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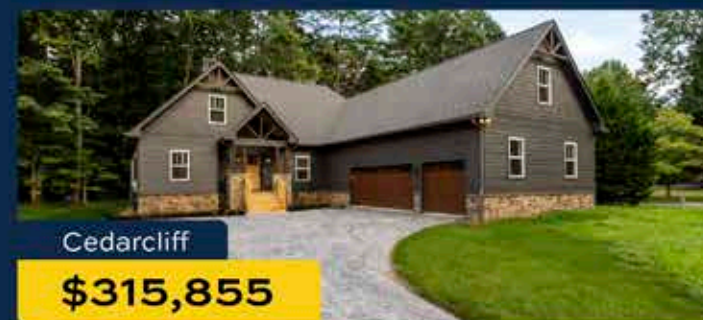
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THE TOP 5 THINGS BUYERS & SELLERS FORGET BEFORE LISTING OR MOVING IN

BY ASHLEY SASHER OWNER - BLOOMIN' BLINDS OF CUMMING & JOHNS CREEK, GA

In real estate, first impressions matter—and often it's the small details that make the biggest difference in how a home shows, photographs, and ultimately sells. While sellers focus on paint colors and landscaping, there are a few finishing touches that buyers notice immediately but homeowners often overlook.

Here are five things buyers and sellers frequently forget to refresh before a home hits the market—or before moving into their new one.



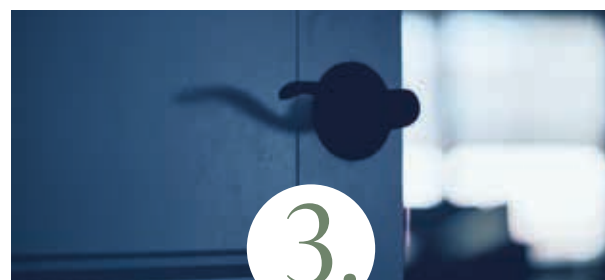
1. WINDOW TREATMENTS

Nothing dates a home faster than worn blinds, broken cords, or mismatched coverings. Clean, modern window treatments instantly elevate a space, enhance natural light, and create a finished look for listing photos and showings. Many buyers also want privacy and light control on day one, making updated treatments a strong selling feature.



2. LIGHTING FIXTURES

Outdated lighting can make a home feel older than it is. Swapping builder-grade fixtures for modern designs is a quick update with high visual impact.



3. DOOR HARDWARE AND CABINET PULLS

Small details like handles, knobs, and hinges can refresh an entire kitchen or bathroom for a relatively low investment.



4. OUTDOOR SHADE AND PATIO SPACES

Outdoor living spaces are more important than ever. Adding motorized retractable screens or shades can turn a patio into usable square footage buyers love and will use all year round.



5. SMART HOME COMFORT FEATURES

Motorized shades and automated lighting are becoming increasingly desirable, especially for hard to reach windows and luxury listings.

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YOUR AI ADVANTAGE

AI NEWS: VIRTUAL STAGING GOES MAINSTREAM (AND IT'S GETTING SCARY GOOD)

BY STEVEN NEVILLE

AI virtual staging has hit a tipping point. The technology is now so realistic that buyers often can't tell the difference between AI-staged photos and traditional staging. But here's what matters for your business: what used to cost \$2,000+ and take days now costs under \$10 per image and takes minutes. Speed has improved dramatically: most tools deliver staged images in under 10 minutes instead of the 24-48 hour turnaround from traditional services. And the cost savings are massive: **traditional staging runs \$2,000-\$5,000 per property, while AI staging averages \$50-\$100 for an entire listing.**

AI Tool Spotlight: Apply Design

Apply Design (applydesign.io) is the professional-grade AI staging tool that balances automation with creative control.

What sets it apart:

18,000+ furniture pieces: not cookie-cutter templates. Mix and match styles to target specific buyer demographics

Drag-and-drop editor: AI generates the base design, you customize it to perfection

Multi-angle consistency: replicate the same design across multiple photos of the same room (critical for cohesive listing presentations)

Photorealistic quality: accurate lighting, shadows, and reflections that pass the buyer eye test

Pricing: ~\$7-10 per image. A full listing (8-12 rooms) costs under \$100.

