

# THE GULF COAST *Seller's* PLAYBOOK

*How to price, prep, and present your home  
for the market we're actually in.*

EST. 2001 · QUE PADRE REALTY · CAMERON COUNTY, TX



# Selling well takes *more than a sign* in the yard.

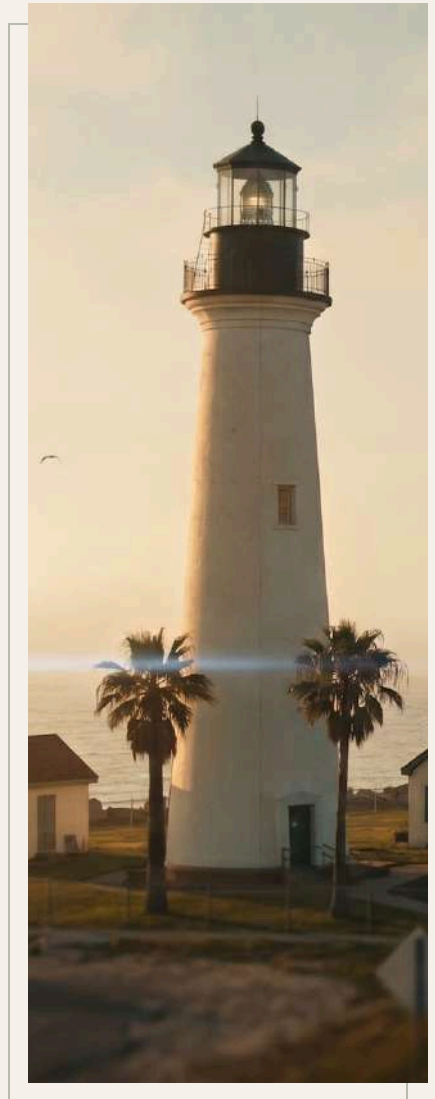
Selling on the South Texas coast is not like selling anywhere else in Texas. There's no frenzy machine here — no buyers waiving inspections because they're afraid of missing out. What there is, is a market that rewards honesty: sellers who know what they have, price it correctly, and present it well.

The buyers who find their way to Port Isabel, South Padre, Laguna Vista, and the surrounding communities have already made a real decision. They chose this stretch of coast over every other option. They're motivated, they're qualified, and when a home is priced right and shown right, they move.

What follows is a plain-language guide to how the selling process works down here — what drives price, what drives interest, and what makes the difference between a home that closes in 30 days and one that sits. It's the conversation I'd have with you over coffee before we ever talked about listing. Read it, then call me.

Twenty-five years on this water.

*Lenny*



# Sellers who *price for today* still win.

The South Texas coastal market operates differently than what you see in Austin or Houston. Inventory is meaningful here — not flooded, but real. Buyers have options and they take their time. Days on market are longer than in urban markets, which means the price you set on day one carries more weight than almost anywhere else in Texas.

What moves here is what's priced for the current moment, not the peak of 2022. The comps are clear. Buyers know them. Sellers who price honestly upfront close well. Sellers who price for where they wish the market was spend months chasing it down.

Cameron County has its own pricing logic: waterfront versus canal versus inland; flood zone designation; elevation certificate status; age and condition; seasonal buyer patterns. A home priced correctly for where it actually sits in this hierarchy sells. One priced for where the seller wishes it sat — doesn't.

This market rewards candor. Pricing it right, presenting it beautifully, and moving it confidently — that's the playbook. The rest of this guide is about what each of those things actually looks like on the South Texas coast.

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*“The sellers who do well here price for today, not 2022.”*

# The first decision is the most *consequential*.

If I could have only one conversation with a seller before listing, it would be about price. Pricing is the single most important variable a seller controls, and the one most often gotten wrong. The good news: getting it right isn't complicated. It just requires honesty.

## *The 21-day rule.*

The first three weeks a home is on the market are not just the most active: they are, statistically, the most consequential. The buyers who have been waiting will see your home in those three weeks. The agents whose clients are ready will tour it. If the price is right, offers come during this window. If it's not, the home grows stale, and stale is expensive. Re-priced listings sell for less, on average, than listings priced correctly out of the gate.

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## *Comparable sales beat aspirational thinking.*

A comparable sale is a home that is genuinely similar to yours: same neighborhood, similar size, similar condition, similar features, closed in the last 90 days. It is not a list price. It is not a home from 2022. It is not the home down the street that hasn't sold in six months. The honest answer to 'what is my home worth' lives in the closed comps, and a good agent will walk you through them line by line.

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## *The cost of being optimistic.*

Listing 5% over market generally doesn't generate 5% more in offers. It generates fewer showings, fewer offers, and a longer time on market, which forces a price reduction that sellers often have to make twice. The eventual sale price for an aspirationally-priced home is, more often than not, below what a market-priced listing would have achieved on day one.

*“Price the home for who's buying, not for who you wish was.”*

# What to fix, *what to leave*, what to skip.

Sellers routinely spend money on the wrong things before listing. Below is the order I generally recommend, ranked by return on the dollar. None of these require a renovation. All of them shift how a buyer feels in the home in the first 30 seconds.

## 01 Declutter and depersonalize.

The single highest-ROI move. Buyers need to picture themselves in the space. Family photos, collections, and personal mementos make that harder. Pack 50% of what's in the home before listing. The house will feel larger immediately.

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## 02 Deep clean.

Hire professionals. Floors, windows, grout, vents, the inside of the oven. Clean homes photograph better, show better, and signal to buyers that the home has been cared for.

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## 03 Neutralize the palette.

If a room is painted a bold color, neutralize it. Warm whites, soft greiges, and quiet neutrals photograph beautifully and let buyers project their own taste onto the walls. This is the highest-ROI cosmetic update a seller can make.

