



Simple, with Tsh Oxenreider

Episode 187

thesimplershow.com

Segment One

Speaker 1: [00:00:02](#) This is Simple; I'm Tsh Oxenreider.

Hey friends! In this episode I'm chatting with contributing writer and managing editor of The Art of Simple, Andrea Debbink. As always, we're talking about what we wrote this week. Andrea wrote about what she's learned about the philosophical idea of home from having rented the same apartment for the past six years with her husband. She's in her mid-thirties and there's often this idea that home ownership is the destination that somehow crowns you officially a grownup. We talk about how that simply isn't the case. And then since this week I shared an update on our fixer upper renovation, showing photos of our before and during progress, I'm talking about the practical tips and mindset shifts that really help living in a fixer upper. If any of you are also in that boat or if you're thinking about one day buying an old house and living in it while you fix it up. And then in the third segment, Stephanie Langford and I are answering another one of your travel questions. Let's get right to it. Here's Andrea sharing tips and encouragement for the many, many people who rent an apartment and call it home.

Andrea, I want to know your thoughts about living in an apartment in your mid-thirties because I think a lot of our listeners can relate to this.

Andrea: Living in an apartment in my mid-thirties is not something that I really expected for myself. I grew up in the suburbs of a pretty big city where home ownership was really just the norm and it was expected that this was a natural life milestone that I would eventually hit at some point, probably in my early twenties or mid-twenties. But the reality has looked quite a bit different for me. I live in a different city now than the city that I grew up in. But the housing market here is a pretty expensive and houses tend to go pretty quickly. Actually, I was counting for this post this past week and I realized that since living in the college dorms, I've actually lived in 10 different places and seven of those places were apartments that I was renting.

Tsh: Just to set the record, I've lived in many different places as well and quite a few of them had been apartments so you're in good company from what I find.

Andrea: That's what I was realizing too as I was researching for this post this week is that, especially because of the age that I am, I'm technically considered a millennial. I'm an old millennial because I was born in 1983 but as I was investigating millennials in general, I was realizing that 60% of millennials are renters right now. I think part of that is they're obviously a bit younger, in college, just out of college. They're actually the biggest class of renters in the country. They're also the group of people that are more likely to prefer renting.

Tsh: Oh, interesting.

Andrea: As I was researching the post, I was realizing, oh, I'm actually in pretty good company considering my peers. Even though I live in an area where it's actually pretty common to own a home.

Tsh: Where do you live?

Andrea: I live in Madison, Wisconsin. It's a midsize city. It's definitely not a huge city, but it is a university town with a big state university. We have a pretty young and young professional population and it was always growing because of the university.

Tsh: [00:03:25](#) Sure. You live in an apartment in your mid-thirties. And from what I'm gathering, you tell me you've actually grown to like this, right?

Andrea: [00:03:35](#) Yeah, I have. It's been surprising for me because I think especially in my mid-twenties, I was really wanting to own a home. And I think part of that was just so many of my friends were starting to buy homes in their mid-twenties and again, I just saw it as this normal life milestone that I'm supposed to pass at some point. As I look back over the places that I've lived, some of them have been less than ideal just because of the actual apartment itself or just the fact that I was only there for a year or so. Where I live now, I've actually lived in this apartment for six years. It'll be six years in June and my husband and I first moved into this apartment when we got married six years ago. It's the longest I've lived anywhere.

I think part of that permanency too has contributed to the fact that this has become home to me, because I've lived here longer than a couple of years now. Also I've definitely experienced a mindset shift and I've stopped treating this apartment like it's just some temporary place that I have to live until I own a home. I've actually really settled in here. I think that has actually helped me to be a lot more content with where I'm at. Just this mindset shift of realizing I don't need to treat this like a temporary place. This can be my home and I can be okay with it being my home.

Tsh: [00:04:57](#) And I think just also as we move into this conversation, I think it's really important for all of us to think about our why and that the default in our culture is home ownership equals now I'm an adult. It's a milestone for sure. I think it is important for many people, but it's not the be all end all of everything. And if you haven't yet signed a mortgage, that doesn't mean you're not a grown up or that you haven't thought through or have a plan for your life. Do you know what I mean?

Andrea: [00:05:29](#) Absolutely. I think I struggled with that quite a bit when it came to marriage too because that was one of those milestones that you were supposed to pass at a certain point. I didn't get married until I was 30 which is normal I think for like the national average. But again, among my peers that was considered old because a lot of my friends got married in their early twenties so I spent a lot of my twenties feeling like, oh, I'm not a real grown up yet because I'm not married or I'm not a real grown up because I don't own a home. I've definitely had to deal with that in other ways too. I think I've reached a place now in my life where I feel like owning a home is definitely not a precursor to adulthood. And I'm totally fine with where I live.

