THE BESSON GROUP BY THE CREEGAN TEAM · COMPASS

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Buying in South Florida From Out of State

The questions to ask before you wire a deposit on a home you have not stood in.

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Boca Raton · Delray Beach · Palm Beach · Fort Lauderdale · Miami
English · Español · Polski | License #SL3624380

WHAT IS IN HERE

Contents

> This is a list of questions, not a list of answers. Deposit terms, financing, tax treatment and closing procedure vary by building, by lender, by county and by your own situation. I am a real estate agent, not an attorney or a tax advisor. What I can do is make sure you ask the right things early, and work alongside the professionals you choose.

I have made this move myself. More than once.

I grew up in Poland. I lived in Spain. I spent time throughout Scandinavia, Paris and Germany before crossing the Atlantic. In the United States I have called Miami, Aventura, Edgewater, Fort Lauderdale, Las Vegas, Orange County and West Palm Beach home before settling in South Florida for good.

So I know what it is to choose a home in a city you do not know yet. To compare places you have never stood in. To make a very large decision from a laptop, on a different time zone, with a stack of PDFs and a sales agent who is pleasant and is not working for you.

I got some of it wrong before I got it right. This guide is the list of things I wish someone had handed me.

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Most of my clients have never sat across a desk from me.

They live in New York, New Jersey, California, Texas, Canada, Colombia, Mexico and further. They buy new construction and they buy resale. Most fly in once, near the end, for the two or three properties genuinely in contention.

You fly in for the finalists, not the maybes.

The five markets, and how they actually differ

Most people arrive with one city in mind and buy in another. These are differences of geography, price and building stock — the things you cannot see from a listing photo. Which one fits is a conversation, not a formula.

Boca Raton

Low-rise and mid-rise, strong country-club and gated inventory, a walkable downtown, and a large share of the region's newer boutique condo product. Reliable rental demand. Roughly 50 minutes to Miami, 25 to Palm Beach.

Delray Beach

Smaller scale, a dense restaurant and gallery strip on Atlantic Avenue, more single-family and townhouse stock, fewer high-rises. Prices per square foot typically below Boca for comparable finish.

West Palm Beach & Palm Beach

The widest spread on this list — from new downtown towers to historic estates across the bridge. Heavy financial-sector relocation in recent years. Palm Beach island itself is a separate market with its own rules and its own pricing.

Fort Lauderdale

Waterfront and boating inventory, a deep pre-construction pipeline, and generally more square footage for the money than Miami. Airport access is the best in the region for frequent flyers.

Miami & Hallandale / Sunny Isles

The most international market, the tallest buildings, the highest price ceiling and the widest range of quality. Also where the difference between a good and a poor pre-construction contract is largest.

How to choose

Start from how you will actually use it — full time, seasonal, or rented. Then airport, then commute, then building type. Choosing a city first and a lifestyle second is the most common expensive mistake I see.

How buying remotely actually works

There is no mystery to it. There is just a process, and most agents have never built one — which is why remote buyers end up doing the flying.

01 **A real conversation first**

A phone call — no camera, no screen sharing. Budget, timeline, and the three things you will not compromise on. This is also where we work out whether new construction or resale fits how you want to live — people often arrive certain about one and leave with the other.

02 **A shortlist, with reasons**

Not a portal link with forty properties. A short list with a written note on each explaining why it made the cut and what its weak point is. Every property has a weak point. An agent who cannot name it has not looked hard enough.

03 **Live video tours**

I walk the property on FaceTime or Zoom while you watch, and you tell me where to point the camera. You hear the road noise. You see the view from the actual unit rather than the rendering, and the finish quality up close. If the connection at the property is too weak to hold a live call, I record the walkthrough instead and send it the same day with my notes.

04 **Written offer and negotiation**

Digital signatures throughout. You get the reasoning behind each position, not just the number.

05 **Closing without a flight**

Inspections, appraisal, title and walkthrough coordinated on the ground, with regular video updates. Remote closing options exist; which apply depends on your lender and title company, and we confirm that early rather than late.

04 · SEQUENCING

Your timeline, week by week

Every transaction differs, and Florida closings can run faster or slower than this. Treat it as the shape of the thing, not a promise.

WEEK 0

The call

Budget, timeline, non-negotiables, and whether you are financing. If you are, the lender conversation starts this week — not later. Financing is the single most common source of delay.

