

If Your Home Were a Book, the Front Yard Would Be Its Cover



We know better, but let's be honest, covers are judged! As the sunshine draws us out, suddenly our home's aesthetic takes center stage. Our property's attractiveness — or lack thereof — commands attention in the spring as we combat the proliferation of both flowers and weeds. You can almost hear the collective sigh of homeowners ev-

erywhere pondering what can be done to improve their curb appeal. However big or small your goals and budget are for the front yard, I hope to enthrall you with some savvy tips and ideas because we all win when our neighborhood is teeming with attractive homes.

Look at the complete picture

A renovation to the front of the house can be offset if you don't also address an older, stained roof, for example. **Eliad Vaknin**, owner of **EV Remodeling** headquartered in Peachtree Corners, advises homeowners to take everything into consideration when making improvements.

Vaknin has the experience and knowledge to spearhead large-scale residential redesigns. For ambitious façade improvements like adding an awning over the

front entrance, changing the exterior envelope of the home, a fresh coat of paint or new windows and doors, Vaknin is well-equipped to orchestrate projects of this magnitude. His company focuses on private home renovations, and they've done it all, from the smallest revamps to new construction. The only limits are your imagination and financial plan.

Since multiple trades are involved to complete such a remodel, it's best if a professional coordinates these endeavors. "Someone needs to see the full picture, oversee the whole project, so the final result is better," Vaknin said.

Does the outside of your home need some TLC?

The easiest and least expensive way to enhance your home's curb appeal is to paint the exterior. "You can go from red brick to a white

home instantly. Even so, some customers are surprised by the cost of painting," Vaknin said.

He recommends opting for specialized, more durable — and yes — pricier products obtained at a brick supply company that can last 20



Eliad Vaknin

By Patrizia Winsper



Opposite page, An example provided by Realtor Amy Fuchs, of curb appeal that will sell your home faster and for top dollar. Sabrina Samuel Photography.

Center (after) inset (before): This home underwent a transformation that resulted in an updated and refreshed looking facade, with the help of EV Remodeling. Photo courtesy of Eliad Vaknin.

Below right (after) inset (before): A curved walkway and new plants were added to revive this front yard in Amberfield. Provided by Sonya Harrison.



years rather than getting regular exterior paint from a paint store. "It will apply fine; it will work, but it's not going to last as long," Vaknin warned.

Using paint gives you many color options. But Vaknin cautions, "There's no going back, once you paint brick."

Another option is limewash. Used for centuries, limewash is made of crushed limestone. It gets absorbed into the brick, but you'll need to reapply it every five to seven years. "It fades the brick color. Imagine a milky wash on top; you still see the brick, but it's faded. Applying more coats gets it lighter," Vaknin said.

Rethink those plain envelopes

Make sure any new additions match the overall style of your home. Modern updates will look

out of place on a more traditional style home, and vice versa, unless you change everything. Even front porch railings should be selected with this in mind.

To add definition and interest to the front of a home, Vaknin likes combining a few different materials rather than using a single material and color. "Combine stucco or brick with wood or use stone with siding. It's more interesting," he said.

The domino effect

Sometimes you peel off stucco and find the wood sheathing underneath has rotted. You'll need to replace that. Work required behind the walls adds to exterior renovation costs and that number can increase dramatically.

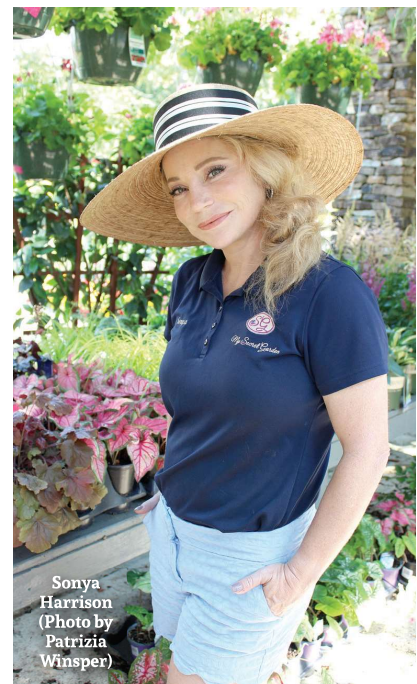
Rotted sheathing usually means new windows are required, as the moulding around them has likely

decayed as well. Having experts like EV Remodeling on hand to manage all the unforeseeable developments during exterior renovations is invaluable.