Tsh: [00:06:08](#) Good. Your post talks about what apartment life has taught you about home on a philosophical level, right? How to think about home and the idea of home. I'm curious what you want to dive deeper in our chat here, maybe about a deeper philosophy or do you want to talk practicals? Because I'm sure you have lots of encouragement for listeners because I really do believe, like you said, 60% are millennials. But even beyond that, I think more than a few people listening, either rent a home or rent an apartment or live in a condo situation. That's just really common and it's good to remember that.

Andrea: [00:06:51](#) Like I mentioned earlier, a big mindset shift for me has been just this idea of not treating where I live like it's temporary. Some of that has shown up in just the way I treat the space and the way my husband and I treat this space. I think a really practical way this has shown itself is committing to hanging up curtains or installing picture rails on a wall. A couple of years ago my husband installed under cabinet lighting in our kitchen. It's pretty temporary, it's something that was really easy to put up. It'll be easy to take down should we leave this place. I definitely think a few apartments ago I would've really hesitated to do things like install picture rails or install extra lighting because I had this idea of I'm not going to be here very long, so I don't want to invest in projects like this or things that I'm going to have to take down later.

I've heard people talk about painting their apartments that way. If you live in an apartment where you're allowed to paint, sometimes there's this temptation to think, well, I'm not going to be here very long. I don't want to have to repaint this when I move out. But I think it's that mindset that gets you in trouble

sometimes because you just feel like you don't want to commit to a place because you know you're going to move. I think that's something you face, whether you're renting your home or you own your home. Most of us probably won't live in our homes for 50 years, we're going to leave at some point. In that way maybe we started treating our apartment a little bit more like a home or more like a house. It makes the apartment feel more personalized to us.

Tsh: [00:08:28](#) I like that you've brought up paint because I feel like that touches on both a philosophical and a practical idea here. The thing about paint, I remember our first, and it wasn't our first apartment, this is the apartment that we lived in the longest before he moved overseas and it's where we brought our first kiddo home. This to me was the place that I felt like I hit a major milestone becoming a mom. I really wanted to painted it and I remember Kyle thinking a bit more like what would practically make sense? Like why are we going to paint? We had a move out date in mind. We didn't necessarily say we have to, but we just had this idea in mind we're not gonna be here forever. I wanted to paint it because I really, maybe it was the nesting hormone thing, but I also just really wanted it to feel okay and validating that this was where we were planting ourselves for the moment and that it was worth the hassle later down the road to have to paint over that because I think that was the stipulation in our contract is that if we painted, we had to paint over whatever we painted.

I just did an accent wall and our daughter's nursery and I got oops paint in the Home Depot section. It was nothing expensive. We were on a very tight budget and I just did this little accent wall that was no big deal, but it made such a big difference. I think the philosophical idea of that is by painting, you are choosing to say, this is where I'm at home for now. Then practically speaking, paint is one of the cheapest ways to personalize a place and it's fairly easily fixable or changeable down the road. It's not a bad idea to look into it if you have that inside need to make a place homier.

Do you have thoughts for listeners on the practicals, because honestly it is impressive that you've lived in the same apartment for six years now. You've clearly found ways to make it feel like home. Tell us a little bit about the practicals of what someone can look for when they are considering an apartment they might not want to move out of right away.

Andrea: [00:10:41](#) I think part of the reason that we've been here, as long as we have a, it was just that I did a much better job this time around looking for an apartment. We weren't really in a time crunch because we were both living in separate places and we knew we were getting married in a few months, but we had a little more time to make sure that we landed on a place that we actually liked. Then because I had lived in so many other places, I had realized over time what was really important to me just as far as like the bones of the apartment

go. I settled on a few things. I think it was maybe just like three or four things when I was looking for an apartment that I knew that if I could find an apartment that hit these points, I could work with the rest of it. The first part for me and this comes up when you're buying a home as well, was just the idea of natural light. I definitely had lived in some apartments that were really dark for various reasons. Either it was on a lower level and it just didn't face the sun or it was maybe north facing or something like that. When chose our current apartment, it was really important that I find an apartment that had a lot of good natural light. When we settled on the apartment complex that we would live in, I was given four different choices basically at that time of apartments that were available and ended up going with the one that was a corner unit. It actually gives us a lot more light. It's the first time I've lived in a corner unit and I'm just amazed at the difference. It feels a lot less like a hotel room and just a lot more like a home because of having that light.

