

FIRST HOME BUYERS GUIDE

YOUR FIRST HOME.
YOUR QUESTIONS.
JUST ASK ASH.

ASH THOMAS

ASH THOMAS REAL ESTATE

Ask Ash Before You Buy

Your first home starts with a question.

Buying your first home is exciting — but it can also feel like a lot. How much can I borrow? What should I look for? What does “unconditional” actually mean? What should I ask before I sign anything?

My approach is simple: I'd rather you ask the question than make an expensive assumption. This guide is designed to give you a clear picture of the journey, from getting finance sorted through to picking up the keys.

JUST ASK ASH

If you're not sure, ask. There are no silly questions when you're making one of the biggest purchases of your life.

I'm not here to tell you what you should buy. I'm here to help you understand the property, the process and the questions you should be asking so you can make your own informed decision.

Don't try to learn everything at once.

Use this guide as a roadmap. You can jump to the section you need, but I recommend reading it once from beginning to end before you start seriously looking.

YOUR FIRST-HOME ROADMAP

- 1. Work out your budget and deposit.
- 2. Talk to your bank or mortgage adviser.
- 3. Build your property team.
- 4. Decide what you actually need in a home.
- 5. Start viewing and comparing properties.
- 6. Understand the property information.
- 7. Understand how the property is being sold.
- 8. Make an offer with appropriate conditions.
- 9. Complete your due diligence.
- 10. Go unconditional only when you're comfortable.
- 11. Get ready for settlement.
- 12. Pick up the keys and enjoy your new home.

ASH'S TAKE

The best buyer isn't necessarily the one who knows the most. It's the one who asks the right questions and gets the right people involved.

Are you ready to buy?

Being ready doesn't mean having a huge deposit, no debt and every dollar perfectly organised. It means understanding what you can comfortably afford and having a plan.

ASK YOURSELF

- Have I started building a deposit?
- Do I have stable income?
- Am I managing my existing debt comfortably?
- Would I cope if interest rates or household costs changed?
- Will I have some savings left after I buy?
- Am I buying because it suits my life — not because I feel pressured?

ASK ASH BEFORE YOU BUY

Approval is not the same as affordability. A bank can tell you what it may lend; your budget tells you what you can comfortably live with.

Your first home does not have to be your forever home. It can simply be your first step. Focus on buying something that works for your circumstances today and gives you room to build from there.

Myth vs reality

MYTH	REALITY
I need a 20% deposit before I can buy.	Some buyers may be able to purchase with less, depending on lender criteria and eligibility.
I need to know exactly what I want before I start looking.	Viewing homes helps you work out what matters to you.
My first home needs to be my forever home.	For many people, the first home is a stepping stone.
If I miss out, I've failed.	Sometimes the house you don't buy turns out to be the best decision.

ASH'S TAKE

Don't let one missed property make you rush into the next one. There will always be another property — your job is to make the right decision for you.

Your budget: what can you comfortably afford?

The important number isn't simply “how much will the bank lend me?”
It's “what sort of mortgage and home can I live with comfortably?”

BUILD THE REAL BUDGET

- Mortgage repayments
- Council rates
- House insurance
- Utilities
- Maintenance and repairs
- Transport and everyday living
- Body corporate costs, if applicable
- A buffer for unexpected expenses

The purchase price is only part of the cost of owning a home. Build your budget around your actual life, not an ideal version of it.

JUST ASK ASH

If you're looking at a property and you're unsure what ongoing costs to ask about, I'll help you work through the questions.

Deposit, KiwiSaver & the money you need

Your deposit may come from savings, KiwiSaver, gifted funds, investments or other approved sources. The amount you need and what a lender will accept depends on your circumstances.

If you're using KiwiSaver, start early. Eligibility and processing requirements apply, and you don't want to discover a timing issue just before settlement.