WEEKS 1–2

Shortlist and first tours

I preview in person and send you a short list with notes. Live video tours on the ones that survive. Expect to reject most of them; that is the point.

WEEKS 2–4

Narrow to finalists

Deeper diligence on two or three: association documents, budgets, assessment history, comparable sales, and for pre-construction, the developer and the contract.

WEEK 4–5

Your visit, if you want one

One trip, two or three properties, decisions made in daylight rather than under time pressure.

WEEK 5

Offer and negotiation

Written offer, digital signatures, negotiation with reasoning attached. On acceptance, the deposit and inspection clocks start.

WEEKS 5–7

Inspection and diligence period

Inspection, association document review, and for condos the reserve and assessment picture. This is the window in which you can still walk away — use it properly.

WEEKS 7–10

Appraisal, underwriting, title

Mostly waiting, punctuated by document requests. Answer them the day they arrive; that is genuinely what keeps a closing on schedule.

WEEK 10–12

Walkthrough and closing

I do the walkthrough on video with you. Remote closing where available. Keys, and a set of photographs of everything.

What you sign, and who is actually working for you

This part changed recently and it confuses almost everybody, so here it is plainly.

You now sign a written agreement before touring

Buyers in the United States generally sign a written buyer-representation agreement with their agent before being shown properties. It sets out what the agent will do, for how long, and how they are paid. Read it. Ask what the term is and how you end it if you are not happy. Any agent who is uncomfortable with that question has answered it.

Compensation is negotiable, and it is disclosed

This gets explained too simply, so here is the honest version. In most transactions the seller offers to pay the buyer's agent, and in those cases it costs you nothing directly. That is common — it is not guaranteed. Sometimes the seller offers less than the agreed fee and the difference falls to you. Occasionally there is no offer at all. It is negotiable in every case.

Get it in writing before you view a single property: what the fee is, and who is expected to pay it. And ask your agent to tell you the moment a listing appears where any part of it may fall to you — before you get attached to the place.

A sales gallery agent represents the building

This is the one that costs out-of-state buyers the most. If you walk into a pre-construction sales gallery alone, the person greeting you works for the developer. They may be excellent. They are not negotiating on your behalf. In most cases you must have your agent register with you on your first visit, or you can lose the right to be represented at that project entirely.

> **Practical rule:** before you visit any sales gallery, tell your agent. One email, sent in advance, protects your representation for that building. After the visit is usually too late.

Twelve questions to ask before you deposit

A sales gallery is staffed by people who represent the building. They are usually pleasant and often genuinely knowledgeable. They are not working for you. These are the questions that change decisions.

01 **What is the full deposit schedule?**

How much at contract, how much at each milestone, and by what dates. Get it in writing before you fall in love with a floor plan.

02 **Where is my deposit held, and under what terms?**

Ask specifically what happens if the project is delayed, redesigned, or does not proceed. Have your attorney read the answer, not just hear it.

03 **What has this developer delivered before?**

Names of completed projects, promised dates versus actual dates. A developer with a clean record will happily tell you. Hesitation is information.

04 **How was the projected HOA figure calculated?**

Projections are estimates, and estimates on a building that does not exist yet are frequently optimistic. Ask what is included and what is billed separately.

05 **What are the rental rules?**

Minimum lease terms, how many times per year, whether short-term rental is permitted at all. If any part of your plan involves renting, this is not optional.

06 **What is planned on the surrounding parcels?**

The most expensive surprise in pre-construction is a view that disappears. Ask what is zoned, what is approved, and what is merely rumoured.

06 · NEW CONSTRUCTION, PART TWO

01 **Which views are contractually protected, and which are not?**

"Protected" and "unlikely to change" are different sentences. Ask which one applies.

02 **How does this compare on price per square foot to the genuinely competing projects?**

Not to the market average. To the two or three buildings you would otherwise consider.

03 **What exactly is included in the delivered unit?**

Appliances, closets, window treatments, flooring in every room. Renderings routinely show items that are upgrades.

04 **What is the assignment policy?**

If your circumstances change before delivery, can you transfer the contract? At what cost, and with whose approval?

05 **What happens if delivery is late?**

Every large project can slip. What the contract says about it is the part that matters.

06 **Who represents me in this transaction?**

Walk into a sales gallery unrepresented and the answer may be nobody. Ask before you sign anything, including a registration card.

> Buying directly from a sales gallery is an option. Buying strategically is the goal.
> The difference is usually four or five of the questions above.

