic hills, BART access
Median: \$2.2M-\$3.0M+

School District

Acalanes Union HSD
Top-rated public schools

%↑ YOUR NOTES

Vlatka Bathgate

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Over 22 years serving Lamorinda families

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Ready to Start Your Search?

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