CHAPTER 1: WELCOME TO THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

Alluring, magical, and indescribably beautiful, the San Francisco Bay Area draws millions of visitors each year. Those who know the area intimately might share their love and passion for the superb amenities, dynamic energy, breathtaking natural beauty, and unique cityscape as the area’s major charms. When Fortune magazine ranked the San Francisco Bay region as number one for business nationally—and second worldwide behind Singapore—two of the primary factors cited were quality of lifestyle and the high concentration of intellectuals and entrepreneurs. Little wonder that Greater San Francisco invites comparison to other globally influential cities like Sydney, Rio de Janeiro, and Hong Kong.

In addition to the San Francisco and San Mateo counties, the San Francisco Bay Area consists of seven other counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, Solano, Sonoma, and Santa Clara. As you will discover, the entire region is a vibrant international community filled with the positive spirit of advancement, growth, and progress. Even though each community and neighborhood claims its own special character and charm, the Bay Area as a region offers an exciting and friendly, yet cosmopolitan, atmosphere. The greater San Francisco metropolitan region is also a magnet for new businesses seeking a location that combines economic vitality with an exceptional quality of life. The City of San Francisco joins San Jose and Oakland as the regional pulse points for business, commerce and distribution.

With more than seven million residents, the Bay Area ranks as one of the largest metropolitan regions in the country, claiming industries that range from high technology to high fashion. Stir in world-class universities, research laboratories, international markets, an exceptionally
talented labor force and spectacular scenery. Add the high-tech leadership of the Silicon Valley, the prowess of San Francisco’s banking and financial world, the innovation associated with Stanford University and UC Berkeley, and the industrial and distribution centers in Oakland. No other region in the nation brings together such superior ingredients in one relatively compact area.

With so many biotechnology research centers and eminent technological leaders—including such preeminent companies as Google, Facebook, Twitter, Pixar, Pandora, Square and Apple—the area is constantly forging new programs to support a highly educated workforce and a cultivated spirit of entrepreneurship. Top Bay Area companies now encourage a world-renowned state of health and wellness by offering bus and carpool services, gym and daycare facilities, and gourmet food to their hardworking employees. The “campuses” of these companies have become mini cities in their own right, where workers can feel comfortable working later and staying longer. In many sectors, though, telecommuting has become common practice, allowing Bay Area residents to live where they want to live rather than next door to their workplace. Thanks to the Bay Area’s solid economy, many of its households boast high incomes. The region includes two of the top twenty-five wealthiest counties in the United States, and is one of the country’s most expensive and desirable areas.

**Services**

Enhancing the industrial, commercial, and residential expansion of the area is an efficient transportation network of harbor facilities, international airports, rail services, highways and interstates, rapid transit, trans-Bay bridges and tunnels. For commuters who want to avoid highway and bridge traffic at peak hours, options for mass transit are abundant. Mobility is a top priority in San Francisco and throughout the Bay Area, constantly motivating planners and engineers to develop and maintain
the finest of transportation amenities. San Mateo County, nestled at the very edge of San Francisco on the peninsula, is home to the San Francisco International Airport.

Newcomers to the Bay Area can look forward to a healthcare system that stands at the pinnacle of medical technology, staffed by some of the most brilliant, talented, and dedicated professionals in the nation. Quality diagnostics and treatment combine with cost-effective delivery of diverse services. Excellent healthcare systems ensure that a network of major hospitals, community clinics, advanced specialists and supportive services are available to meet every need.

World-renowned Stanford Hospital & Clinics assumes a leading role in healthcare advancements with highly acclaimed specializations that include the AIDS Research Center, Trauma Center, and internationally recognized cancer treatment programs. Nearby in Oakland, the UCSF Benioff Children’s Hospital is distinguished as the largest, busiest and most comprehensive pediatric medical center between Los Angeles and Seattle. Throughout the regional and community facilities are proactive programs such as health screenings, fitness programs, and ongoing community education programs designed to safeguard and maintain good health.

