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What to look for at an open house

There's an old saying that you should never judge a book by its cover, and this is true for houses – after all, who would buy one having never seen more than the front door? Open inspections are opportunities to really flick through the pages, and here's how to take full advantage.

Really use your senses

Sniff, peer, listen and feel as much as you can. Your nose might pick up a mouldy or musty smell that may mean damp. You might spy small or hidden cracks that could mean structural issues. That clattering sound when water is running? That can be a sign of serious plumbing problems.

Don't be distracted by the beautiful bling

Anyone can invest money in pretty cushions and lamps to set off the house. Or bake some cookies just as the open inspection starts so the house smells cosy and homey. But when buying property, you're buying the sausage not the sizzle, so look past the perfectly presented and lit lounge room to the size, shape and placement in the floorplan of the actual room, and imagine how you will use it.

Look up

That means checking the roof on the way in and looking at the ceilings in the rooms. Damp and leakage issues are costly and notoriously hard to fix. And once the rot sets in, it's there to stay.

That kitchen and bathroom advice

If these two rooms aren't how you would like them to be, are you prepared to live with it or spend the money required to transform them? Kitchen renovations in Australia have an average cost of \$15,000, provided that the room is in good condition and doesn't need any significant structural renovation. Bathroom renovations will be upwards of \$10,000.

Look at your surroundings

Who and what are your neighbours? Check out the home at different times of the week and day. It may sound excessive, but maybe the house is under a window-rattlingly low flight path only when the weather is bad, there's a bar across the road that blasts out loud music in the early hours but is closed during the day when inspections are on, or there's a factory down the road that when the wind blows a certain way sends nasty smells wafting. If you have kids, what are the local school like? What is the local crime rate?

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Ask lots of questions

What are the utilities like gas, electricity and water costing the current residents? A home with large windows seems bright and sunny, but it can also make for more drafts in winter and warmer rooms in the summer – both problems that make for higher utility costs. It's also important to ask about previous repairs and renovations; if something goes wrong down the track it can be good to have a history.

Have a pre-purchase building and pest inspection

This may seem obvious but many houses are bought and sold without one. Home inspectors are trained to find flaws in a home that your untrained eye may never see as a problem, but may cost a lot to correct down the line. If it's your dream home, you may choose to buy it even with structural or pest problems, but you'll no doubt be able to negotiate on price.

Before you start looking at homes, talk to [Chocolate Money](#) about how much money you can borrow and which type of loan suits you.