Good data visualization is about getting to the qualitative in quantitative information.

What's more qualitative than a gut reaction to a house you are looking to buy?

Here's a story about how I used visualization to help my family sort out what house to buy…

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It was the Spring of 2003, after six months and dozens of houses, nothing seemed the obvious choice. There were things to like about lots of the houses we'd seen, but there were also lots of considerations. It felt like a really complicated decision.

So we decided to try to document what we knew and what we felt…

Step 1 | **We articulated our criteria**

We came to an agreement on what was important to us…

Criteria
outdoor space
guest accommodation
storage/potential
open entertainment area
parking (2 spaces)
low maintenance/upkeep
other kids nearby
excitement/uniqueness of space
cozy private spaces
location
doesn't need much work
price
room to grow into
garage

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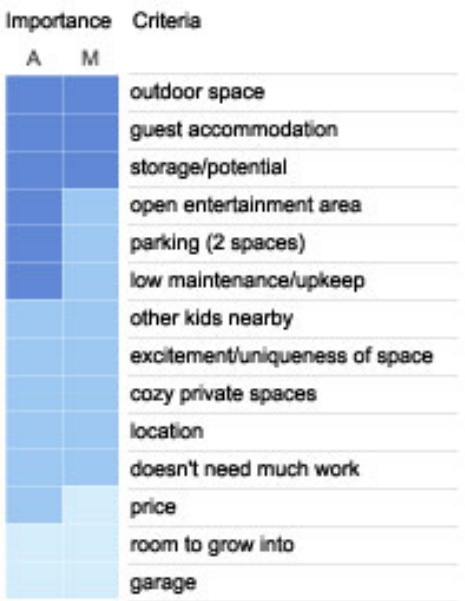
Step 2 | **Ranking the Criteria**

Then we ranked how important each criterion was to us. Darker blue means more important. (I am "A", "M" is my partner in crime…)



This is known as a *multi attribute decision model.* But here, the color coding acts as a *visual* weighting factor.

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Step 3: **List all the options**

These are the *six* houses we had narrowed it down to…






Importance A	Importance M	Criteria
		outdoor space
		guest accommodation
		storage/potential
		open entertainment area
		parking (2 spaces)
		low maintenance/upkeep
		other kids nearby
		excitement/uniqueness of space
		cozy private spaces
		location
		doesn't need much work
		price
		room to grow into
		garage

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Step 4: **Rating all the options**

And so both of us documented our opinion of each of the six options…

Importance A	Importance M	Criteria	Option 1 A	Option 1 M	Option 2 A	Option 2 M	Option 3 A	Option 3 M	Option 4 A	Option 4 M	Option 5 A	Option 5 M	Option 6 A	Option 6 M
		outdoor space												
		guest accommodation												
		storage/potential												
		open entertainment area												
		parking (2 spaces)												
		low maintenance/upkeep												
		other kids nearby												
		excitement/uniqueness of space												
		cozy private spaces												
		location												
		doesn't need much work												
		price												
		room to grow into												
		garage												