Quality public and private schools serve the region, enhanced by a network of vocational and career institutions, community colleges, law schools and leading universities. The area boasts some of the West’s most exceptional universities such as the University of California-San Francisco, Stanford University and the University of California-Berkeley. Community colleges combine with extensions for a number of California and national colleges and universities to bring higher education even closer to home. Most of these institutions provide flexible schedules that enable working adults to earn degrees while balancing a career and family responsibilities with the pursuit of a higher education or specialized skills.
Lifestyle

Imagine the quality of life available to newcomers to the San Francisco Bay Area, living each day in one of the world's most beloved tourist destinations. World-class museums, professional sports, spectacular gardens, lush parks and vast natural preserves ensure an unsurpassed quality of life. Around every corner, you'll discover a free music concert, an exciting attraction, or a chance to enjoy and appreciate nature. Attracting visitors from every continent, San Francisco places tourism at the top of its revenue-generating industries. The city creates a romantic, ever-changing and exciting atmosphere filled with memorable cultural, shopping, and entertainment opportunities.

Breathtaking vistas, stunning architecture, abundant parks, delicious restaurants featuring almost any cuisine imaginable, impossible streets and quaint cable cars are all elements of San Francisco's enchanting ambiance. All four of the performing arts — symphony, theatre, opera, and dance — maintain celebrated permanent companies in San Francisco. Fine galleries mix with fascinating museums and science discovery centers, many that offer special programs and classes. The San Francisco War Memorial and Performing Arts Center covers a full seven acres in the heart of the city with dazzling venues like Davies Symphony Hall and the Opera House. Legendary museums such as the De Young, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Legion of Honor, the Walt Disney Family Museum and the Exploratorium, dot the city, displaying everything from the world's greatest fine art to wax figures of movie stars and famous characters from history.

Many communities and neighborhoods combine sports activities with a kaleidoscope of artistic classes and modes of expression, from dancing to painting. Teen and senior centers, community centers, recreation centers and country clubs provide opportunities for exercise, creative expression and camaraderie. Equestrian centers, golf courses,
tennis courts, swimming pools, athletic fields, sports leagues, racquet clubs, skating rinks and lush parks combine with regional sites for hunting, fishing, hiking and camping. Residents and tourists alike enjoy the incredible natural areas in Muir Woods National Monument (Mill Valley), Golden Gate National Recreation Area (San Francisco), Tilden Regional Park (Berkeley/Orinda), and Mt. Diablo State Park (Clayton), among many others. Golden Gate Park, one of America’s first urban retreats and one of the world’s largest horticultural wonderlands, stretches from Stanyan Street to the majestic Pacific Ocean on 1,107 indescribably beautiful acres. Some of San Mateo County’s fine state beaches are also perfect spots for whale watching, including Montara State Beach, Pillar Point Harbor and Half Moon Bay. If sailing is your passion, the San Francisco Bay enjoys a worldwide reputation for optimum conditions and sheer beauty.

Aficionados of shopping will find that the San Francisco Bay Area is a retail mecca of virtually endless treasures, from antique and specialty stores to art galleries and sprawling regional malls. The downtown international marketplace lures artists and activists to its kaleidoscope of merchandise, while sidewalk cafes and fine restaurants beckon the weary customer to relax and refresh. When the intrigue of San Francisco’s cosmopolitan crowds begins to dim, you can explore the intimate neighborhood districts tucked away in San Mateo County’s welcoming communities. For bargains and a collector’s dream, look over the books, trinkets, and linens at one of the weekend flea markets or antique fairs.

