



How to get to know an area before you buy your home

Jessica Doyle

Even if your house purchase is a long way off, you can decide where to buy within your budget while you save

With the age of first-time buyers on the rise, many of us in our late-20s and 30s with the distant goal of one day buying a house in Ireland are restless, arms folded, one foot tapping, waiting for our “deposit fund” to reach the necessary amount.

It is little wonder then that in the meantime so many of us placate ourselves with little luxuries such as gel manicures and fancy coffee – the former of which, my partner’s colleague helpfully informs him, “is the reason he’ll never own a house”.

In a world where progress is valued above all, with some invisible ladder we should all be climbing, I asked myself, is there any research I could be doing in preparation for the day when I can hand over a lump of cash, shake the estate agent’s hand and say, “I’ll take it”?

But first things first. Before you commit, you have to choose the areas where you would be happy to live and where you can conceivably afford a home. Compromise is inevitable, and making a list of what is most important to you can help.

In an ideal world, perhaps you would rent in your target area before looking to buy there. But with high rental costs and recent research showing 68 per cent of people aged 25-29 are still living at home with their parents, that is not likely to be an option for most.

So then, how can you get to know an area before you buy? I asked some estate agents to offer their advice.

Explore

“It’s the biggest investment someone is going to make in their life, so it has to be right,” says Kate Mullery, agent at Mullery O’Gara. “Doing your research from the outset is imperative.”

There is no substitute for walking around an area to get a feel for it, she says, and the times you do so are important, too.

“Night time is the big one. Walking around an area at night, you can get to know if it feels safe.”

You should also visit on weekends, says Mullery, “when there’s plenty of people walking around with kids, dogs – you can see who actually lives there”.

Local people are your biggest asset, she adds, so ask around your friends and colleagues to find someone you can speak to who has first-hand experience of living in the area. “Ireland is very small, through word of mouth, you’ll find someone.”

Failing that, try local shops and cafes. “Get talking to the people who work there, ask if they’re local. They’ll have the inside scoop on the area,” says Mullery. “One of the key pieces of advice I give people is find out who the next-door neighbours are,” says Owen Reilly of Owen Reilly Estate Agents. “There’s no point finding out afterwards that there’s an issue there because then it’s too late.”

You should also check out what kind of houses are in the area, says Mullery. “If there are houses that have been refurbished, it could tell you there is a younger demographic there looking to live in the area long-term, for example.”

She points out that you should always check the local authority website for the area where you wish to buy to check what developments are planned, “because in five or 10 years’ time, you don’t want to see that there’s a 10-storey apartment block being built behind you on lovely green site.”

Brock de Lappe estate agency, which is based in Dublin 8, hand out maps highlighting the hotspots – for eating and drinking and going for walks etc – at viewings, says David Brock, and this is something prospective buyers can do for themselves on Google maps.

Transport

Although remote-working practices took hold during the Covid-19 pandemic, more and more workplaces seem to be shifting to a hybrid model, says Mullery, and so doing a midweek test drive of your morning and evening commute to and from your target area is important.

“Hybrid workers, I think, by the level of



Always think long term when you’re moving into a neighbourhood. You might plan to stay somewhere short term, but it could end up being a lot longer

■ For newcomers to the housing market, there are many things to consider when trying to choose an area to buy in.

PHOTOGRAPH: ISTOCK

traffic [in Dublin city], seem to work between Tuesday and Thursday, so do the rush-hour commute first thing in the morning [on those days] to see what it’s like,” she says.

Also check out the Transport for Ireland website to check out the public-transport options in the area, and how long they take to get you to work, Mullery says.

“In Dublin, if you’re not on the Dart and you’re not on the Luas [lines], you’re relying on a car, buses or taxis. And the taxi situation in Dublin on the weekend is really bad,” says Reilly.

Reilly, Brock and Mullery all say the Luas is a big draw for prospective buyers in Dublin, and Mullery and Brock say the new Bus Connects scheme is also set to have an impact on commuters, so buyers should check if planned routes will be useful for them. Cycle lanes are also important for prospective buyers, notes Brock, especially the one that travels along the Grand Canal.

In addition, Reilly points out that parking can be an issue, especially if you own a car or hope to in the future, or if you have friends and family driving to visit you on a regular basis.

Future planning

“Always think long term when you’re moving into a neighbourhood,” says Reilly. “You might plan to stay somewhere short term, but it could end up being a lot longer.”

“It’s important to look up schools and preschools if you have children or plan to down the line,” says Mullery. “Some schools may not be in the catchment area; you can call them and find out.”

School places have become such a concern for prospective buyers, says Brock, that many “work backwards” by choosing a school first before searching for a home nearby.

Taking these tips on board, there is no harm in settling on a few target areas while you patiently wait for the optimum time to finally buy your first home. So get to exploring – all it takes is an online search while you sip a matcha latte from your perfectly manicured hand.

Sort it

Denise O’Connor



How flooring can transform a room from drab to dazzling

Pattern is a powerful design tool that can transform your room from drab to dazzling. But it’s easy to make mistakes and striking the balance between trendy and timeless requires some finesse. One way to introduce pattern to a room is with your flooring. Whether it’s a grand entrance hall or a tiny guest WC, here are some of the best ways to make a statement with your flooring to suit every style or budget.

Paint

While flooring is a significant investment, it’s essential to strike a balance. Be cautious of embracing fleeting trends too closely, as they come with a commitment to change and may not stand the test of time. But one relatively low-risk way to experiment with trends is by painting your floor. Something like a chequerboard will create a simple and classic effect.

