THE THOUSAND OAKS
HOME BUYING GUIDE

Everything you need to know about buying a home in the heart of Ventura County's Conejo Valley

A BUYER'S GUIDE FROM

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FROM ERIC & DEBRA

Welcome to Thousand Oaks

First things first — congratulations. If you're reading this, you've already noticed something special about the Conejo Valley: the oak-covered hills, the top-ranked schools, the safest-city rankings, and a lifestyle that still feels like a small town even though you're 40 minutes from downtown LA.

We're Eric and Debra Ross, and together we run The Ross Realty Group at Keller Williams. We've helped buyers find their first condo in Newbury Park, their forever home in North Ranch, and everything in between. This guide is the exact playbook we walk our own clients through before we ever set foot in a home — the stuff that prevents surprises, saves you money, and makes your offer the one a seller says yes to.

The truth is, Thousand Oaks has its own rules. California property taxes work differently than a lot of out-of-state buyers expect. Fire zones can affect your insurance before they ever affect your safety. And in this market, being pre-approved and ready to move fast isn't optional — it's the whole game.

None of this is dealbreaker territory. It's just knowledge. Read this guide front to back, dog-ear what matters to you, and when you're ready — let's grab coffee. Who you work with matters.

— Eric & Debra Ross, #YupSOLD

CHAPTER 1

Why Thousand Oaks?

Thousand Oaks sits in the heart of the Conejo Valley, in eastern Ventura County — about 40 minutes from downtown LA and 20 minutes from Malibu's coastline. What makes it different from every other Southern California suburb? Simple: it was planned that way.

The open space is the headline

Thousand Oaks was built around a genuinely radical idea for Southern California: preserve the hillsides. Thousands of acres of protected hillside and canyon open space, managed largely through the Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency (COSCA), wrap around nearly every neighborhood in the city. That means oak-studded ridgelines, miles of hiking and mountain-biking trails, and views that would cost a fortune anywhere else — right outside your back fence.

The location does the rest

Highway 101 runs straight through town, with the 23 Freeway connecting north to Moorpark and Simi Valley. From Thousand Oaks, typical drive times look like this: Westlake Village and Agoura Hills are 10 minutes, Malibu's beaches are about 25, downtown LA and Hollywood are 40-ish depending on traffic, and Camarillo and Ventura's coastline are 20-25 minutes. For families and remote-flexible professionals, that combination of small-town calm and big-city access is genuinely hard to beat.

Who buys here

Four groups dominate the Thousand Oaks buyer pool: young families chasing the Conejo Valley Unified School District's reputation; move-up buyers looking for more space, a pool, or a hillside view lot; entertainment and biotech professionals commuting to Warner Center, Agoura Hills, or working remotely; and downsizers who want single-story living in a gated, low-maintenance community without leaving the area they've called home for decades.

THE TRUTH IS...

Thousand Oaks has ranked among the safest cities in America of its size for years running. That reputation alone drives a huge share of demand here — buyers aren't just buying a house, they're buying peace of mind.

CHAPTER 2

Know Your Zip Code

Thousand Oaks is primarily served by three zip codes, plus the adjoining city of Westlake Village (91361), which shares the same school district, the same 101 corridor, and a lot of the same lifestyle. Each has its own personality and price band.

91320 — Newbury Park (Southwest Thousand Oaks)

Newbury Park anchors the southwestern end of the city, closest to the Santa Monica Mountains and the 101/Ventura County line. Home to the master-planned Dos Vientos Ranch community, newer construction, and easy access to Point Mugu and the coast. Strong family draw and some of the newest housing stock in the city.

Typical price range: $750K – $1.7M

91360 — Central & East Thousand Oaks

The township's original core — Thousand Oaks Boulevard, the Civic Arts Plaza, The Oaks shopping center, and neighborhoods like Wildwood, Lynn Ranch, and Sunset Hills. A mix of classic 1960s-80s ranch homes, established tree-lined streets, and some of the best walkability in the city.

Typical price range: $700K – $1.5M

91362 — North Thousand Oaks & Westlake-Adjacent

North Thousand Oaks reaches toward California Lutheran University and the gated golf communities of North Ranch. Some of the most desirable view-lot and country-club properties in the city sit in this zip. Convenient to top-rated schools and upscale shopping.