Another magnet to the Bay Area is the abundance of professional sports thrills in the impressive arenas of San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose. Some of America’s favorite teams clash with the competition, cheered on by frenzied fans. Imagine watching the SF Giants or Oakland A’s play baseball, catching the action of the SF 49’ers or Oakland Raiders football teams, or cheering on the Golden State Warriors basketball team.
Day trips and weekend vacations are a common indulgence for Bay Area residents, who live within an easy drive from premier destinations like pristine Lake Tahoe and other alpine recreation areas, Pebble Beach and the Monterey Peninsula, and the award-winning wineries of the Sonoma and Napa Valleys. Where the San Francisco Bay meets the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers at the California Delta, more than 1,000 miles of sparkling waterways invite boating, fishing, camping, relaxing on a houseboat, water-skiing, jet-skiing, swimming and birding. The more adventurous may want to explore high-intensity sports like sky-diving, windsurfing, parasailing, canoeing, kayaking, white-water rafting, backpacking, bungee jumping and rock-climbing.

Award-winning public school districts are spread all across the Bay Area, providing students with exceptional preparation for an eventual university education. If you prefer the benefits of private school education, some top private schools include: Head-Royce School in Oakland, The Academy in Berkeley, St. Ignatius College Preparatory in San Francisco, College Preparatory School in Oakland, and Bentley School in Oakland/Lafayette. Certain Catholic schools in the area include Corpus Christi in Piedmont and St. Theresa and Bishop O'Dowd in Oakland. For those interested, the average tuition for a private high school in California is $15,617 and the average tuition for a private California elementary school is $9,650.

Finding the ideal home is easy in the San Francisco Bay Area, where spectacular waterfront properties, hillside retreats, and magnificent mansions mix with cozy bungalows or elegant Victorians. High-rise condominiums and luxurious townhouses with panoramic Bay views draw in the city’s brilliant glow of lights, romance, and attractions. In the region’s smaller communities, meticulous landscaping trimmed in greenery and blooms graces beautiful older homes along tree-shaded streets. Regardless of where you choose to settle in the Bay Area, you will find a gracious lifestyle that defies comparison. Little wonder that metropolitan San
Francisco glitters like a flawless diamond among metropolitan centers, intensely loved by those who are fortunate enough to call it home.

THE BAY AREA REAL ESTATE MARKET
San Francisco Housing Trends – An Overview

The crown jewel of the San Francisco Bay Area is of course the City by the Bay itself. With a real estate climate all its own, the city of San Francisco and its housing market merit a brief examination before we delve into the smaller housing communities to the East of the sparkling Bay.

With an estimated population of over 837,000 condensed within 47 square miles, San Francisco is classed as the fourteenth largest U.S. city. Thanks to its unparalleled setting and vigorous job market (along with the highest minimum wage in the country—$10.74—as of January 2014), San Francisco in recent years has become one of the most attractive—and most competitive—places to find a home. As such, the current housing market in the city proper is extraordinarily intense: competition is fierce among buyers and unprecedented numbers of homes are selling far above their asking prices. The rise in housing prices all over the city—including that of detached homes, condos, and apartments—indicates that there is much more demand for new housing than there is supply. The flock of new buyers rushing into San Francisco is a young and affluent crowd; many are first-time homebuyers and employees of the booming tech industry, which is based in the nearby Silicon Valley and in San Francisco itself. The city is becoming steadily denser, more affluent, and more expensive. The unfortunate result of this trend is that many longtime city residents are being forced out of their hometown, as rents continue to climb and the cost of living skyrockets.

In sum, if you are set on living within San Francisco itself, be prepared to pay above the asking price and to survive a bidding war in order
to secure virtually any property you may find. As prices are expected to continue increasing in the coming months, now may be the best time to make your San Francisco housing purchase.

**East Bay Area Market Trends – An Overview**

Across the United States, home buyers and sellers are more savvy and insightful than ever before – both players expect more detailed information and more comprehensive assessments than were typically offered in the past. If you have made the decision to buy or sell real estate in the Bay Area, we want to help ensure that you can contend with the competition. In this increasingly educated real estate climate, it pays to know your local market so that you, too, can make informed decisions and achieve your housing goals.