Besides factoring in the cost of an exterior remodel (anywhere from \$40,000 to \$100,000) and timeframe (a month or so), Vaknin ensures that all necessary information is submitted to the city for approval. It's an easy enough process in Peachtree Corners if you submit the proper documents.

Make a statement with nature

Landscape Designer **Sonya Harrison of My Secret Garden** quite possibly has the greenest thumb in town. Who better to consult for pointers on beautifying our front yards? Harrison can help you take your home's curb appeal to the next level with her flair for



Sonya Harrison (Photo by Patrizia Winsper)

attractive containers. “When you do containers at the front door, go big or go home. People tend to buy smaller ones. Your door is really big, it’s six to eight feet tall! You need proportion,” Harrison said.

A perfect blend

As with remodeling, landscaping should complement the home’s architecture. “Plant choices should match the look of the house. If you have a more modern house, you’ll want things like straight grasses. For southern style homes you’ll want more traditional plants like hydrangeas, azaleas, camellias and roses.

Sprucing up your front yard landscape with the help of My Secret Garden begins with a consul-

weren’t available when these houses were built,” Harrison said.

Hardscaping is next — walkways, porches, retaining walls, bed lines. “Once planting begins, we work from big to small: trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, mulch — and grass is last. That’s how we approach it for the integrity of the project,” Harrison shared.

Perhaps you weren’t aware that the owner of My Secret Garden also designs and builds boulder walls, dry creek beds, pathways, small border walls and stacked stone borders around beds, porches and patios.

Show off your house, don’t cover it up

Keeping older shrubs trimmed

feet by five feet, and eventually it’ll get to 10 by 10 feet.

“The upright Coral Bark is my favorite Japanese maple. It has coral-colored bark with leaves that go from green to bright yellow in fall. The Ginkgo is another favorite. The dainty leaves remind me of butterflies. The foliage gets bright yellow and then overnight it drops all its leaves at once for easy clean up,” Harrison said. “We stock everything, and we can custom order for you.”

Georgia clay is harsh on hungry, thirsty plants; they need to be fertilized and watered. Harrison suggests fertilizing blooming annuals every 7 to 10 days so they’ll bloom all season. Trees and shrubs should be fertilized in spring. Her fertilizers

of choice are Fox Farm and Espoma.

Curb appeal killers

- Plastic or metal edgings — they inevitably move. “Make an edge a couple of inches into the soil like a small trench. It’s all about the details,” Harrison smiled.

planning to sell your home or enjoy it yourself.

Amy Fuchs — FamilyHomesGa Team, Keller Williams Chattahoochee North



Realtor, Amy Fuchs of FamilyHomesGA, Keller Williams Chattahoochee North provides some great tips for boosting the curb appeal of your home for a great first impression. Photo courtesy of Amy Fuchs

- Amy Fuchs of FamilyHomesGa advises we don’t skimp on perking up our homes’ exteriors. “You never get a second chance to make a first impression,” she said, and that certainly holds true when staging your property.

“Even in a seller’s market, presenting your home in the best light will help you get better offers faster,” Fuchs added. In today’s fast-paced market, buyers often drive by the property before making an appointment to see it. An alluring front yard allows homebuyers to be hopeful about the interior.

Keep it fresh and make it pop!