The things nobody tells you until you already own it

If you are buying from another state, this is the page with the highest value in the guide. None of it is obvious from a listing, and all of it affects what the property actually costs you to hold.

Insurance is a real line item, not a footnote

Property insurance in coastal Florida has moved significantly in recent years, and premiums vary enormously between buildings that look identical from the street. Roof age, construction type, elevation, distance to water and impact-rated windows all move the number. **Get an insurance quote on the specific property before your inspection period ends** — not after.

Flood zone is separate from insurance, and separate from the price

Flood coverage is generally a separate policy from your homeowner or condo policy. Ask which flood zone the property sits in, whether there is an elevation certificate, and what the current flood premium is for that exact unit or address.

Condo law changed, and it changed the maths

Following the Surfside collapse, Florida introduced significantly stricter requirements around structural inspections and reserve funding for many condominium buildings. In practice this has meant new inspections, newly funded reserves, and in some buildings large special assessments. **For any condo, ask for the milestone inspection status, the structural reserve study, the current reserve balance, and every assessment levied or discussed in the last five years.** Requirements and deadlines vary by building age, height and location, so confirm what applies to your specific building with the association and your attorney.

Impact windows and the building envelope

Impact-rated windows and doors are standard in newer construction and frequently absent in older stock. They affect insurance, noise and comfort. In a resale, ask when they were installed and whether the permits were closed — unpermitted work is a genuine closing problem, not a technicality.

Property taxes do not stay where the seller left them

The tax figure shown on a listing usually reflects the current owner's situation, which may include exemptions or caps that will not transfer to you. Ask your agent and your CPA what the likely assessed figure is *for you* after purchase. Buyers from other states are caught by this more often than any other single item.

HOA and condo association approval

Many buildings require association approval before closing, sometimes including an interview and an application fee. Timelines vary and can be weeks. Build it into your schedule at offer stage rather than discovering it at week nine.

Hurricane season is a calendar item

Insurance binding is commonly restricted while a named storm is in the forecast cone. If you are closing between June and November, ask your lender and insurer how that affects your timeline before you set a closing date.

> None of this is a reason not to buy here. It is a reason to know the holding cost before you commit, rather than a year after.

What to check on a building that already exists

Resale trades uncertainty for certainty. You see the actual property rather than a rendering, you know the real monthly figure rather than a projection, and you move on your timeline. In exchange, you take on the building's history.

- [ ] The reserve study, and how well funded the reserves actually are
- [ ] Every special assessment in the past five years, and any pending or under discussion
- [ ] Milestone or structural inspection status, and any work scheduled as a result
- [ ] Age and remaining life of roof, elevators, plumbing risers and HVAC
- [ ] Insurance history for the building and what has happened to the premium recently
- [ ] Pending litigation involving the association
- [ ] Owner-occupancy versus rental ratio, which can affect your financing
- [ ] Board approval requirements, timelines and interview practices
- [ ] What the monthly fee covers, and what it does not
- [ ] Whether past renovation work in the unit was permitted and closed

> Ask for these documents early rather than during the inspection window. A seller or association slow to produce them is telling you something worth hearing.

09 · PRINT THIS ONE

The video tour checklist

Send this to whoever is touring on your behalf. A good remote tour is not a walkthrough — it is an interrogation of the property, and you are directing it.

- [ ] Stand still at the front door for thirty seconds and let me listen
- [ ] Open a window. What do I hear from the road, the pool deck, the neighbours?
- [ ] Pan the full view slowly, then point the camera at the empty land beside it
- [ ] Show me the closets, the utility space, the garage — where photographers stop
- [ ] Show me ceiling height against your own head for scale
- [ ] Run the water. Check pressure and how long it takes to get hot
- [ ] Open and close the impact windows and doors — every one that moves
- [ ] Walk the common areas: lobby, gym, pool deck, elevators, mail room, trash
- [ ] Photograph the parking space and the walk from it to the front door
- [ ] Ask a resident in the elevator how they like living here, and send me their answer
- [ ] Step outside and film the walk to the nearest coffee, grocery and beach access
- [ ] Drive the route to the main road and time it

Ask these early, not two weeks before closing

These figures vary by property, by lender and by your circumstances, so this page gives you questions rather than numbers. Anyone quoting exact answers before knowing your situation is guessing.

Ask your lender

- What deposit and reserve requirements apply to this specific building?
- Does the building's owner-occupancy ratio or litigation status affect my financing?
- What documentation do you need, and how long does it realistically take?
- Can this transaction close remotely, and what does that require from your side?
- How does hurricane-season insurance binding affect my closing date?