The San Francisco Bay Area is currently favoring home sellers, making the current climate what is known as a “seller’s market” (more about this in Chapter 2). It is an ideal time to be a home seller because there is a great deal of demand to move into the area, sales prices are climbing, and a shortage of inventory for sale means that buyers are forced to pay more than the asking price for a home. These conditions have combined to make the Bay Area one of the nation’s hottest real estate markets this year. This is great news for those who want to sell their homes quickly: eager Bay Area buyers tend to close a deal in about a month, or even less. It is also worth noting that the sale of luxury homes—those selling for one million dollars or more—is on the rise in this area; improvements to the economy and a healthy rate of employment are making luxury living attainable for many Bay Area residents.

Another essential facet of the East Bay market that you must be aware of is its timing. All real estate markets are cyclical, and are more active at certain times of the year than at others. In the East Bay, the most competitive and active period for the housing market falls between
January and May 15th, when the greatest number of people is looking to buy. It is a common misconception in our area that the summer is the best time to place one’s home on the market, but, in fact, the summer time is a slower period than the winter and spring. Here is why: in an affluent area such as the East Bay, many families use their summers to travel and take time away from home with their loved ones. Others may be busy with graduations, which can also require travel, and tend to occur in May and June. As such, much of the buyer pool is lost to vacations and family time during the summer months.

Because of the prevalence of summer vacations, July tends to be a better month for homebuyers than for sellers; there is less competition for homes in July when many other families are out of town. When August rolls around, the housing market becomes quiet across the board: school is starting, last-minute vacations are wrapping up, and busy families are getting back into the swing of their routines. Though real estate sales do begin to pick up in September and the fall months, it isn’t until January, when the holiday season is at an end that the market truly picks up speed. Once January hits, people are returning to their regular schedules and work routines, and kids are back to school; thus buyers return to fulfilling their real estate needs. January and February are excellent months for a seller to bring his home onto the market. You may ask why, and this may seem contrary to what you envision. But, inventory is still low in January and February, and other sellers are just beginning the conversation about selling their homes in the spring. Limited inventory is ideal for a seller while competition is stiff for a buyer. Don’t wait for the New Year to begin planning if selling is on the horizon. Having a strong grasp on the yearly timing of your local market will give you a leg up in choosing when it is the most profitable time for you to sell or to buy. Keep this timeline in the back of your mind as you ready yourself for your next big real estate move. Each market has a high selling season and a low selling season, so consult an agent in your specific area to find the time that’s best for you as a buyer or a seller.
Whether you are looking to buy or to sell a home in the East Bay, it is essential that you have a firm understanding of the market in which you are doing business. The subsequent chapters in this guide—some targeted specifically for buyers, some targeted specifically for sellers, and others written for the benefit of all—will elucidate the ins and outs of real estate in this area, with helpful insights and tips designed to guarantee a successful home sale or a successful home purchase. To begin understanding the local market, let us proceed to a narrowing of focus as we hone in on the neighborhoods and communities that make up our precise corner of the East Bay.

**East Bay Communities**

Adam and I specialize in the following niche neighborhoods and communities, all tucked within the beautiful slopes to the east of the San Francisco Bay: Piedmont, Berkeley, and the Oakland Hills. While we have extensive real estate work experience throughout the East Bay, as well as in San Francisco itself, and although some agents will work further out, Adam and I prefer to concentrate our efforts on a modest number of towns and neighborhoods so as to provide the best, most comprehensive service to individuals moving in and out of those distinct markets.

If you are looking to buy or sell in other areas of the Bay Area—such as Orinda, Lafayette, Danville, San Francisco or Marin—we would be more than happy to refer you to experienced real estate professionals we trust in those areas. We pride ourselves on cultivating a strong referral network (read more about the importance of Referrals in Chapter 6), and would love to assist you in finding a specialist who works outside our own area of expertise.