Tsh: [00:12:18](#) It's amazing to me what natural light does to our moods. I've done some study on that just over the years having lived in the Northwest where it's gray for a good chunk of the year and this is back when we were first married. Why is my mood, why am I feeling so down and so lethargic? And then when I looked into that whole idea, just having good natural light, even if it's not sunny, really does affect our moods. I think that's such a good point.

Andrea: [00:12:44](#) Along with the natural light another practical consideration that I would recommend is just the having access to outdoor space. We live on a ground floor apartment, but we can't actually access it from outside. But we do have a balcony. I mentioned this in the post, one of the flats that I lived in previously, was in a house but it didn't have a yard and it didn't have any sort of outdoor space. And as a person who really loves the outdoors and fresh air, it's actually really hard to live there for that reason because I felt like there was never a place where I could just go and be outside and still be close to home. Having this balcony at our current apartment has really been great because we put a chair out there, we grow flowers out there in the spring and summer. I did try some container gardening at some point that didn't go well, but at least it was an opportunity. It was something I could do outdoors while still living in an apartment. That was another thing too is it had to have a balcony or some sort of outdoor space and that's made a big difference. Then the third, and again this is just another practical consideration is just finding an apartment that has adequate storage, which is a challenge. I think that's one of the harder things of living in an apartment is just you have to be a minimalist by necessity because we just have such limited space. You don't have a basement and you don't have an attic or some of these areas that you might have in a home. I was able to choose among the few different apartments we were looking at and get an apartment that had more closets than some of the other floor plans that were

available and also had a storage unit down the hall, this separate extra large closet. That's really made a difference for us. All the stuff we own is either in our apartment or in that storage room down the hall. We don't need a separate storage unit or something like that and that helps a lot.

Tsh: [00:14:37](#) I think just for those curious, I do find that whenever you live in a small space with minimal storage, which I'll get into when I get into my segment, a lot of times it is a matter of physics. You do take up the space you're given but you'll surprise yourself with what little space you might need. Especially if you only bring in what you need. You don't try and squeeze, if you're downsizing, you don't try and squeeze everything you normally had in a bigger space into a smaller space. Just basically living with your limitations might surprise you in a good way.

Andrea: [00:15:12](#) I think one thing for us where that's really showing up as in the kitchen and we both really liked to cook and entertain, but we really don't own that many kitchen appliances or things that you would usually have in a big kitchen if you're a foodie. We've learned to make do with that, you realize you can make do with that I think is the lesson. Those are some of the practical considerations I had when we were first looking for our apartment.

Tsh: [00:15:39](#) That's good. Once you found the just right apartment for you, which of course there's no place that's perfect, but you found a place that works for you, were there little things you did to just make it feel homier that aren't major renovations cause you can't do that in an apartment?

Andrea: [00:15:53](#) One of the things, we were talking about painting earlier. I thought for sure when we moved into this place that I would be painting, because this is one of the first places I've lived where that's actually allowed. But I actually haven't. And I think part of that is because I found other ways to personalize our home that still adds color and interest without having to paint so that's been interesting. I think one of the biggest things I've learned has just been the importance of curtains or some sort of window treatments. Most of the places I've lived have actually come with blinds already. The apartment we have right now has those vertical blinds that are, I think they're ugly. But they do the job and we can't take them down. One of the first things I did when we moved into the apartment is first I sewed some curtains, which I hardly ever do, but I found some fabrics, really bright yellow fabric that I really liked for our main patio door. Then my husband and I together hung up curtain rods and put curtains on most of the windows in the apartment and it just did so much. Even before we had the art on the walls or had all our furniture just to have the curtains and soften the windows and bring in that color. It made a really big difference. I definitely recommend that because I haven't always done that in the apartments that I've lived in.

Tsh: [00:17:10](#) I think that's a good point too, when it comes to curtains, I totally agree with window treatments making a big change. But they can be expensive, like really expensive. I know this because I've literally been looking this past week and yet there are lots of ways to do it cheaply. If you're wanting to make some window treatments in a space that you don't know you're going to be in forever, don't lose heart and just say, oh well I'm going to just stick with the default even if I hate them because there are ways to do it and you can make a lot of change for just a few dollars.