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## 04 Light, hardware, and fixtures.

Replace dated light fixtures, dim bulbs, and worn-out hardware on cabinets and doors. The total cost is often under \$1,000. The visual upgrade is dramatic and reads as 'well-maintained' in photos.

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## 05 Curb appeal and the front door.

The front door and the first ten feet of the home are the buyer's first impression. Fresh paint on the door, a new welcome mat, trimmed hedges, a clean walkway. Inexpensive and disproportionately effective.

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## 06 Skip the major renovation.

Resist the urge to renovate the kitchen or bathroom right before listing. Sellers rarely recoup full renovation costs in a sale, and buyers often want to choose finishes themselves. The exception: if a kitchen or bathroom is so dated that it actively repels offers, a light cosmetic refresh (paint, hardware, fixtures) is sufficient.

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# Buyers see your home *online* before they see it in person.

## *The 3-second rule.*

A buyer scrolling Zillow or their agent's curated listings spends roughly three seconds on each photo before deciding whether to swipe or click. The first photo of your listing, almost always an exterior shot, has to do real work. So does the second, and the third.

Photography isn't a finishing touch. It's the most important marketing asset of the sale.

## *Stage what's worth staging.*

Full home staging isn't always necessary, but selective staging often is. Empty rooms photograph poorly and make spaces feel smaller. Dated furniture reads as dated home, even when it isn't. A good listing agent will assess which rooms need staging and which can be photographed as-is, and the cost almost always pays back in the offer price.

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## *The listing description matters more than sellers think.*

The description is the first place a serious buyer reads about your home in their own time. It should be specific: not "great location" but "two blocks to the Mueller farmer's market," confident, and free of the generic phrases that pad most listings. A great description doesn't oversell. It gives buyers permission to fall in love.

*“The home that photographs well sells well.”*

# How to read *the market's response.*

The first two to three weeks of a listing are diagnostic. They tell you, with surprising clarity, whether your pricing and presentation are aligned with the current market. Knowing what to look for is half the work.

## *Showing volume.*

A correctly-priced, well-presented home in Austin should generate 10 to 20 showings in the first two weeks. If showings are below this range, the listing is being passed over: usually a price signal, sometimes a presentation signal, occasionally a photography signal. Volume is the leading indicator.

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## *Buyer feedback.*

Most agents collect feedback after showings. Themes matter more than individual comments. If three buyers in a row mention the same issue: the kitchen feels cramped, the layout is awkward, the price is high. The market is telling you something specific. Listen to it.

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## *The offer window.*

Strong listings in today's Austin market generate at least one offer in the first 14 days, often two or three. If you're past 21 days with no offers, the conversation about a price adjustment becomes urgent. Waiting another 30 days rarely improves the outcome. It usually worsens it.

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*“The market always tells you the truth. The question is whether you're listening.”*

# Reading offers when you might *only have one.*

Multiple-offer situations still happen in Austin, but they're no longer the default. More often, sellers today review one or two offers per listing, and the discipline of evaluating them well becomes more important. Here's how I think about it.

## **01** Price is one variable, not the whole picture.

A slightly lower price with a cash offer, no contingencies, and a fast close can be substantially better than a higher offer that's contingent on the buyer's existing home selling first. Read every term, not just the top number.

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## **02** Counter-offers move in three or four steps.

Most negotiations don't conclude in one round. Expect a counter, then a response, then perhaps another counter. Sellers who stay patient through this process usually arrive at terms they're happy with. Sellers who feel personally insulted by an opening offer often miss the deal that was right in front of them.

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## **03** Concessions are negotiable in both directions.

Buyers may ask for repairs, closing costs, rate buydowns, or inclusions. You can grant some, decline others, or counter with alternatives. A skilled agent helps you trade smaller concessions for things that matter to you: a faster close, a leaseback, or a price hold.

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## **04** The strongest offer is often the one with fewest conditions.

A pre-approved buyer with strong earnest money, a short option period, and limited contingencies is usually a better counterparty than a buyer with a slightly higher offer but more strings attached. Certainty has value, and the value compounds the further into the deal you go.

# What can still *go sideways*, and how to prevent it.

Once an offer is accepted, the deal isn't done. The next 30 to 45 days include inspection negotiations, appraisal, lender underwriting, title work, and a closing day that has its own choreography. Most deals close cleanly. The ones that don't usually fall apart in three predictable places.

## *Inspection negotiations.*

Texas grants buyers a short option period, typically 7 to 10 days, during which they can inspect the home and request repairs, credits, or walk away. Be prepared for an inspection report that finds something. Every home has issues. The conversation is about which ones matter, what's reasonable to address, and whether to credit or repair. A good agent helps you stay calm and strategic during this phase.

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## *Appraisal gaps.*

The lender's appraiser will assign a value to the home, and that value sometimes comes in below the contract price. In a softer market, this is more common. The buyer either covers the gap, the seller adjusts, or the parties meet somewhere in the middle. Knowing this is a possibility means it doesn't surprise you.

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## *Underwriting and the final clear-to-close.*

Buyers' loans are not actually approved until the lender issues a clear-to-close, often days before closing. Buyers can be approved on day one and have an issue arise on day 28. Your agent's job is to keep this process moving, anticipate problems, and communicate clearly so closing day is uneventful.

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*“A clean closing is built in the four weeks before it. Not the day of.”*

# Let's start with a *walkthrough.*

The honest first step in selling a home is a 45-minute walkthrough. I'll see what you've built, hear what you're hoping for, and tell you directly what I think the home will sell for in today's market and what we'd want to do to get there. No pressure, no listing agreement, no obligation. Just a real conversation about what's possible.



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