If, however, you are interested in the Piedmont, Berkeley, or Oakland Hills markets, you have come to the right place. With over twenty years’ experience in these specific markets—combined with the fact that
I was raised in Piedmont and we now raise our own family there—we could not feel more at home in the neighborhoods where we shop, work and play. When it comes to these particular East Bay communities, you will not find agents with more experience, dedication, or familiarity than we have. Below you will find the insider’s perspective on these three key communities. It is our hope that an overview of each location will help you to identify which local area is right for you, should you be looking to relocate within the East Bay.

**Piedmont**

The City of Piedmont is a charter city of approximately 11,000 residents located in the beautiful Oakland Hills, overlooking the San Francisco Bay. The city, which is virtually built out, consists of established, high-quality, single-family homes on quiet, tree-lined streets. Piedmont is centrally located within a few minutes from Oakland and San Francisco on the West and Concord and Walnut Creek on the East. Within Piedmont’s 1.7 square-mile area, there are five city parks and numerous landscaped areas which offer wooded paths, tennis courts, children’s playgrounds and picnic facilities.

Families primarily move into Piedmont to take advantage of the outstanding and exclusive school district: students must live within the town of Piedmont to attend its first-rate schools. Piedmont’s school system includes three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Local families also value the small, close-knit atmosphere found in Piedmont. When people raise their children here, they decide to stay for its unparalleled sense of community and proximity to all of the Bay Area’s gems. Among the neighborhoods featured in this description, Piedmont is the most expensive, followed by the Oakland neighborhoods of Crocker Highlands and Upper Rockridge.
Oakland

Oakland is a vibrant city comprised of many neighborhoods with various cultures, attractions and styles. Consider the following specific Oakland districts:

**Crocker Highlands:** Crocker Highlands is a charming neighborhood located in the Oakland Hills and situated between the lovely City of Piedmont, the quaint Glenview neighborhood, the bustling shops and restaurants on Lakeshore Avenue, and within close proximity to Highways 13 and 580. Crocker Highlands is comprised of mostly older, traditional homes built in the 1920s with a sprinkling of homes built in the ‘30s and ‘40s. Charming and gracious is how one might describe a typical Crocker Highlands home. It is a wonderful neighborhood filled with laughter and charm, sidewalks and trees. The community is very small and intimate, with no shops of its own. Each year, we are proud to support the Crocker Highlands Elementary School Auction and Home Tour. This public elementary school has become very popular due to an influx of affluent families moving into the neighborhood who are active participants in their children’s education. After 5th grade, Crocker Highlands families
may decide between nearby Catholic schools, private schools, or other schooling options for their children.

**Glenview:** “Rockridge East” is my personal description for Glenview, a community located just below Piedmont and Oakmore. The Glenview home is similar in style to the 1920s Rockridge craftsman bungalow, and is also situated in a bustling neighborhood featuring charming shops, cafes, a variety of restaurants and convenient services (including my favorite dog grooming shop and shoe repair). Though still suburban in nature, the charming community of Glenview provides more of an urban feel similar to that of San Francisco itself.

**Oakmore & Beyond:** Comparable to Montclair and Upper Rockridge and adjacent to Piedmont you will find predominately traditional homes in quaint neighborhoods, with sidewalks and small shopping districts to call their own. Oakmore is located across from the City of Piedmont, just off of Park Boulevard and Highway 13. Upper Oakmore belongs to the Montclair School District and attracts many families. This neighborhood tends to fall within the same price point as Montclair, Crocker Highlands, and Upper Rockridge. Lincoln Heights, Redwood Heights and the Laurel District are three additional popular neighborhoods just beyond the Oakmore District up Highway 13. These areas are especially suitable for starter homes and younger families just beginning to establish themselves.