DON'T FORGET THE OTHER COSTS

- Lawyer or conveyancing costs
- Building inspection
- LIM and other property information
- Valuation, if required
- Moving costs
- Utility connections
- Immediate repairs or purchases
- An emergency buffer after settlement

ASH'S TAKE

Getting the keys is not the finish line. Keep some money in reserve so your first blocked drain, broken appliance or moving bill doesn't become a crisis.

Finance: bank or mortgage adviser?

Talk to someone before you fall in love with a house.

Your bank can assess your position and explain its lending options. A mortgage adviser may be able to compare options from multiple lenders. There isn't one answer that suits everyone.

ASK ABOUT

- How much can I realistically borrow?
- What deposit do I need?
- What will my repayments look like?
- What fees or low-equity costs may apply?
- What happens if interest rates rise?
- How much cash should I keep after settlement?
- What documents do you need from me?

ASK ASH BEFORE YOU BUY

Get your finance position sorted before you spend weekends falling in love with houses outside your budget.

Build your property team

Buying a home is a team exercise. You don't need to know everything — you need to know who to ask.

WHO	WHAT THEY HELP WITH
Mortgage adviser / lender	Finance, lending criteria and loan structure
Lawyer / conveyancer	Legal advice, agreements, title and settlement
Builder / inspector	Condition of the building and potential issues
Insurance provider	Cover required before settlement
Real estate agent	Property information, sale process and communication with the seller

ASH'S TAKE

A good question asked early can save you a lot of money later. If something doesn't make sense, stop and ask.

House hunting: needs vs wants

Online photos are a starting point, not a decision.

YOUR NEEDS

- Location and commute
- Number of bedrooms
- Parking / garage
- Outdoor space
- Accessibility
- School or family requirements
- Budget

YOUR WANTS

- Modern kitchen
- Extra living space
- Views
- Workshop
- Big garden
- Renovation potential
- Future development potential

The more homes you view, the clearer your priorities become. Keep notes after each viewing. A week later, the houses can start blending together.

JUST ASK ASH

**Tell me what you're trying to achieve, not just what you think you want.
Sometimes the best property is the one that solves the problem you actually have.**

What to look for at a viewing

LOOK BEYOND THE DECOR

- Signs of dampness, mould or unusual smells
- Cracks or movement that need further investigation
- Roof and gutter condition
- Windows and joinery
- Heating and ventilation
- Electrical condition and obvious DIY work
- Plumbing and water pressure
- Insulation and general warmth
- Drainage and outdoor areas
- Noise, traffic and neighbouring properties

You are not expected to diagnose a building problem at an open home. Your job is to notice things that raise questions.

ASH'S TAKE

Don't talk yourself out of a question because you don't want to offend the seller. If you notice something, ask about it. If the answer isn't clear, investigate it.

Property information: look beyond the listing

A property listing tells you why you might like the house. The property documents help you understand what you're actually buying.

DOCUMENTS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR ADVISERS

- Record of Title
- LIM and council information
- Property files and plans
- Rates information
- Sale and Purchase Agreement
- Any disclosures or known issues
- Body corporate information for unit-title property
- Any reports supplied by the seller

Some documents can look complicated. That's exactly why you have a lawyer and other professionals. Don't guess what a clause means — ask.

ASK ASH BEFORE YOU BUY

I'll help you identify the questions to ask about the property, but legal and technical questions should go to the appropriate professional.

A few questions I want every buyer to ask

PROPERTY QUESTIONS

- How long has the property been on the market?
- Why is the owner selling?
- Are there known issues or previous repairs?
- Are there alterations or additions that need checking?
- What are the current rates?
- What are the likely ongoing costs?
- What chattels are included?
- Are there any notices, claims or outstanding works I should know about?
- If it is a unit title, what are the body corporate fees and maintenance obligations?

ASH'S TAKE

You don't need to interrogate the seller. You just need enough information to decide what should be checked before you commit.

How is the property being sold?

METHOD	WHAT IT MEANS
Price / Asking Price	A price is advertised as a guide or requested price; negotiation may still be possible.
Negotiation	Buyers can put forward an offer and negotiate terms and price.
Deadline Sale	Offers are invited by a stated deadline; the seller may have different options depending on the terms.
Tender	Offers are submitted in the required format by a closing time.
Auction	The property is offered for competitive bidding under auction conditions.