Typical price range: $850K – $3.5M+ (North Ranch drives the high end)

91361 — Westlake Village (adjoining city)

Technically its own incorporated city, Westlake Village shares the Conejo Valley school boundaries and lifestyle with north Thousand Oaks. Home to Westlake Lake, Sherwood Country Club, and some of the region's premier luxury estates.

Typical price range: $1M – $8M+

QUICK TIP

Want walkability and value? Start in 91360. Chasing a golf-course or gated lifestyle? Focus 91362 and 91361. Want the newest construction and top schools for growing families? Newbury Park's 91320 is your best hunting ground.

CHAPTER 3

What Homes Cost in Thousand Oaks

As of mid-2026, the median Thousand Oaks home sells for right around $1,025,000. Here's how that breaks down by property type.

PROPERTY TYPE	TYPICAL RANGE & NOTES
Condos / Townhomes	$500K – $800K. Low-maintenance living, popular with first-time buyers and downsizers, concentrated near the 101 corridor and Newbury Park.
Ranch / Single-Story	$800K – $1.3M. Classic 1960s-80s Conejo Valley ranch homes on quarter-acre-plus lots. Popular with families and retirees alike.
Two-Story / Move-Up	$1M – $1.8M. Three to five bedrooms, updated kitchens, and yards built for entertaining. The heart of the market.
New Construction	$1.3M – $2.2M+. Limited supply, mostly clustered in Newbury Park's Dos Vientos and infill lots citywide.
Hillside & View Lots	$1.2M – $2.5M+. Homes backing to COSCA open space or perched on a ridge. Views drive the premium here, not square footage.
Gated / Golf Course (North Ranch, Sherwood)	$1.8M – $8M+. Country club living, HOA-managed, some of the most prestigious addresses in Ventura County.

Price data reflects MLS trends for Thousand Oaks and Ventura County as of mid-2026. Individual properties vary by location, condition, lot, and view. Always consult current listings — that's where we come in.

CHAPTER 4

The California Property Tax Reality

This is one of the most important pages in this guide. Read it twice.

How property taxes work in California

California operates under Proposition 13, passed back in 1978. Here's the short version: your property is taxed at a base rate of 1% of its assessed value, and that assessed value can only increase by a maximum of 2% per year — no matter what happens to the actual market value — for as long as you own the home.

Then you buy it

When a property changes hands, it gets reassessed to the current purchase price. So your first full year of property taxes will be based on what you paid — not on whatever number the seller's old tax bill showed you. In Ventura County, the effective tax rate typically lands between about 1.1% and 1.3% of the purchase price once you add in voter-approved school bonds and local assessments.

On a $1,025,000 home, that generally works out to somewhere around $11,300 – $13,300 per year, split into two installments due each December and April.

Don't forget the transfer tax

When you close, California charges a documentary transfer tax — generally $1.10 per $1,000 of the sale price, split between the county and the city of Thousand Oaks. On a $1,025,000 sale, that's roughly $1,128. This is a one-time closing cost, not an ongoing tax, and it's typically paid by the seller — though it can be negotiated.

File your Homeowners' Exemption

If you're moving into the home as your primary residence, file a Homeowners' Exemption with the Ventura County Assessor. It knocks about $7,000 off your assessed value — not a huge number, but free money you don't want to leave on the table.

THE TRUTH IS...

Never use the seller's current tax bill to estimate your future bill. Ask your agent or the Ventura County Assessor's office for an estimate based on your actual offer price, and build that real number into your monthly budget before you write the offer.

CHAPTER 5

Hillside Living, Open Space & Gated Communities

Thousand Oaks was designed around its hills — and that shapes everything from your morning hike to your HOA dues. Here's what to know before you fall in love with a view.

COSCA open space: the neighborhood amenity money can't fully buy

Thousands of acres of protected canyon and ridgeline open space wrap around the city, laced with hiking and mountain-biking trails that connect neighborhood to neighborhood. A home backing to open space usually carries a real premium — but it also means no future neighbor will ever build behind you. That's worth something.

Gated & golf-course communities

North Ranch and Sherwood Country Club are the two names buyers ask about most. Both come with mandatory HOA dues, and Sherwood layers in a separate country club membership on top of that. Neither is a dealbreaker — but you need the numbers before you write an offer.