“We all know the lawn should be freshly cut, but don’t forget to put down fresh pine straw or mulch before photos are taken and going live. It will add a well-maintained look and cover up any unwanted weeds,” Fuchs said. “Add bright colors by the front door, along the walkway or at the mailbox with blooming flowers, providing a happy welcome.”

Fuchs forewarns: if house numbers are obscure and your mailbox is covered in cobwebs and falling over, your home is not going to make a favorable impact. Make sure numbers are clearly visible and keep the mailbox and pole in good repair.

Power-wash the doorway and get rid of any pollen, cobwebs or debris. This is the first closeup look buyers get of your home. Avoid tree limbs



Crimson Prince



Coral bark

tation. Harrison provides at home consultations to see what the rest of the yard is like so she can create a cohesive design. Typical installations in Peachtree Corners average around \$7,000, including shrubs and plants.

Breathe new life into your garden

Any removal of trees and older or dead plants happens first. Per Harrison, some people don’t realize that plants have a lifespan. She’s familiar with our city and knows many plots still include flora that have gotten too big for their spots or have exceeded their life expectancy. It’s time to start fresh and get new varieties.

“When these houses were planted, azaleas were very large. Now people want a two-foot-tall azalea that blooms three times a year that you can plant in full sun. I can give you that now. A lot of things

underneath windowsills and not covering up your house greatly benefits curb appeal.

If you have a two-story house, you’ll want to accent the corners on either side to soften the edges. Harrison suggests junipers, camellias and Emerald green arborvitae for this purpose.

Although yards are square or rectangular, curvy flower beds make them more appealing. “I don’t like right angles in yards. They should all be soft edges, 40 or 45-degree angles,” Harrison said.

Leave a green legacy

Trees will likely outlive us, allowing us to leave a legacy that’s great for the environment. Harrison’s top choices are dogwoods, redbuds and Japanese maples. “We have a weeping redbud that grows five feet tall. Japanese maples can be upright or dwarf. People like the Crimson Queen. It grows slowly to about five

- Mistakenly planting shade plants in the sun or sun plants in the shade.

- Edging with monkey grass on both sides of a walkway up to the house. “It’s outdated. It’s fine on a bed edge, but on a path across the front, I like grass all the way up to it, then a bed on the other side so it’s not covered up.”

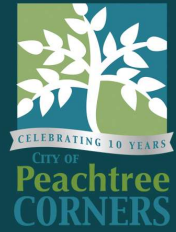
- “Too many different perennials — one here, one there — make the yard look polka-dotted. Choose three or five varieties instead and plant each one in large swooshes so it doesn’t look discombobulated,” Harrison advised.

Shut the Front Door!

When it comes to curb appeal, realtors have seen it all — the good, the bad and the downright... I don’t want to spell it out, but you know what I mean. I picked the brains of some trusted local realtors for front yard tips that work whether you’re

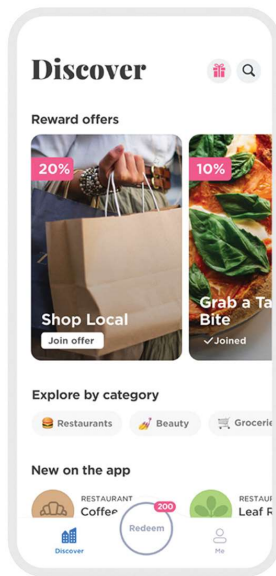


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How Does it Work?



1

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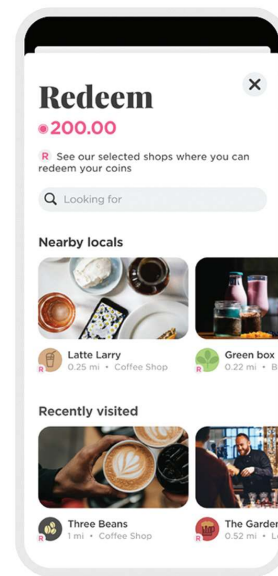
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and bushes blocking walkways or parking areas; keep them trimmed.