The sale method changes how you approach the property. Before you make a move, understand the rules, the timing and what your offer needs to contain.

JUST ASK ASH

Not sure how an auction, tender or deadline works? Ask me to walk you through it before you decide whether to participate.

Making an offer

This is the point where excitement meets paperwork.

An offer is normally made using a Sale and Purchase Agreement. It sets out the price, deposit, settlement date, chattels and conditions. The exact terms matter.

BEFORE YOU SIGN, CHECK

- Purchase price
- Deposit amount and when it is payable
- Settlement date
- Chattels included
- Finance condition, if applicable
- Building inspection condition, if applicable
- LIM / title / legal due diligence requirements
- Any other condition your lawyer recommends

ASK ASH BEFORE YOU BUY

Never feel pressured to sign because you're worried someone else will get the property. Take the time you need to understand what you're signing and get legal advice.

Negotiation: don't just focus on price

Price is important, but it isn't the only term that can matter. Settlement timing, deposit, chattels and conditions can all affect the overall deal.

THINK ABOUT

- What price fits your budget?
- What settlement date works for you?
- What conditions do you need to protect yourself?
- What chattels are important to you?
- What is your walk-away position?

ASH'S TAKE

Know your ceiling before you negotiate. It's much easier to make a sensible decision when you have already decided what you are comfortable with.

Due diligence: do your homework

Due diligence is simply checking the property properly before you become fully committed.

YOUR DUE-DILIGENCE LIST

- Review the title and relevant property information
- Get legal advice
- Arrange a building inspection where appropriate
- Check council information / LIM where appropriate
- Confirm finance
- Arrange insurance
- Investigate any alterations, repairs or concerns
- Check unit-title / body corporate information if relevant
- Make sure the property and its inclusions match your understanding

JUST ASK ASH

If something doesn't add up, don't ignore it because you love the house. Ask the question. Then get the right professional to check it.

Red flags I don't want you ignoring

PAUSE AND INVESTIGATE

- Fresh paint hiding a suspicious area
- Strong air fresheners or unusual smells
- Large cracks or movement
- Unconsented-looking alterations
- Water staining or dampness
- DIY electrical or plumbing work
- Drainage problems
- Major retaining walls or structures
- Body corporate issues or upcoming major works
- Anything that simply doesn't make sense

A red flag doesn't automatically mean “walk away”. It means “find out more”. Some problems are manageable; others can change the economics of a purchase.

ASH'S TAKE

I would much rather you ask me the awkward question before you buy than call me six months later wishing you had.

Going unconditional

This is the moment it becomes real.

Once the conditions in your Sale and Purchase Agreement have been satisfied, waived or fulfilled, the agreement becomes unconditional. At that point, the buyer and seller are generally committed to completing the transaction.

BEFORE YOU GO UNCONDITIONAL

- Finance is confirmed
- Your lawyer is comfortable with the legal position
- Your investigations are complete
- Any building or specialist reports have been reviewed
- Insurance can be arranged
- You understand the agreement and your obligations

ASK ASH BEFORE YOU BUY

Going unconditional is not the time to discover that you forgot to ask a question.

The period between unconditional and settlement

Once you're unconditional, there is still work to do. Your lender, lawyer, insurer and other professionals will be working behind the scenes.

GET ORGANISED

- Sign loan documents
- Confirm insurance
- Organise deposit / settlement funds
- Keep in touch with your lawyer and lender
- Arrange moving plans
- Book utilities
- Plan your pre-settlement inspection

ASH'S TAKE

Stay responsive. If your lawyer or lender asks for a document, don't leave it sitting in your inbox for a week. Delays can create unnecessary stress.

Pre-settlement inspection

This is your opportunity to check that the property is substantially in the condition you agreed to purchase it.