High	Good / Has a lot
Medium	Okay / Has some
Low	Poor / Has little if any

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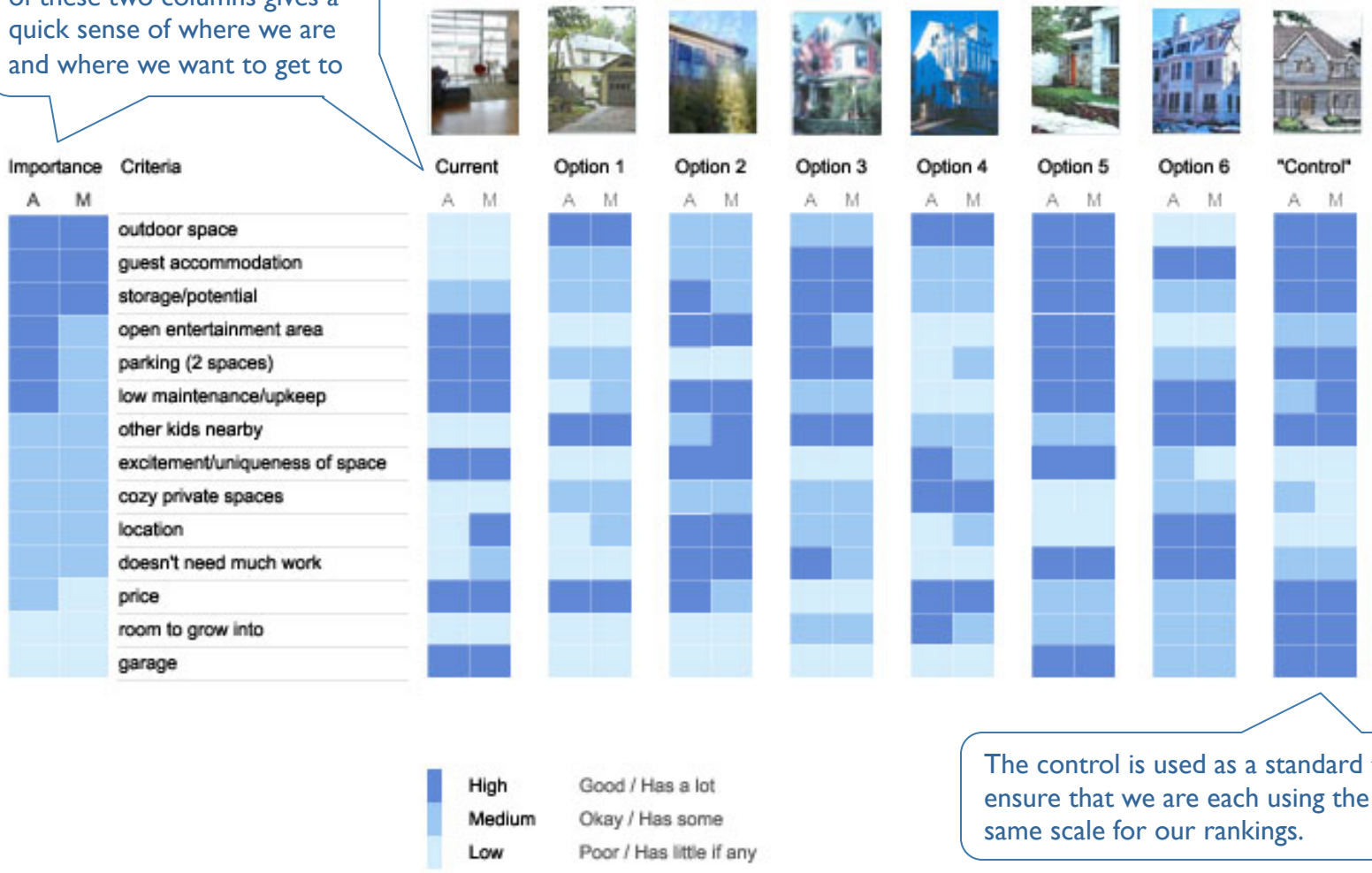
Step 5 | **Add "Control" Houses** (Our Current House and a Friend's House)

Comparing the color coding of these two columns gives a quick sense of where we are and where we want to get to



The control is used as a standard to ensure that we are each using the same scale for our rankings.