Questions to ask before you offer on an HOA or gated-community home

- What are the monthly or annual HOA dues, and have they been raised recently?
- Is there a separate country club or golf membership required, and what does that cost?
- What does the HOA's reserve fund look like? Are any major repairs or special assessments coming?
- Can I see the CC&Rs (Covenants, Conditions & Restrictions) and the last year of meeting minutes?
- Are there rental restrictions if you ever want to lease the home out?

REALITY CHECK

A great hillside-view home with reasonable HOA dues can give you 90% of the resort lifestyle at a fraction of a full country-club price tag. But read every page of the CC&Rs and reserve study before you fall for the view — HOAs vary wildly in how well they're run.

CHAPTER 6

First-Time Buyer Programs

California offers some of the most aggressive first-time buyer assistance in the country — most buyers just don't know where to look.

CalHFA MyHome Assistance Program

The California Housing Finance Agency's flagship down payment program offers a deferred loan of 3-3.5% of the purchase price for down payment and closing costs, paired with an FHA, VA, USDA, or conventional first mortgage. No monthly payments — it's repaid when you sell, refinance, or pay off your first mortgage.

CalHFA Dream For All

This program can offer up to 20% of the purchase price as shared-appreciation down payment assistance. Here's the honest truth: it runs on a lottery system, funding has been exhausted within days of opening in recent years, and there's no guaranteed reopening date. Get pre-approved with a CalHFA-approved lender so you're ready if a window opens — but don't build your whole plan around winning it.

Other paths worth knowing

- FHA loans — as little as 3.5% down with a credit score as low as 580. Pairs well with MyHome assistance.
- VA loans — 0% down for qualified veterans and active military, with no PMI.
- Conventional 97 — 3% down for well-qualified conventional borrowers.
- Mortgage Credit Certificate (MCC) — a federal tax credit some first-time buyers can layer on top of any of the above, worth asking your lender about.

Typical requirements

- First-time buyer status (no home ownership in the past 3 years) for most CalHFA programs
- Minimum credit score of 660 for most CalHFA products
- Household income within CalHFA's Ventura County limits, which run well above the national average given local housing costs
- Completion of an approved homebuyer education course
- Home must be your primary residence

IMPORTANT

CalHFA program details, funding availability, and income limits change frequently — sometimes month to month. Always confirm current terms with a CalHFA-approved lender before committing to a strategy.

CHAPTER 7

What to Watch for at Inspection

Thousand Oaks' housing stock and hillside geography come with a few inspection issues you won't see in flatland suburbs. Know them before you book the inspector.

1. **Aging mechanicals.** Much of Thousand Oaks' inventory was built between the 1960s and 1980s. Have your inspector evaluate the electrical panel (watch for Zinsco or Federal Pacific panels — both are insurance flags), HVAC age, water heater, and original sewer lateral lines.

2. **Foundation, soil & drainage.** Hillside lots mean expansive clay soil, retaining walls, and drainage that has to be engineered right. Look for cracked slabs, sticking doors, and hillside drainage issues — and consider a soils or geological report on any hillside or view-lot property.

3. **Wildfire risk & insurability.** Many Thousand Oaks neighborhoods — especially hillside and canyon-adjacent homes — sit inside or near a CAL FIRE-designated Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone. Ask about defensible space compliance, home-hardening features (ember-resistant vents, Class A roofing), and get an early read on insurability. California's FAIR Plan exists as a last-resort option when standard carriers decline coverage, but you want to know that going in, not at closing.

4. **Pool & spa.** Pools are common here. Have your inspector check equipment age, look for leaks, and pull permit history for the pool and any additions or hardscape.

5. **HOA documents.** If you're buying into an HOA or gated community, budget separately for a full CC&R and reserve-study review — most standard home inspections don't include this, and it can reveal upcoming special assessments before they hit your wallet.

REALITY CHECK

None of these are automatic dealbreakers. They're negotiation points, budget items, and insurance conversations you want to have before you're in escrow, not during your contingency period.

CHAPTER 8

When to Buy

Thousand Oaks' market has a real seasonal rhythm. Here's how to use it to your advantage.