Andrea: [00:17:44](#) You also don't have to do it all at once. I made a priority that I definitely want to cover the big patio door that we have. But it actually took probably a year or two before we had curtains in the bedroom or in the other parts of the apartment. You have to move at your own pace as far as that goes. The other thing we've done that has really just helped the whole feel of our apartment is to bring in a lot of plants. We are definitely plant people. I am a plant killer. We realized a couple of years ago that I was the person in charge of our plants at that point, but they were not doing well. A couple of years ago my husband took over and now they're flourishing and we just have a lot of them for such a small space, but they do so much to just make it feel homey. Like I said, we both really like nature so it brings some more of that nature in. We've actually found some plants that surprisingly do really well in the space that we have. We don't have south facing windows, so we don't get a lot of that great direct sunlight. But apparently we get enough for these plants to thrive. That's been really cool.

Tsh: That's fantastic. I pretty much have a black thumb as well. I think I mentioned this in my goals episode at the top of the year in 2019 and I had this idea of I want to become, I'm not ready yet to become a plant lady because I don't think history has proven itself that I might not ever get there. But I want to not just write off plants all together. I bought myself a little, very simple, like almost impossible to kill container plant that really needs minimal sun and the way you water it, the best way to water is to put two ice cubes on the soil about once a week. Because the ice cubes slowly melt. It provides enough moisture for the soil without choking it with a deluge of water. You just do that about once a week, I can do that. I can put two ice cubes somewhere one time a week. And so far I haven't killed it.

Andrea: What kind of plant is it?

Tsh: It's just a simple ivy, an English ivy. You do almost nothing to it. And the reason I went with that one is because that was a one plant I had all throughout college, freshmen through fifth year senior year that I didn't kill and I actually had to calm down because it was starting to overgrow and go everywhere. So I knew, okay, I think I can handle that and it worked great. I'm just saying all this to go with

anyone listening, thinking I kill plants, that there are some out there that you don't necessarily need to do much work to make them work.

Andrea: [00:20:16](#) That's absolutely true. We actually have one of those, I don't know the long name for it, but it's called the ZZ plant.

Tsh: I think I've heard other people talk about.

Andrea: It is amazing. There's this rumor that you can actually grow it in a closet. It has been proved that to be true because he took one to his old office and his old office was in the basement of his office building with no windows at all. And that plant thrived down there with fluorescent lights, no natural lighting. If anybody is looking for a plant that they can't kill, probably the ZZ plant.

Tsh: I just looked it up while we're talking. It's called the Zanzibar Gem. If you want to go to a nursery and ask for that Zanzibar Gym. I love that idea. I think it's really interesting the therapeutic nature of gardening, even in tiny little containers, you don't need to have a huge backyard. I think that's so important and true. There's just something about getting your hands in the dirt, even if it's barely anything that really does feel good. I would imagine in an apartment where like you've said your porch does overlook a parking lot. It's nice to feel like you are a part of the earth a little bit even if it looks like concrete around you.

Segment Two

Tsh: [00:26:18](#) On the flip side, for me, I feel like it's easy for me to think about living where I live in a temporary mindset as well because we live in a fixer upper. My post this week was a simple update because I really have barely talked about where we live online. It's interesting, it was almost therapeutic for me to write about this and post photos about it because I tend to want to wait until I can do a definitive before and after. Like we are done, look at the progress and we're just not done. It's very easy for me to avoid posting anything on Instagram or on a blog post until I can show you this is our progress and we can cross it off the list because our entire house basically is a during. We're not in the before stage anymore, but we're not at the after yet. Everything is a during. I'm just leaning into this and embracing the fact that nowhere is, I don't want to say perfect because I don't feel like I'm a perfectionist, but I still feel like a doer and an achiever. Actually now that I'm thinking about it, you know that strengths finder test?

Andrea: [00:27:30](#) Yeah.

Tsh: My number one strength is achieving. I wonder if there's something to do with the fact that I want to have done it. I want to have cross the finish line and man

living in a fixer upper, if that's an easy mindset for you, you have to really learn to flex little else. Just to give an update, even though you can read this in my post, I'll just be quick. We live in a 1935 cottage in an old historic neighborhood in central Texas. It's frequently called the best town square in Texas. I forget the term, but it wins these awards. Where we live is very historic and so there are houses all around us that had been renovated and our house being 1935 is actually on the "newer" side. There's a lot of houses from the 1800s in our neighborhood.