If you’re feeling especially creative, consider elevating your painted floor with a more complex pattern. Stencils or stamping techniques are an easy way to create a bespoke design that brings a touch of modern flair to your space. A geometric pattern is always a timeless choice, or opt for playful choices such as a Moroccan-tile effect or bold angular designs.

Timber

Timber is always an excellent choice for flooring and works in almost any room in your home. When looking to create pattern with timber, parquet flooring is the ideal choice. Two of the most popular parquet patterns are herringbone and chevron, which are often confused.

Herringbone features a classic V-shaped, interlocking weave, while chevron has an inverted V-shape with a point of intersection, imparting a more contemporary look.

Herringbone and chevron can be laid in several ways depending on the look you are trying to create and the size of your room. From borders to panels, the options are endless, but one of the most critical considerations when installing parquet is to seek a specialist fitter experienced in laying these floors.

Tiles

Bathrooms are another ideal space where a patterned floor can be a standout feature. Something like hexagon mosaic tiles are a great way to blend pattern and practicality in a bathroom. They offer a gorgeous blend of pattern and texture and good slip resistance underfoot.

A monochromatic scheme always looks sharp in a bathroom. Embracing well-defined designs can elevate your room, giving it a contemporary edge. For a modern take on a timeless classic, consider using triangles or stripes angled in different directions to add a dynamic twist to the pattern.

When creating a patterned tiled floor, you don’t need patterned tiles.

A combination of plain ceramic tiles can create a striking design. A mix of two different

coloured tiles in a chequerboard formation has a timeless appeal that works exceptionally well in bathrooms.

Tiles are a brilliant choice for entrance halls due to their durability. Opting for a striking pattern can make a welcoming statement, and depending on your chosen pattern, you can create a fun atmosphere in an otherwise practical space.

Rugs

If you’re renting or hesitant to make a permanent commitment to patterned floors, a rug is a great option. It’s a quick and easy way to add pattern to a room without the long-term commitment.

Use a colourful rug in an otherwise neutral room for ultimate impact, or take colours from your chosen rug to create a colour scheme for your room that feels effortlessly pulled together. A popular trend is layering rugs of different patterns, colours and textures to infuse your space with visual depth, warmth and interest.

There are no hard and fast rules for layering rugs, but as a general guideline, start with more plain rugs at the bottom, then build from there, finishing with the boldest or most elaborate pattern on top.

Statement staircase

Staircases present a unique canvas for patterns. Given the fact that you tend to move through a stairwell rather than spend time in it, there’s less risk of growing weary of a bold design compared with other spaces in the home. Classic stripes serve as a versatile choice, harmonising with both patterned tiles and wooden floors. Besides their aesthetic appeal, stair runners offer practical benefits. Consider edging your runner with a bold-coloured border to make a striking statement.

Luxury vinyl

Luxury vinyl tile (LVT) is an ultra-durable flooring choice, ideal for high-traffic areas in your home. Not only is it hard-wearing and scratch and stain resistant, but it also boasts low maintenance, just a regular sweep and light mop will do.

Thanks to recent advancements in LVT technology, there’s an array of realistic designs mimicking materials such as timber and marble. Achieving herringbone or chevron patterns has never been easier.

With an extensive range of self-patterned options available, LVT is an excellent choice for those concerned about wear and tear.

Marble

While marble is often viewed as a classic flooring choice rooted in traditional design, it’s a versatile material that seamlessly complements contemporary settings. To unlock its full potential, consider geometric patterns, from timeless chequerboard designs to modern stripes. The rich spectrum of colours marble offers provides the ideal canvas for those aiming for a harmonious blend of luxury and flair. Elevate your pattern choice by framing it with a border to add that final touch of elegance.

On view



36 Hampton Court, St Helen’s Wood, Booterstown, Co Dublin

€1.495m, Sherry FitzGerald
Detached five-bedroom house extending to 226sq m (2,433sq ft). The double-fronted property, which has a southwest-facing back garden, lies in a mature cul-de-sac close to all amenities and Blackrock Village. Ber D1
On view: By appointment at sherryfitz.ie



Halrose, 5 Orwell Walk, Rathgar, Dublin 6

€795,000, Beirne & Wise
Semidetached four-bedroom house extending to 135sq m (1,453sq ft). Located at the end of a quiet cul-de-sac, the 1940s property has an adjacent garage and lovely views over the river Dodder. There is room to extend subject to planning permission. Ber G
On view: By appointment at beirnewise.ie



Kingston House, 64 Patrick Street, Dún Laoghaire, Co Dublin

€895,000, Lisney Sotheby’s International Realty
Double-fronted semidetached period house extending to 213sq m (2,293sq ft). Laid out as a commercial unit, planning permission granted in November 2020 allows for the use to be changed to residential, and for it to be converted to a five-bedroom with extensions. Ber D1
On view: By appointment at lisney.com



12 Wainsfort Crescent, Terenure, Dublin 6W

€545,000, DNG
Semidetached three-bedroom dormer bungalow extending to 104sq m (1,119sq ft). The property has a separate garage, which could be converted, and room to extend in the rear or side gardens subject to planning permission. Ber E2.
On view: By appointment at dng.ie



Mintiagh’s Lodge, Drumfries, Co Donegal

€750,000, Rainey Estate Agents
Detached four/five-bedroom Georgian hunting lodge extending to 404sq m (4,349sq ft). The property, dating from 1820, lies on six acres and retains many period features. It has outbuildings with potential for conversion. Ber-exempt
On view: By appointment at raineyproperty.ie