This Month's Tip: When to Use AI Staging vs Traditional Staging

Not every listing needs the same approach. Use this framework:

Use AI staging when:

- Property is vacant and needs instant visual appeal
- Budget is tight (investor flips, lower-priced homes)
- You need fast turnaround (days, not weeks)

Use traditional staging when:

Luxury listings where buyers expect to walk through staged homes

Property has unique architectural features that need physical emphasis

You're hosting open houses (buyers will see it's not actually furnished)

Hybrid approach: AI stage the listing photos for online marketing,

traditional stage only the main living areas for showings.

Important: Check your local MLS rules on virtual staging disclosure.



Got Questions?
Send me your burning AI questions or topics you'd like to see covered. Email me or connect with me on LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/realstevenneville/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/realstevenneville/)
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CARLY *Bell*

FINDING HER GROOVE

"I didn't get licensed in real estate because I enjoy touring houses all day," Carly Bell admits. "I also didn't get it for the freedom of creating my own schedule or because I could make a lot of money. I got my license because I'm passionate about advocating for people and connecting them with homes and opportunities that they may have never thought were possible."

BY JESS WELLAR
PHOTOS BY ALLIE SANTOS

After searching for years to find a career that truly felt meaningful, Carly discovered that real estate offered exactly what she had been looking for all along. Today, as a rising agent with Keller Williams Greater Athens and a member of the Sold by Ashley & Associates team, Carly is building momentum in an industry where the right environment can make all the difference.

Choosing The Hard Road

Carly's leap into real estate began at a crossroads that could have easily led somewhere else. At the time, she had been offered an appealing job opportunity with strong pay and travel perks. Yet at the same moment, she had also enrolled in a local real estate pre-licensing course while working as a receptionist at a flooring company and waiting tables off and on. One option offered certainty, while the other represented risk and possibility.

"If I went with the job opportunity, I knew exactly what I was getting into," she remembers thinking. "Or I could start my real estate course that I may not finish or may not pass the exam and then may not be successful at real estate at all. But if I am, then I've got something that's mine."

That realization pushed her to bet on herself.

Finding the Right Circle

While Carly earned her license in May of 2023, the first couple of years were



quieter than she had hoped. Like many new agents, she felt unsure how to turn her ambition into consistent results.

That changed when she began reevaluating who she surrounded herself with.

"After about seven months of sitting around waiting on the phone to ring, I decided something had to change," Carly recalls. A conversation with KW broker Brandon McEachern helped change her mind on switching brokerages to avoid the same scenario elsewhere.

Soon afterward, Carly connected with team leader Ashley Nalley and began considering something she had never previously imagined: joining a team. The culture Ashley described resonated deeply, especially the emphasis on accountability, personal growth, and protecting the reputation of everyone involved by being selective.

"Everyone on our team has the same core values and has high standards as well," Carly affirms. "We're all positive, uplifting, and push each other to be stronger every day."





Once Carly stepped into real estate full time in July of last year, the results came quickly. With the support of her team and a new mindset focused on consistent effort, she closed eight transactions in just six months, surpassing the goal she had originally thought might be out of reach.

Advocacy First

While production milestones are exciting, Carly is quick to point out that numbers are not what motivate her. What matters most is the responsibility that comes with guiding clients through major life decisions.

“These are not just transactions for me,” she explains. “My clients are families, newlyweds, first-time buyers, investors, and friends trusting me with one of the biggest financial and emotional decisions of their lives.”

That perspective shapes how she approaches every conversation and every negotiation. Carly sees her role as part advocate, part guide, helping clients navigate a process that can feel overwhelming at times.

“I pray for my clients, and I strive to operate with integrity, honesty, and excellence in every situation,” she emphasizes. “At the end of the day, I want them to feel protected, valued, and truly represented.”

Many of Carly’s clients remark that they felt treated like family throughout the process, and some even describe her as “surprisingly aggressive” when advocating on their behalf. Carly laughs at the description but understands what they mean.

“I would say I’m just passionate and very straightforward,” she grins. “What matters to me are the lives and the people on the other side of the deal.”

Rooted in What Matters

Outside of work, Carly’s life centers around the people and community that support her. She and her husband Phillip, who owns his own business as a certified arborist and land management specialist, were married in September of 2024 after several years together. The Bell’s household also includes three beloved “fur babies:” Nyx, a Boykin Spaniel; Peanut, a Chihuahua mix; and Pete, a tuxedo cat.