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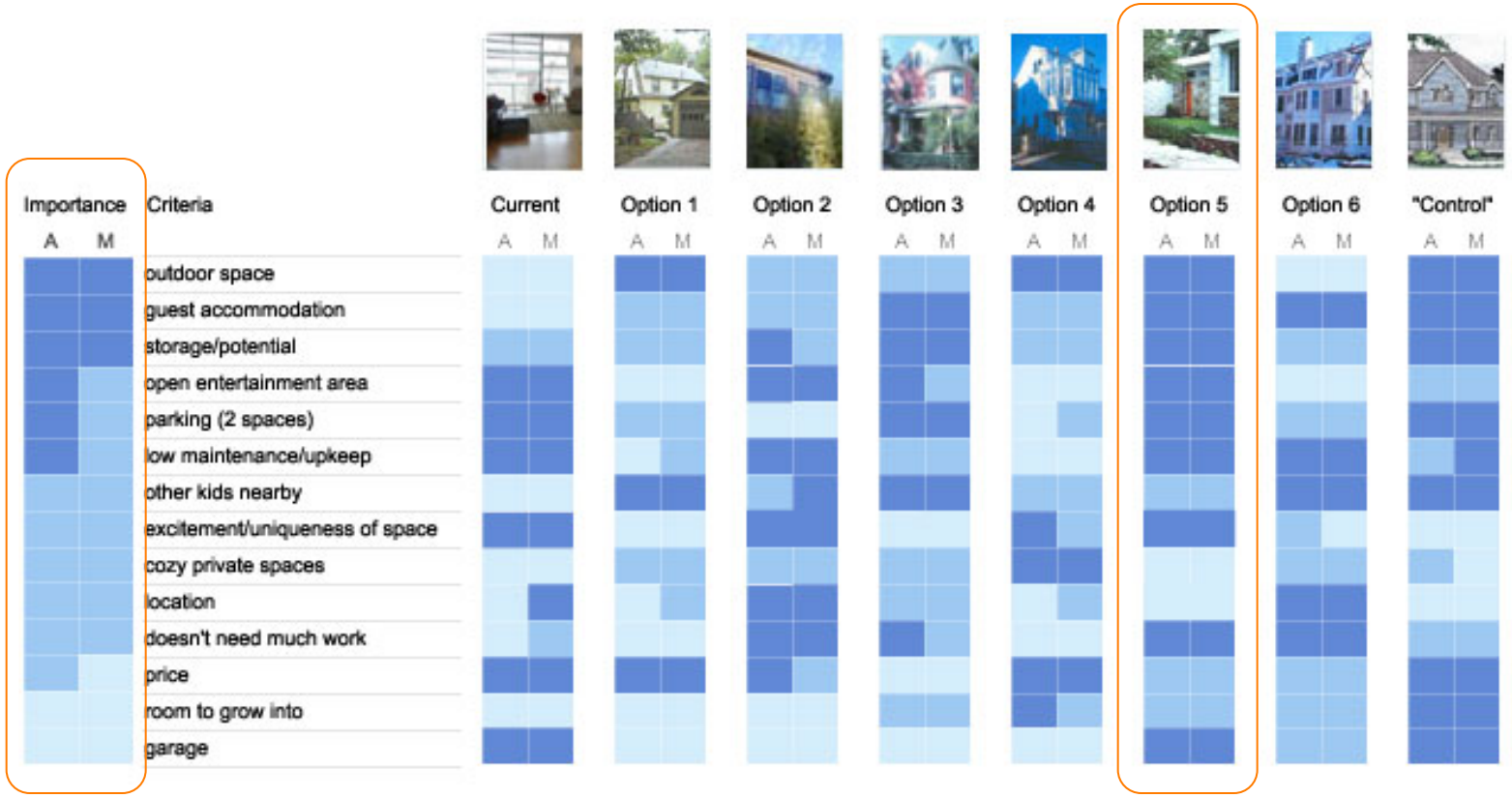
Step 5 | **Add "Control" Houses** (Our Current House and a Friend's House)



At this point, from a quick scan across the columns, Option 5's 'pattern' most closely matches our weighting of the criteria– in fact, it has even more dark blue. No. 5 seemed the house we should buy. However, both of us were conflicted. That told us that our model was not complete…