Ask your attorney or title company

- What are the estimated closing costs on this transaction, itemised?
- What is required for a remote or mail-away closing in this county?
- Who reviews the condominium documents, and by when must I object?

Ask your CPA

- What will my property tax figure likely be after purchase, not the seller's?
- What are the tax and reporting implications for my situation?
- Does anything change if I rent the property, even occasionally?
- If I am not a US resident, what should be in place before closing rather than after?

What to line up before you start looking

A meaningful share of my clients buy from outside the United States. The process is the same one on page five. What differs is preparation — and the items below take longer than people expect, so start them early.

- [ ] Identity and source-of-funds documentation, in the form your bank and title company will actually accept
- [ ] A conversation with a lender who works with foreign nationals, before you shortlist
- [ ] A US attorney and a CPA familiar with cross-border purchases
- [ ] Clarity on how funds transfer, in what currency, and what the timing risk is
- [ ] Whether you hold personally or through an entity — decided before contract, not after
- [ ] How documents will be notarised or apostilled from your country
- [ ] Any withholding or reporting obligations that apply on a future sale, understood now

I speak English, Spanish and Polish, and I am comfortable running the entire relationship over video across time zones.

Six things that should make you pause

01 **"This price is only good today."**
Real opportunities survive a night's sleep and a call to your attorney.

02 **Vagueness about the deposit schedule**
The most important financial term in a pre-construction purchase should not require three follow-ups.

03 **"Don't worry about the HOA number, it always comes in lower."**
It frequently does not. Ask how it was calculated.

04 **Reluctance to name previous projects**
A developer with a good record leads with it.

05 **Pressure to sign anything at the sales gallery**
Including registration cards, which can affect who represents you.

06 **An agent who cannot tell you the property's weak point**
Every property has one. Not knowing it means not having looked.

The words people use without explaining them

Sales gallery — The developer's showroom for a pre-construction project, with models and finish samples. Staffed by people who represent the building, not you.

Pre-construction — Buying a unit before, or during, construction. You pay deposits over time and take delivery on completion.

Deposit schedule — The staged payments a pre-construction contract requires, tied to dates or construction milestones.

Assignment — Transferring your pre-construction contract to another buyer before closing. Often restricted, sometimes prohibited.

HOA / association fee — The recurring charge for shared building or community costs. In pre-construction it is a projection until the building operates.

Special assessment — A one-off charge levied by an association for work reserves do not cover. The number that surprises people.

Reserve study — An assessment of a building's major components and what should be set aside to replace them.

Milestone inspection — A structural inspection required for many Florida condominium buildings at certain ages, with follow-up work where deficiencies are found.

Impact windows — Hurricane-rated glazing. Affects insurance, noise and comfort.

Elevation certificate — A document recording a property's elevation relative to flood levels; used in flood insurance pricing.

Estoppel letter — An association's written statement of what is owed on a unit at closing.

Mail-away closing — Closing without attending in person, with documents executed remotely where permitted.

Buyer representation agreement — The written contract between you and your agent setting out scope, term and compensation.

Before you wire anything

- [ ] I have the full deposit schedule in writing, with dates
- [ ] My attorney has read the purchase contract, not summarised it
- [ ] I know where my deposit is held and what happens if the project stalls
- [ ] I have the developer's previous projects, promised versus actual delivery
- [ ] I know how the HOA projection was calculated and what it excludes
- [ ] I know the rental rules, in writing
- [ ] I know what is planned or zoned on the parcels around this building
- [ ] I have compared price per square foot against two genuinely competing projects
- [ ] I have an insurance quote for this specific property
- [ ] I know the flood zone and whether there is an elevation certificate
- [ ] For a condo: I have the milestone inspection status and reserve study
- [ ] I know what my property taxes will likely be, not the seller's
- [ ] I have seen a live video tour, directed by me, not a produced walkthrough
- [ ] I know exactly what is included in the delivered unit
- [ ] My lender has confirmed this specific building is financeable for me
- [ ] My CPA knows about this purchase
- [ ] I know who represents me in this transaction, in writing
- [ ] I have slept on it

NEXT STEP

If any of these questions made you uneasy, that is the point.

Bring me the building you are considering and I will work through this list with you. No obligation and no pressure — if South Florida is not right for you, I would rather you learn that on a call than after a purchase.

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