The thing that's also encouraging is that we also live around a lot of houses that have yet to be renovated. We're in good company. We're not the only ones who are trying to make our house non-ugly. There are plenty of cases of that around us. Kyle, my husband is a former licensed contractor, he used to renovate houses for a living for his job. The plus side of that is that he knows how to do every part of a house from the ground up. He has been on enough projects to know literally breaking ground for the foundation, all the way to handing the owners the keys. He's been part of every step of that and been part of renovations and done so internationally so he understands a lot of the different ways one can do things.

The nice thing about that is that we are saving ourselves a lot of money on labor. The downside of that is that it's much slower. Because we're doing everything ourselves and cash-flowing this as much as possible because our priority honestly, is not overspending on a house. We are sacrificing that for time. I have to remember this mentally a lot. Our little square block, we live on a long street, but our smaller cross streets in between break us up into just about 12 houses and most of these houses have been renovated or were in the renovating process whenever we first started as well and a lot of them are done and we are still not done. It's easy for me to get disheartened I guess in a way.

But when I think about, oh wait, our priority is saved money, not saved time. That we're willing to go slower if it means doing it cheaply. And Kyle, he borderlines on perfectionism, but he cares a lot about high quality. He's not going to do something quickly for the sake of getting it over with. He wants to do it right. There are times when that tests my patience. But I know when I zoom back out and when I think of myself, 10 years from now I will be so glad he's like that because we won't have issues down the road. Our cottage is very small, meaning we have no garage, which is very hard when you live in a fixer upper and your husband is a contractor. He has lots of tools. We do have a little storage/shed workshop that came with the house. It's very old. It looks like if you tap it, it's going to fall over. There's a lot of boring reasons in terms of city regulations, why we can't just tear it down and build a new one. He is just using this dilapidated old workshop as best he can to store big tools. But in the

meantime, there's lots of little tools around our house and just being stored in drawers here and there, or shelves or just shoved in a corner. At any one time you can trip over a hose or a tool or a something in our house. We also just have minimal storage because that's just the way it is with old houses. Closets weren't a big thing when our house was built in 1935. Honestly it hasn't been touched since the 80s when we bought it. The woman who had lived here had been here for a really long time and had been a widow for several decades by then. I think her husband was the one who did the renovations. It hadn't been touched since the 80s and so the kitchen was very eighties, but much of the house was actually still originally in 1935. Some of it had not been touched at all. Like the electrical, for example, when Kyle got into the walls, he had found that every single wire was still old, knob and two. I think that's the trick.

Andrea: Yeah. Wow. That is old.

Tsh: He'd have to be careful not to touch it because it was hot and they were wrapped in cloth. Man, this is the old, so he had to replace all the electrical, that kind of thing. Ultimately our goal, which I think is really important to remember, what's the point of what we're doing? It's not to flip this house, it's not to then move on to something else. Our goal is to make this our longterm home. I think it's partly because similar to you, Andrea, we've moved so many times in our lives and we have had enough experience to know that no home is perfect, that we are ready to just settle down and say, okay, this is home. We're done moving as best we can. That's not to say we never will. I know life continually can surprise us that way. But from my perspective now, I don't think we're going to move for a while, for quite a while. Then the other goal we have coupled with that is to travel. Our family prioritizes travel above lots of other things. One of the reasons we chose this house is because it's not big and we didn't want to over buy. It was fairly cheap because we knew Kyle could do a lot of the work. I just say all these things to help people and myself honestly remember what our end game is cause it might be different from somebody else's. Our end game is not to make this place huge or immaculate. One of our goals is to make this house definitely warm and cozy and livable. But it's not to make it fancy by any means. We just don't care enough. We want to get back out there and travel. That's where we would rather prioritize our budget.

Andrea: I'm curious, when you first moved back to Texas then, was it always your idea that you would buy a fixer upper that would be this long term project or was that something that came about as you were looking for places to live?

Tsh: [00:33:41](#) We knew we went into live in a fixer upper. When we lived in Oregon, we bought a house that needed a lot of work. It was a newer house. It was built in the 90s, so it wasn't like an old renovation, but we knew that that was just a better use of our money to buy lower and then put sweat equity in it.

The main reason we knew we would look for a fixer upper is because we wanted to be in this specific neighborhood, right? In fact, we said okay, we will move back to Texas, but it needs to be specifically in this town, Georgetown. And it needs to be specifically in Old Town, that's the name of our neighborhood. That took us a while. When we first moved here, we rented for a year in a regular suburb because we wanted to wait. We'd rather rent and wait for the house that we wanted in the right neighborhood. We had this in mind from the get go. We are very grateful, very grateful to be where we are.