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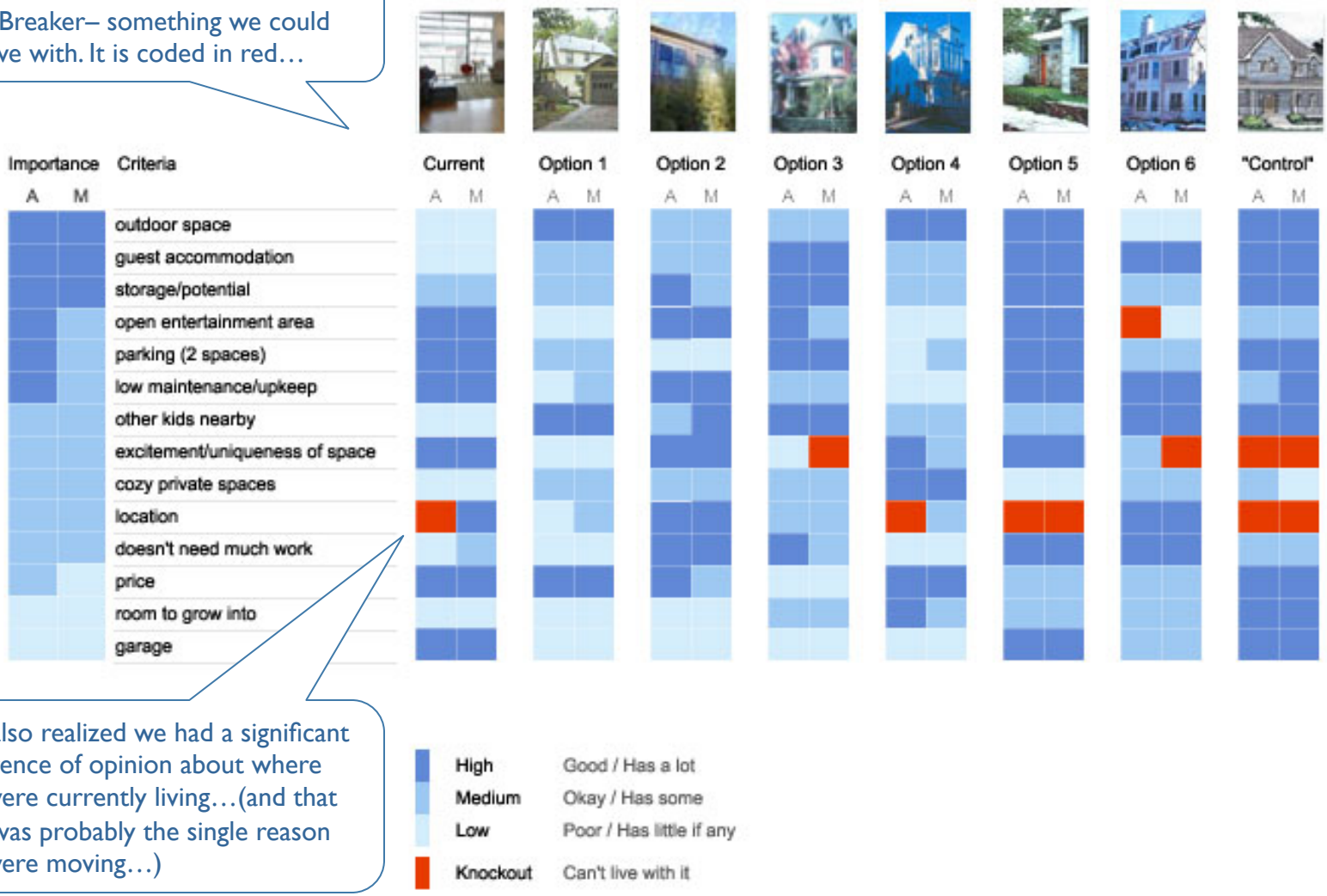
Step 6 | Reflecting the Emotion in Decision-making **The "Deal Breaker"**

So, we added another dimension-- the Deal Breaker– something we could not live with. It is coded in red…



We also realized we had a significant difference of opinion about where we were currently living…(and that this was probably the single reason we were moving…)