Carly and her husband enjoy visiting her brother-in-law’s family in Monroe and cheering on their two young nieces as they begin to explore sports and other activities. Beach trips and casual weekends together have become some of Carly’s favorite ways to recharge. The couple also leads a married small group through Athens Church, which has created a close-knit community of friends who spend time together often.

“My family and my faith keep me motivated,” Carly shares. “Let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the

proper time we shall reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

When they do manage to steal a quiet afternoon, Carly enjoys visiting local breweries or wineries and spending time near the water, whether that means the beach, a lake, or simply relaxing poolside. One favorite local spot just down the road from them is Strange Duck Brewing, where the laid-back atmosphere and friendly owners make it easy to unwind.

Looking ahead, Carly remains focused on continuing to grow both personally and professionally while keeping her priorities in check.

“I spent so much time listening to incredible agents who were closing 100-plus transactions a year and thinking that will probably never be me,” she concludes. “But as long as you surround yourself with the right people and find a team or partner who truly wants to see you grow, you can be just as successful. Don’t let your own mindset limit you.”



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GREAT HOME ENDEAVORS

Where Smart Design Meets Affordable Living

WRITTEN BY ELIZABETH MCCABE
PHOTOS BY JACOB JONES



Let's face the facts. For many families today, the idea of an "affordable home" feels increasingly out of reach. What once counted as a starter home has steadily climbed in price, with many entry-level houses now landing between \$300,000 and \$400,000 in the metro Atlanta area. For retirees, young adults just starting out, and families hoping to keep aging parents close, the options can feel limited.

That reality is exactly what inspired Elissa and Andrew Byrd to launch **Great Home Endeavors** in 2024.

"We realized that what we used to call an affordable home simply doesn't exist anymore," Andrew explains. "But we can build homes that are smaller in size, more efficient, and much more affordable."

Their solution focuses on small homes and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), which are secondary homes built on an existing property. These homes typically range from 400 to 1,100 square feet, offering options such as one-bedroom, one-bath homes or two-bedroom, two-bath layouts.

And while the terms "tiny home" and "small home" are often used interchangeably, the Byrds are quick to clarify the difference.

"These are not homes on wheels," Andrew says. "They're real homes."

Great Home Endeavors builds permanent, stick-built homes constructed on a slab, crawl space, or basement, complete with HVAC systems, plumbing, and electrical infrastructure. Because of this, the homes are designed to add real value to a property, unlike portable tiny homes or sheds.

"They add equity," Andrew explains. "That's important to homeowners."

The flexibility of these homes makes them attractive for a variety of situations. Many families build them for aging parents who want to remain independent but still live nearby. Others create a place for adult children who can't yet afford a traditional home. Some homeowners even build them as short-term rentals through Airbnb or VRBO, generating additional income from their property.

"There's a high need for families who have retired parents who want to live on the same piece of property," Andrew says. "Not everyone can afford \$5,000

- \$10,000 a month for independent or assisted living."

Recognizing the growing demand for this type of housing, the Byrds became Certified ADU Specialists, a designation that reflects their expertise in this rapidly evolving segment of the housing market.

In states like California and Oregon, ADUs have been common for decades. In the Southeast, however, the concept is still gaining momentum.

"It opens a lot of possibilities for people," Andrew says.

But building smaller homes requires more than just construction expertise. Designing a compact space that still feels comfortable, functional, and inviting takes creativity and planning. That's where Elissa's background shines.

In addition to co-owning Great Home Endeavors, she also runs **The Refined Nest**, an interior design, staging, and organization company. Her experience includes years working in builder design centers, helping homeowners navigate the often overwhelming

process of making selections and customizing their homes.



"I found a good ability to talk to homeowners and understand what they need," Elissa explains. "And also talk to builders on their terms and become a liaison between the builder and the homeowner."

That role often saves builders time while helping homeowners feel confident about their decisions.

"I can help them think through things they may not have considered," she says.

This perspective is especially valuable when designing smaller homes, where thoughtful details make a big difference.



“When you have a smaller home, you need to maximize every bit of space,” Elissa says.

Simple changes can pay off. Elissa points out that raising ceiling heights from eight feet to nine feet can dramatically increase storage possibilities. Full-height closets, built-in cabinetry, shelving between studs, and creative storage under staircases can all help homeowners gain functionality without increasing square footage.