Your front yard should say, "Welcome to my well-maintained home!"

Sandy St. John Hippeli — Palmer House Properties



Above, from a single front door to a double front door, the Hippeli home in Peachtree Corners. Bottom left, Realtors Anthony Hippeli and Sandy St. John Hippeli — Palmer House Properties

Sandy St. John Hippeli of the dynamic real estate duo — her husband, **Anthony Hippeli** is also a realtor — shared some pointers for achieving a loved home look. The couple enhanced their own residence by replacing rounded columns with squared posts and a single door with a double door for both functionality and a more upscale look. To install the larger door, transoms above and on either side of the original were removed to accommodate custom iron doors.

Hippeli recommends hiring a color specialist like **Clarice Sell** who specializes in paint color selection for stylish exterior color combinations sure to make your home look stunning. For the lawn, she likes landscaping company **Outdoor Solutions**.

Other hints by Hippeli include creating a focal point in your yard like stonewall flower beds, a bench, fountain or tree, focusing on symmetry and perusing Pinterest for inspiration. In addition to the driveway, pressure washing should include sidewalks and stone surfaces. Add flowers and a new doormat for a winning combination.

Preferences and pet peeves

Hippeli prefers mulch over white rocks. "Rocks allow weeds to grow causing more maintenance in the long run. They also get hot and lead to stressed, thirsty plants," she said.

She also likes big boulders and rocks over railroad ties for retain-



Before and after photos of the Hippeli home in Peachtree Corners. From round columns to square, from a single front door to a double, and exterior colors updated with the help of a color specialist.

ing walls, and little to no lawn art over a busy space with several pieces. "For a sophisticated look, limit the number of yard sculptures, bird baths, or metal pieces," Hippeli said.

What worries her? Neglected shutters and windows, visible rotten wood soffits or trim, leaves or pine needles in



Marsha Richards

gutters and on the roof, weeds, bald patches in the lawn, unedged walkways and lawn "art."

Marsha Richards — The Richards Team, Keller Williams Chattahoochee North

Marsha Richards would have us stand across the street to look at our

house through the eyes of a buyer, "Does it paint a pretty picture?"

The entryway sets the stage for your home according to Richards. She suggests painting your door and changing weathered-looking hardware. Don't forget to update outdoor lighting. Finally, Richards proposes a designated seating area, especially on a front porch.



Martina and David Watson

The Perfect House on a Hill

Martina and David Watson planned for 10 years before embarking on a total transformation of their front yard that took eight months and about \$80,000.

Atlanta Custom Landscapes completed the rock work, landscaping, grading, lighting, sprinklers, grass and plan design. Anthony



After

Faust drew plans that brought the Watsons' vision to life.

Allgood Construction built piers and limestone steps leading from the sidewalk to their front porch. The stone columns and wall are by Mark Allgood.

"We added a landscape water meter, replaced our water line to the house from the street and rebuilt our retaining wall along the driveway at the same time to alleviate any risk of having to do that after completing the project," Martina shared.

Improvements include hardscape, softscape, grading, lighting and lawn. Their favorites are the peonies in the spring and the limestone steps.

Martina suggests breaking large projects into phases. Phase one for them was the driveway retaining

wall. Phase two was the main staircase and landscaping.

"Give your neighbors a heads up to prepare everyone for the fun," she said. "A great plan from a professional is the key. Get what you really want. Then the money spent is well worth it."

Let the spring / summer spruce up begin!

The experts and neighbors have chimed in. What fresh touches will you put on your home to give visitors a first glimpse of its personality? It doesn't have to be a huge financial investment.

Whatever you do, enjoy the extra kick you'll get out of pulling up to your house every day. ■

The dramatic result of a lot of planning, designing, and construction work in the front yard of Peachtree Corners couple, Martina and David Watson. Photo courtesy of the Watsons.



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