I just want to park a little bit in my chat here for maybe those of you who are either in the middle of living in a construction zone like me or perhaps are considering it, like maybe you're thinking about buying a fixer upper, and are curious what it's like to live in one. I have learned because it's been two years now and we're not done what it means to live in a fixer upper and how to not lose your mind, basically. I'm still learning because there are days when I think I'm going to lose to my mind.

I have two types of bits of wisdom that I've gathered. Some are more broad, a philosophical mindset, maybe it's a way to say that. And then my second one is were more practical. First, the mindset. The first thing is just to keep the end in mind. I think that's obvious, but with you're in the middle of living in a place that doesn't feel done, it's helpful to just actually remind yourself, I need to keep the end in mind. The goal is for the house to look like this, the way I have it in my head. It's helpful to remember when you've been staring at sheet rock for a while.

Another one is to note your progress frequently. I think it couples well with what I just said about keeping the end in mind to compare where you are to the beginning and not to that picture in your head where you want to be at the end.

Yes, keep the end in mind, but don't mark your progress on that end in mind because it's going to feel like the goalposts keep moving. The finish line is just so far out there, you're never going to stop. But whenever you think about what it looked like when you first got the keys to the place, that is so helpful. I have to do this all the time because we are, I would say we're at the 75% mark, so we're over halfway, but we still got a whole quarter left of stuff to do and it can feel disheartening. But when I think about how it looked at the beginning, it looked totally different, like completely different, and so it helps my mindset.

Another one is to create a done-ish space that feels peaceful to you, even if it's tiny. Done-ish meaning it doesn't need to be done, done like 100% how you want it, but it needs to feel a little bit like you've taken some effort. So for me, this looks like in our master bedroom I have a little corner where I have one of my favorite arm chairs and a little side table. It's an old tree trunk and that's

where, and it's right by a window that gets good natural light. That's where I read a lot. Sometimes I work there and that little corner is just for me and I keep it pretty clean. That's just sort of a sanity saving spot, so when I do literally feel like my head is spinning, I will sit there and catch my breath and I think that's really helpful if you can create a space as early as possible in your renovation.

Andrea: I think that's such a good tip. I love that idea of done-ish. My space, it's not perfectly finished, but it's done enough that it gives you that sense of calm when you're there.

Tsh: [00:37:26](#) That's right.

Andrea: I think that's a great idea. No matter if you're renovating a house or moving into a place for the first time.

Tsh: Pick a spot that you know won't take a lot of money or major effort to just make a place that feels like you aesthetically. I think that's key.

Another mindset shift is just to be flexible. You often don't know how you want things until you've lived in it, which I would argue is actually one of the benefits to living in your fixer upper. It makes so much practical sense to maybe rent a place while you renovate because it will go faster. But if you can't do that for budget reasons or practical reasons, just keep in mind there is a benefit to actually living in it and that's you can adjust what you want as you go.

There are countless things we have changed in our plan because we've lived here and it has to do with like small things you wouldn't even think of like where the light switches go, like where it makes sense to put an outlet where you might actually want a cabinet for this sort of thing versus that kind of thing. You know what I mean? Just be flexible with your end game, I guess is what I'm trying to say here.

Another one is to honestly own your expectations. I think that's key. Kyle is so adaptable and so flexible. He's great with, okay, we can do this. It turns out we can't put a, I'm obviously not a construction person, but we can't put a little "doohickey" there so therefore we got to put it over here.

For me, if I just say okay and don't at least stop to own it, I'm disappointed. That's a bummer. I really wanted this thing to be here. I really wanted to have a window here. I really wanted a light here or for this appliance to go here. Even just pausing for a few minutes to vocalize that and own it, I think is important. Because if you stuff it or just pretend it doesn't exist, it might come out at inopportune time and it'll bubble up and just overflow into other emotions that maybe you weren't expecting.

With that, communication is key especially for doing this married, and especially if one of the spouses is more "in charge" of this renovation than the other. If one of them is acting as the general contractor, just to communicate frequently about expectations. What are you expecting to be worked on at the moment? Honestly, even just letting the spouse who's not as in the know, what are you currently working on because it might not be obvious, it might be obvious to you, but whenever Kyle stops to let me know I am working on the plumbing and you can't see the plumbing very easily, it doesn't have a lot of visual progress. Just for me to hear that, oh okay, that's good to know. I like to know where we are in the house and what's also next. What he has in mind of what might make sense to be the next project. And for him to ask what would you like to see next happen is really good. We actually keep things in a shared list. We use the APP Todoist. It's a great app because you can have it on your phone, you can share lists and you can have it on your desktop as an extension for chrome. We use Todoist to communicate back and forth. We have a dedicated list just for the renovation and I can check that at any time and just see what he's working on. That's helpful.