“We want people to live comfortably in the space,” she says. “Even though it’s smaller, it doesn’t have to feel cramped.”

The company also guides clients through every stage of the building process. When someone contacts Great Home Endeavors about building an ADU or small home, the first step is research.

The team reviews tax records, zoning regulations, neighborhood covenants, and setback requirements to determine whether the project is possible and what size structure is allowed. Each city and county has its own regulations, and some areas have minimum square footage requirements.

After that initial research, the Byrds often visit the property.

“We schedule an appointment with the homeowner to see the land,” Elissa explains. “We look at grading, access to

the job site, and what kind of foundation will work best.”

Terrain can play a significant role in cost. A flat property might allow for a simple slab foundation, while homes built on hillsides may require additional structural support.

From there, the company can guide homeowners through the entire process. “Simply put, we can do everything for them, from the research and permitting to building and handing the keys over,” Andrew says.

Their reach extends across a wide region as well. While based in North Georgia, Great Home Endeavors serves areas north of metro Atlanta up to the North Carolina state line, east toward the Car-



olinas, and west toward Ellijay, Georgia, with the ability to build in Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

Meanwhile, through The Refined Nest, Elissa continues helping homeowners transform the spaces they already have. She offers virtual design consultations, color consultations, staging services, and organization support.

Her goal is simple: create homes that feel both beautiful and functional. “Organization helps people stay on task, have clear thoughts, and create more effective daily routines,” she explains.

Together, the Byrds have built businesses that complement each other perfectly, construction paired with thoughtful design.

And in a housing market where affordability is often hard to find, their mission is clear.

“In a world where people are so profit-oriented,” Andrew says, “we focus on the customer service side of adding value.”

He pauses for a moment before adding a thought that captures their philosophy perfectly, “When is the last time you spent money on something you really loved, that added value, with a great experience, and regretted it?” At Great Home Endeavors, the goal is simple: “We add value that no one else can do.”

The Byrds enjoy being involved in the communities they serve and are often seen with their companion and community-loved Australian shepherd, Ruby. “The truth is Ruby is the main attraction,” says Andrew. “She loves people and food. If you have neither, she will introduce herself with love anyway.”

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ANITA BRE

BY JESS WELLAR
PHOTOS BY ALLIE SANTOS

Stephens

THE PERFECT BALANCE

“What keeps me motivated is building something meaningful for my daughter and our future, creating a legacy she can be proud of, and a life that shows her what hard work and kindness look like in action,” Anita Stephens begins. “We both believe in working hard so we can play hard, give generously, and serve others well. That balance keeps me grounded and moving forward every day.”

For Anita and Bre Stephens, that balance is generational. As the mother-daughter partners behind Simply Stephens Real Estate at Keller Williams Realty Atlanta Partners in Braselton, Georgia, they’ve built a \$20+ million-producing team grounded in experience and deep-rooted service while modeling what legacy looks like in real time.

Generations At Work

Anita’s path into real estate began in 1993 at age 23, but her passion for helping people find “home” started even earlier. At 19, she was working as a leasing consultant and quickly discovered she loved the process of helping people find the right place to live. “I fell in love with helping people find their perfect apartment,” Anita says.



“Very quickly, I fell in love with the idea of building a career around engaging with and helping others.

I never looked back.”

“There’s something really special about watching someone walk into a space and realize it’s home. Eventually, I thought, if I can help someone find an apartment, why not help them find a house?”

Bre, on the other hand, had a short stint in college studying statistics and working in a grooming salon at PetSmart before reevaluating her direction.

“I wanted to do something I was passionate about that also felt meaningful,” Bre recalls. “That’s when I reached out to my mom to see what real estate was really all about!”

In the interim, Anita had dispersed her former large team and stepped away from real estate for years to do ministry work. She had only recently gotten back into her real estate groove when Bre initially joined as her executive assistant in 2017 to see the business from behind the scenes.

“Very quickly, I fell in love with the idea of building a career around engaging with and helping others,” Bre explains. Within months, she was licensed and all in: “I never looked back.”

Their dynamic works because it’s both similar and complementary: “My friends say that Bre is a mini me,” Anita laughs. “But she processes things faster with a young, fresh creative side that really helps.”



Bre agrees on the similarities while adding, “My mom’s strengths are how driven she is to see things through. She thinks ahead and is always prepared to help balance us out.”

