



BUYING OUR AUSSIE HOME



Once you have found your dream house Down Under the buying process couldn't be easier, writes **Karen Bleakley**

Having owned our own home in the UK for 10 years, it was strange moving into a rental when we landed in Australia. We were eager to explore suburbs and buy our own place again quickly. It was going to be the final piece of the puzzle that would help us put down roots, after a very unsettled time during the move. Seven months after arriving, we started house hunting seriously on www.realestate.com.au and www.domain.com.au.

In the listings you can see details of any upcoming inspection days – these are an open home where you can go along to view with other families. It's a great way to get a feel for what's on offer (even if you aren't in the market to buy a property straight away).

Our dream house took us by surprise. It was outside of our preferred search area, but moving a little further from the water got us a bigger plot, a newer house and a



Karen and son Reuben

pool, and we fell for it as soon as we stepped through the front door.

MAKING AN OFFER

Making an offer was easy; we just had to write down our terms on a letter template provided by the agent.

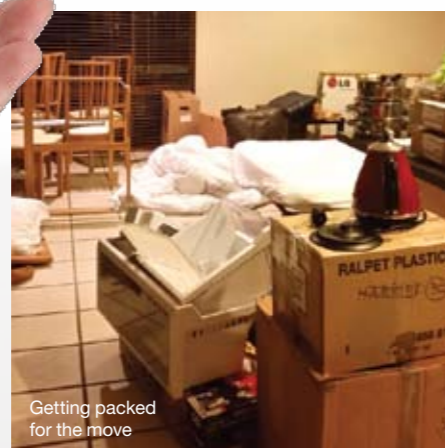
In the letter you have to state: the price

“MOVING FURTHER FROM THE WATER GOT US A BIGGER PLOT, A NEWER HOUSE AND A POOL”

you want to pay, how long you will take to sign off buildings and pest inspections (i.e. survey) and pool inspection (if it has one), how long to sign off your finance and how long until settlement.

You also need to say what initial deposit you will put down (this is just a token fee, not your real deposit – people told us A\$1000 is a pretty standard amount for this and you only pay it once your offer has been accepted).

The real estate agent selling the house advised us it was usual to put seven days



Getting packed for the move



The children (from left), Lincoln, Reuben and Evangeline, in their new home

down for the inspections and finance, and 21 days for settlement. We asked around and found this wasn't typical, and those were tight deadlines. It's worth remembering here that the real estate agent is representing the seller, and not the buyer!

We decided to put in 21 days for buildings and pest inspections, pool inspection and finance. We also added an electrical inspection (this isn't essential but as our friends had recently bought a house with electrical problems, we thought it was worth it).

At our solicitor's suggestion, we also included 'full council approval' (i.e. to check all planning conditions had been met by the property) as another condition of sale, and we put in 30 days for settlement. In hindsight, we completed on a Monday and we should really have looked at a calendar as it would have been better to have specified a Friday settlement date rather than just saying '30 days'.

CONTRACT STAGE

Once the offer letter was submitted by email, we were asked to put it on a full contract the next day. It still hadn't been accepted (even verbally) at this point, but apparently this is normal.

In addition to the deadlines, in the full contract we agreed to pay another small

deposit upon approval of finance. Within hours of e-mailing the scanned contract, we had our offer accepted.

As we were under contract, our mortgage broker advised us to get buildings insurance straight away as we were then responsible for the house. Some companies offer free cover during the contract phase, so shop around.

Our solicitor advised us to wait for the finance to be agreed before getting inspections done, just in case our finance fell through. This was an agonising two-week wait as it was the year end and the bank was busier than normal.

As soon as this came through, we booked the inspections. (Remember, if getting an electrical inspection, the power must be on at the property – empty houses tend to have the power switched off!)

Council searches take up to 10 working days and you usually start these when the inspections have been finalised. Luckily, the inspection reports are generally with you the same day, as everything moves fast here to keep to the deadlines.

RENTAL LEASE

When we'd gone unconditional on the house, we had to give notice on our rental. We had three months left to run on our lease but you can break a 12-month contract by giving 14 days' notice and paying a break-out fee (one week's rent plus GST).

You usually have to commit to covering the rent until a new tenant takes over (although this may vary with different agents). We helped advertise the house by sharing links on Gumtree, and we ran lots of open inspections during our last couple of weeks in the house.

Thankfully, a new tenant was approved to move in a couple of days after we'd moved out which was a relief.

Our UK house sale took 12 weeks with no chains at either end. I thought that was pretty smooth going. Here, 30 days after viewing our dream home, we moved in!

Yes, getting all of the inspections organised and signed off quickly was a bit stressful, but the reality is, buying a house in Australia is easy. If only the packing and unpacking was as easy...



■ Karen is a freelance travel writer and blogger. You can read about her migration journey on her family, travel and lifestyle blog at www.talesofatwinmum.com or on Twitter @TalesofaTwinMum.