Getting into the practicals, once you've got that mindset down, there's a few practicals I've learned. One is if possible, have a storage unit or if you're blessed enough to have a garage, keep everything that's not absolutely essential to life at the moment in storage. You don't need everything that you absolutely love out and visually where you want it while you're living in a renovation. It's just not possible. You're going to be tripping over things. You're going to be moving things a lot and it might just really annoy you. I mean it would drive me crazy. We have a tiny little storage unit, the smallest you can get and we just have our things that we don't need at the moment. It's the high school yearbooks and grandma's quilts stuff. Those are in storage unit, just to keep them out of the way. The nice thing about it is like when you're traveling you realize how little you actually need. There have been times when I go back to that storage unit and it's like, oh I plan to get rid of all the stuff because we actually don't need it. Especially after living here two years and knowing more of how it feels to be here.

Another practical is if possible, kind of like the same as to have a corner to yourself for sanity. Make easy-ish visual progress as soon as you're able. Don't wait until all the walls are taped and floated, sheet rock style to paint. Paint when you can tackle a particular room with paint. Like you said earlier, add plants just to give some life to a place. Maybe even add some art if you feel settled on, I know where certain things are going to go. Adjust your lighting as soon as you can. Definitely the simple ways like add lamps, but even if you know your light fixtures, you already know what they are when you're able to add those because those small visual punches will go a long way to making your

place feel more like you. I think that's key. I'm reminding that of Kyle a lot because he's not as effected by aesthetics as I am. I will have to tell him, Kyle, I am so tired of looking at the 1970s ceiling light. Can we please make a decision of what this light is going to be? I know this isn't the most important thing and I know you might be thinking, why are we going to bother with that, we'll just deal with that later. But I've got to have a different light up there just for my own sanity. He'll just understand. He'll say, okay, I get it. We've done that before. We even right now have a temporary light above our dining room table that we don't plan to have forever that we got for \$5 at the habitat resale store. Have you ever been there? I don't know if everyone has that, but we have one right down the road from us. I spray painted it just the color, it was \$5, it's not where we're going to have forever, but it was better than what it was. To me that was worth the effort, the two or three hours it took to make that thing and install it for just visual progress.

Andrea: I remember reading about that on a different home blog a few years ago. Just that idea of the temporary fix, the interim thing that's much cheaper, but it just gets you part way to you to your end goal.

Tsh: Yeah, that's right. It's a type of a partial solution, really. If it can't be exactly the way you want it, just find ways you can make it close enough as you go.

Like you said earlier, yes to natural light, make as much as possible if you can. If you've got hard floors, add rugs where you can for noise and dust reduction. You might be vacuuming it a lot more than if you waited until you were over. But fixer uppers are loud. It's weird. I say weird because I just wasn't expecting it, how loud a fixer upper can be. Not only if you have kids that are just talkative, but power tools, things being worked on. I mean I know that's an obvious, but it's surprising how much when you live with that day after day, just adding some rugs where you can, will go along a long way to just calm that echoey sound.

Andrea: Do you have any places that you recommend where you like to get your rugs from? I feel like I've seen online places. I know there's some places in my town where people get them.

Tsh: That's a great question. Where I have gotten our rugs lately has been this website. It sounds really tacky, the name of the website is RugsUSA. I'll put a link in the show notes. I found out about this through my friend Myquillyn who is a home blogger. I literally texted her and said, where can I find a good rug? And she told me this place. I think we've gotten three or four rugs from them and I love them. They're really good. I'll put a link in the show notes. They're great.

The last one that I think is a practical tip is to clean frequently. Now that sounds really not fun. I get it. But all I simply mean by that is it's a mindset shift but also

a practical one. It's easy to think I'll mess with this when we're done. Whenever the drilling is done then I'll do a great deep clean. But if you clean as you go, it really packs a lot of punch in terms of just visual progress. Then just your day to day cleaning, things like dishes in the sink will add to the visual clutter when you also have power tools on the island right next to that. Just to keep things clean and simple as you go as you live life, matters so much for your sanity living in a fixer upper. We've recently created a chore system that I think is finally working for our kids. Our kids are old enough now to contribute a sizable amount to the household. We've created three jobs that they rotate because we have three kids that they rotate on weekly and each job has a list of daily and weekly assignments to keep the house running. It's taking a while to get the hang of the habit building but I think we finally figured out this is how to keep things functional and not feel overwhelming. It's that idea of shoveling snow while it's still snowing. Sometimes it feels pointless, but if you wait until it's done snowing, you're going to have a huge job. You know? Just to keep things as tidy as possible as you go really helps your sanity.