CHECK

- The property is substantially as expected
- Agreed chattels are present
- Included fixtures have not been removed
- Any agreed work has been completed as required
- There is no obvious new damage

A pre-settlement inspection is not a replacement for a building inspection. If you see a problem, contact your lawyer promptly rather than trying to negotiate it yourself.

JUST ASK ASH

I'll help you understand the process and who to contact if something doesn't look right.

Settlement day

The day you've been waiting for.

Settlement is the point at which the legal and financial steps are completed and ownership transfers. Your lawyer manages the legal process and confirms when settlement has occurred.

SETTLEMENT DAY

- Settlement confirmed by your lawyer
- Keys collected as arranged
- Utilities and address details organised
- Meter readings recorded where appropriate
- Move-in plan ready

CONGRATULATIONS — YOU DID IT.

Take a moment when you get the keys. You've just bought your first home.

Your home doesn't need to be perfect on day one.

It's tempting to renovate everything immediately. Resist the urge if you can. Live in the house. Learn how it works. Work out what actually bothers you and what can wait.

FIRST-WEEK JOBS

- Change / confirm locks if appropriate
- Locate the mains water, power and switchboard
- Check smoke alarms
- Record important appliance information
- Update your address
- Set up a maintenance file
- Photograph the condition of important areas
- Celebrate!

ASH'S TAKE

Your first home is a milestone, not a renovation competition. Give yourself time to enjoy it.

If you remember nothing else, remember these.

THE ASH THOMAS FIRST-HOME RULES

- 1. Get your finance sorted early.
- 2. Know what you can comfortably afford — not just what you can borrow.
- 3. Separate your needs from your wants.
- 4. Look beyond the pretty photos.
- 5. Ask questions when something doesn't make sense.
- 6. Get the right professionals involved.
- 7. Do your due diligence.
- 8. Don't let FOMO make your decisions.
- 9. Never be embarrassed to ask a “stupid” question.
- 10. Before you buy, Just Ask Ash.

ASK ASH BEFORE YOU BUY

A five-minute conversation can sometimes save you weeks of stress — and potentially a very expensive mistake.

Buying locally means looking beyond the house.

If you're buying in the Wairarapa, your decision may involve more than the four walls of the property. Think about commute times, local amenities, weather exposure, drainage, rural or lifestyle servicing, future development around the property and what the location will mean for your everyday life.

LOCAL QUESTIONS

- How long will the commute really be?
- What services and amenities do I use regularly?
- Are there drainage, flooding, wind or access considerations?
- What are the rates and insurance costs likely to be?
- Is the property rural, lifestyle, residential or unit title?
- What future development or planning information should I investigate?

ASH'S TAKE

I know the Wairarapa market and the local property landscape. Use me as a sounding board — even if you're still at the “just looking” stage.

You don't have to know everything.

Every homeowner was once a first-home buyer.

You may feel excited one day and completely overwhelmed the next. That's normal. Buying a home is a big decision, but it becomes much easier when you break it into steps and surround yourself with the right people.

JUST ASK ASH

Ask before you buy. Ask when you're unsure. Ask when something doesn't add up. Ask when you simply want another perspective.

My role isn't to make the decision for you. It's to help you make a better-informed one.

**YOUR FIRST HOME.
YOUR QUESTIONS.
JUST ASK ASH.**

ASH THOMAS

ASH THOMAS REAL ESTATE

Real Estate Agent

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A guide — not legal or financial advice.

This guide is intended as a practical overview of the first-home buying process. Property, lending, legal, tax, insurance and government requirements can vary between buyers and can change over time.

Before signing a Sale and Purchase Agreement or making a decision about finance, title, building condition, insurance or legal obligations, obtain advice from the appropriate qualified professional.

Information about KiwiSaver, lending and first-home support should be checked against current provider and government requirements. The guide is designed to help you know what to ask — not to replace professional advice.

THE GOLDEN RULE

If you don't understand it, don't guess. Ask the right person.

This Ash Thomas guide has been rewritten from the supplied first-home buyer guide into a practical, buyer-focused format and refreshed to reflect the importance of checking current New Zealand requirements.