Accolades With Purpose

In 2025, Simply Stephens Real Estate ranked as the #3 Group in their Keller Williams market center and Top 100 in the Southeast Region, placing them in the Top 1% nationwide.

Anita was named the 2024 KW-BJ Agent of the Year, and Bre has received the KW-NG Culture Award, both honors voted on by their peers.

Bre also serves as Vice President of the Keller Williams Young Professionals (KWYP) Atlanta Chapter, continuing her commitment to leadership and growth within the real estate community.

But accolades, for them, are a byproduct - not the objective.

Bre defines success as “the ability to do what I want, when I want, with whoever I want, regardless of the cost.” She continues, “Success to me is being able to fill the gaps in others’ lives to help them live full lives, too.”

Anita admits her own definition has matured over time.

“Today, it means helping my daughter build a lasting legacy, serving others well in whatever season they’re in, and having the freedom to pause and enjoy life,” she offers. “If I can serve people well and love my family greatly, that’s success.”

Both have also served on the KW Associate Leadership Council, as Anita emphasizes, “We believe growth is important and as much as we like to

give back to the community, we also give back to our real estate community and teach classes.”

The Family Difference

What sets Simply Stephens Real Estate apart isn’t just experience, it’s intention. “Because we are a family team, every client truly becomes part of that family,” Anita emphasizes.

“By removing our attachment to simply ‘getting a sale,’ our focus stays on what’s best for each client,” Bre continues, “Sometimes that means advising someone not to move yet or helping them create a long-term plan instead.”

Their execution is just as strong as their integrity. As Anita explains, “Everyone receives a luxury marketing experience regardless of price point.”

The team produces high-quality magazines for every listing and is known for hosting unforgettable client events, including masquerade balls, St. Patrick’s Day with live DJs, a “Sweetheart Stampede” featuring line dancing, and pickleball and cornhole social designed to bring clients and community together.

“We love bringing all our people from different groups together to connect,” Anita beams.

Bre explains the client experience from the inside out: “We hear that we are hands-on and handle everything. Because we have in-house transaction and marketing coordinators, clients are not bounced around and often tell us the process felt seamless every step of the way.”

Looking ahead, SSRE is preparing to scale. They currently have a pair of buyer specialists and would love to add two more by the end of the year if it’s the right fit.

Bre clarifies their criteria: “We want a producing agent that is looking for more leverage to love on their sphere, works hard, and enjoys team collaboration to get time back in their daily lives.”



Service At Every Level

Both women take pride in the fact that their team’s impact stretches beyond the closing table. Through partnerships with Kares4Kids and KWcares, they’ve helped build beds for children through Sleep in Heavenly Peace, supported Braselton Christian Academy with facility improvements, donated clothing to Fostering Hope, delivered “Kare Bears” to first responders, and hosted training sessions for local educators.

At home, their worlds are just as full. Bre looks forward to travel adventures and live music with her partner, Emily, and cuddles from their “chunky cat” Bella. This year’s travel docket is packed with trips to Mexico, Alaska, Costa Rica, and various adventures with her KW Young Professionals tribe.

“I also love puzzles, cards, and board games — my absolute favorite is Betrayal — so when I’m home, you’ll often find me huddled around a table,” she laughs.

Married to Brian for 36 years next month, Anita treasures precious time with family, including their son Austin, “daughter-in-love” Amalea, and grandgirls Ivy and Eden, noting it’s her favorite thing. She also loves competing with ALTA and USTA tennis, enjoys live music with Brian, hosting game nights with friends, and relaxing by their pool.

“We’re also very active in our golf and country club community at Traditions of Braselton, which has brought us so many wonderful friendships,” she smiles.

Lofty Ambitions

When asked about the future, Bre isn’t afraid to dream big. In addition to growing their team and pouring into others, one day she hopes to lead remotely to travel the country speaking as a motivational speaker to other young agents.

“I have plans for 10 homes across the country, and want to drift between

“At the end of the day, we care deeply about people and our business is built on *servicing clients the right way.*”

them while still leading, mentoring, and inspiring others,” she elaborates. Anita’s own vision complements that goal beautifully. She looks forward to building a business that runs without her someday, where clients are still cared for like family, and Bre has a legacy to grow.

“At the end of the day, we care deeply about people and our business is built on serving clients the right way,” Anita concludes. “We’re building something meaningful for our clients, our community, and our future.”



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