Spring (March – May)

Listing inventory climbs fast as sellers who held off through winter come on the market. Expect the most competition of the year, especially on move-in-ready homes in top school boundaries. Best for buyers who are pre-approved and ready to move the moment the right listing hits.

Summer (June – August)

Peak inventory and peak demand, driven partly by families wanting to close before the school year starts. Multiple-offer situations are common on well-priced homes. Buyers without kids in Conejo Valley Unified schools may find a little more room to negotiate.

Fall (September – November)

Often the sweet spot. Sellers still on the market in October and November are usually more motivated, and inspection findings get more attention because there's no backup line of offers stacking up behind you.

Winter (December – February)

Lowest inventory, but also the lowest competition. The listings that do appear often come from sellers with a real reason to sell — relocation, life changes — not just testing the market. Patient buyers who can act fast often find the best deals here.

BOTTOM LINE

For the most sought-after school boundaries and move-in-ready homes, be pre-approved and ready by February. For everything else, fall offers the best blend of selection and negotiating leverage.

The 10-Step Buyer Process

Here's exactly what happens between "I want to buy" and "here are your keys," California-style.

1. **Get pre-approved.** Talk to 2-3 lenders and get a written pre-approval letter with a specific price ceiling. This is your ticket to be taken seriously in a competitive market.

2. **Sign with a buyer's agent.** Since the 2024 industry-wide changes to how agents get paid, California buyers now sign a written buyer representation agreement before touring homes with an agent. It spells out our services and how we're compensated — commission is fully negotiable, and in many cases still paid by the seller.

3. **Define your criteria.** Zip code, price range, must-haves, deal-breakers, school boundaries. We'll set up an automated search so new listings hit your inbox the moment they go live.

4. **Tour homes.** Plan on 5-15 showings before you find the right one. Take notes — homes and photos blur together fast.

5. **Make an offer.** Your agent prepares the purchase agreement on the standard C.A.R. (California Association of Realtors) contract. We'll discuss strategy — price, contingencies, earnest money, and your close-of-escrow date.

6. **Negotiate.** Sellers usually counter. We work through price, credits, and timeline until both sides sign.

7. **Open escrow & review disclosures.** Once you're in contract, escrow opens and the seller provides your Transfer Disclosure Statement (TDS) and Natural Hazard Disclosure (NHD) report — required by California law and packed with useful information about the property's history and risks.

8. **Inspect.** Hire a licensed inspector, and add specialty inspections (pool, sewer lateral, soils/geological) where they apply. Use the report to accept the home as-is, negotiate repairs or credits, or walk away if findings are serious.

9. **Appraisal & contingency removal.** Your lender orders an appraisal. If it comes in below contract price, you have options: renegotiate, bring extra cash, dispute the appraisal, or walk. Once you're satisfied, you'll formally remove your contingencies in writing.

10. **Close escrow.** Sign your closing documents, wire your funds through escrow, and get your keys. Closings in California go through an escrow and title company, not an attorney — plan on 30-45 days from accepted offer to close.

WIRE FRAUD WARNING

Never wire money based on emailed instructions alone. Always call your escrow officer directly, using a phone number you look up independently, to verify wiring instructions before you send a single dollar.

CHAPTER 10

Closing Checklist & Next Steps

Before you close, gather

- Government-issued photo ID for everyone on the loan
- Verified wire or cashier's check for closing costs — confirm the exact figure and wiring instructions directly with your escrow officer by phone
- Homeowner's insurance binder — must be in place before closing, so start shopping early given California's tighter insurance market
- Proof of utilities (Southern California Edison, SoCalGas, water district) scheduled to transfer into your name on the closing date
- Your final walk-through notes from the day before closing

Right after you close

- File your Homeowners' Exemption with the Ventura County Assessor — that easy tax reduction we mentioned in Chapter 4
- Submit a change of address with USPS, your bank, and the DMV
- If applicable, register with your HOA and/or club membership
- Schedule an HVAC and chimney inspection ahead of your first season in the home
- Sign up for VC Alert (Ventura County's emergency and wildfire notification system) and the City of Thousand Oaks' community alerts

READY TO START?

Let's Find Your Thousand Oaks Home

No pressure, no obligation. Just a conversation about what you're looking for and how we can help. Who you work with matters.

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