**Rockridge:** Prior to the building of the Bay Bridge in 1936, Rockridge—located at the foot of the Oakland Hills between Alcatraz Avenue to the north and 51st Street to the south, and between Telegraph Avenue to the west and Broadway to the east—was a sleepy neighborhood of cottages and bungalows owned by those who preferred the quiet life to the urban bustle of San Francisco across the Bay. Today, many of these homes remain, and represent some of the most coveted real estate in the Bay Area, for several reasons: the weather in this particular microclimate is often sunny and warm; the commute from the Rockridge BART Station
is easy; the homes on the leafy residential streets have been charminingly restored; and the area’s main thoroughfare, College Avenue, is lined with atmospheric cafes, gourmet restaurants, independent bookstores and antiques shops that people go out of their way to patronize. While residents adore Rockridge for its mini urban environment and prevalent biking and walking opportunities, it is also true that the area is often congested and parking is difficult. Furthermore, rent prices are very high and are consistently climbing.

**Upper Rockridge**: Conveniently situated between the Montclair Village and College Avenue business districts, the Upper Rockridge neighborhood is nestled in the hills, with lovely vistas of the San Francisco Bay. Unlike Piedmont and Crocker Highlands for example, where 1920s homes are prevalent, Upper Rockridge is comprised mostly of post-fire, new construction homes located in the popular Hillcrest School District. This public school district continues through 8th grade and is accessible only to those homes that fall within district boundary lines. The neighborhood boasts some sidewalks, but they are not found across the board. With its slightly lower price bracket, many families feel that they get more for their money in Upper Rockridge than in Piedmont, for instance, where one will pay a higher price for a smaller home that is most likely in need of renovations. After the Oakland Hills fire, many larger homes were rebuilt (where the original home was much smaller) covering a significant portion of the lot, leaving a very small separation between neighbors. However, its proximity to shopping and business districts is an added bonus.
Montclair

Just off of Highway 13, tucked above the Montclair Village, Piedmont and Upper Rockridge in the Oakland Hills, this wooded retreat with mature trees boasts privacy and tranquility and is easily accessible to freeways, first-rate elementary schools and shopping. Montclair exhibits a more wooded and tree-filled environment than its neighboring towns, and is more spread out than Crocker Highlands and Piedmont. Consequently it is not as tight-knit a community. Montclair’s neighborhoods offer a wide range of older and newer homes and a diversity of architectural styles. They do not, however, contain sidewalks, which can be difficult when raising families. Within Montclair you will find a wide range of price points, from affordable homes to higher-end homes. Much like those in the neighboring communities, many Montclair homes enjoy sweeping views of the Bay.
Berkeley

Sheltered by rolling hills and the San Francisco Bay, Berkeley is a vibrant and spirited city of unsurpassed richness. Within Berkeley’s 18 square miles, a visitor can hear a symphony or a jazz quartet, stroll through a redwood forest or a rose garden, shop for Tibetan jewelry or for sportswear from The Gap, play a round of golf, take a yoga class, catch a world-premiere play or first-run film, embark on a sport fishing excursion or enjoy an architectural walking tour. Consummately Californian in its setting—but international in its cultural landscape—Berkeley is home to the University of California, Berkeley, which lends an academic air to the entire city. With its wealth of cultural and social diversity, dining and shopping opportunities and recreational pursuits, Berkeley is a compact city offering an exciting range of visitor options.

Families choose Berkeley for its wide selection of private schools and larger public school districts—Berkeley High School currently educates approximately 3,200 students—and unrivaled cultural opportuni-
ties, which are largely owing to the esteemed University that lends Berkeley its world-renowned status.

For those who are familiar with a large city environment, Berkeley will feel like home: there is something to do for everyone, and the city thus attracts every manner of people. Known as an urban, liberal university town, Berkeley prides itself on its charming older properties and stellar Bay views. Some homes in certain neighborhoods in Berkeley are far exceeding the high prices of some Piedmont homes.