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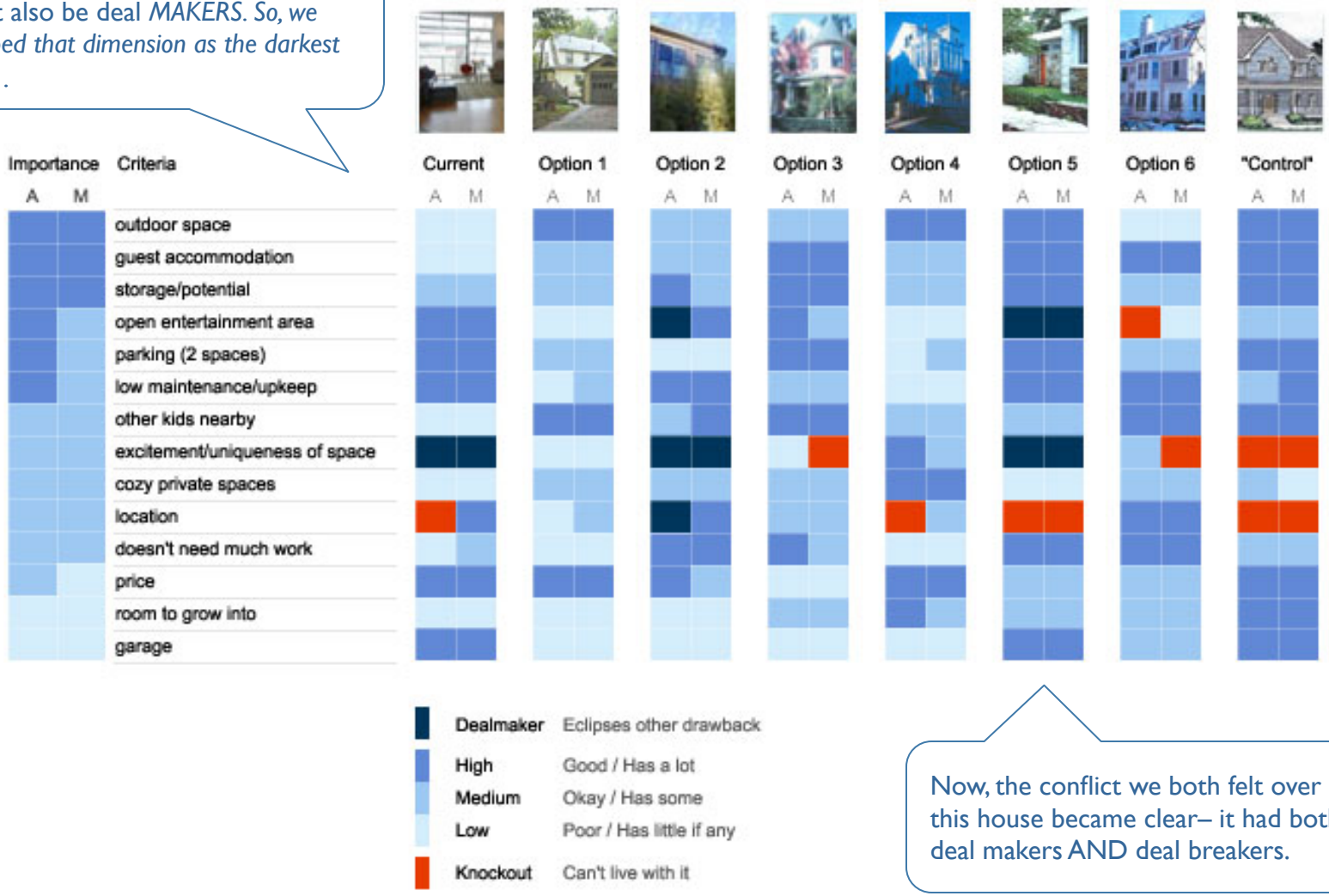
Step 6 | Reflecting the Emotion in Decision-making **The "Deal *Maker*"**

But if there were deal *breakers*, there might also be deal *MAKERS. So, we mapped that dimension as the darkest blue…*



Now, the conflict we both felt over this house became clear– it had both deal makers AND deal breakers.

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Step 8 | **The Decision** Our New House

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This exercise also confirmed that what they say about real estate was true for us too…

…location, location, location.