Andrea: I'm with the fixer upper, there's probably just a lot of inevitable mess. Like you said, you're going to have the out of the power tools out or whatever. You can't exactly put those away, but dishes you can put away.

Tsh: Yeah, exactly. For us right now, the kitchen, the final thing that we haven't really, well, two final things we haven't done. We have a huge island in the middle of our kitchen that Kyle built, but the top is still plywood because he wants to wait to put the butcher block that he's going to build on near the end so that he can toss his saws and drills on the plywood without worrying about the denting it because right now it is a construction zone. For him, it's helpful just to have plywood on there and then we're going to have floating shelves that he's already built and create and they look amazing, but they just haven't been installed yet. Everything right now where we're storing things in the kitchen is temporary. We're not going to always have our bowls in this drawer because they're going to be out on the shelves. But in the meantime, it's very helpful for us to just keep them a drawer for the visual clarity and to keep things as dust free as possible. We're just choosing to not worry about the floating shelves yet until we're closer to the end where things can go and when the butcher block can be installed so that we don't have things everywhere. That's just an example.

The final thing I think is just to remember to celebrate milestones. Don't wait to celebrate until the house is done. Because first of all, as most people know, any homeowner really knows you're never done. We frequently joke that we're not, our end goal is not to be done. Our end goal is to no longer need to call this place of fixer upper. There will always be some sort of household task that needs

doing. To not even wait for that to celebrate. I don't know, a year ago maybe, we finished our front porch in a way that was close enough. We do have long term plans to re-brick the front porch but we're just not there yet, it's not a priority. We cleaned it off and we painted the concrete to where it looks pretty. He added cedar posts and we put some really pretty outdoor lighting out there and then we bought two rocking chairs and a bench and we just spruced it up. We celebrate it by using that area. We use it all the time. It's a little bit of that place that is a nook for us, but we celebrate it by we got fun drinks and we toasted the fact that our front porch is a spot that we could call done for now. And that was fun. We didn't wait until the whole house was done and we could christen the place.

We even celebrate in small ways when he finished the electrical, whenever he rewired the house, I think we went out for dinner as a family and whenever we installed the sink, that if you follow me on Instagram, you saw this farmhouse sink that we got from my grandfather's ranch in Arkansas. Kyle's parents refinished it and it looked amazing. The before and after was shocking.

Andrea: I remember seeing that.

Tsh: We installed that sink and I think we all walked down the street to get some ice cream just because it felt like we did this one huge thing that we didn't know how on earth we would ever get done. Just to celebrate the progress, I think is so important. Otherwise you're just going to feel like you're in a prison sentence. You know? This is supposed to be fun. You're making a home, the place that's very you and you're giving new life to something old instead of building new. I think that's worth celebrating. Those are my tips.

Andrea: [00:49:50](#) I just appreciate hearing your whole story about that because I feel like, especially with maybe the influence of HGTV or social media, you just see the before and after of renovations and it just seems to happen so quickly, especially in on TV shows. It's like oh it's an hour and now this whole house is done. Just to hear your perspective and realize there's a long middle period of fixer uppers or working on homes that you just don't see. I really appreciate hearing your journey with that.

Tsh: [00:50:19](#) We have to remind our kids that sometimes cause they'll want to watch Fixer Upper and the before and after has done in less than an hour and they live less than an hour from us. They're just right up the street. It's easy to somehow, because they're close, mentally think that's how it happens here. We have to tell them because I think I actually went ahead and looked up and I told them guys that says the average renovation of theirs is nine months and they don't have one dad working on it. They have a whole construction team doing everything. Nine months even with a huge construction team equals the fact

that we're doing this for two years with one guy. Okay, we're doing all right. This isn't that bad.

Andrea: Plus you're living in it, too. Which I'm sure adds a different layer of complexity.

Tsh: [00:51:00](#) Yeah, it totally does. Kyle said this because he is tempted to maybe do this again in our neighborhood. Actually buy a home to renovate, not for us to live in but for then for us to rent to renters or maybe for us to use as a guest house. We don't know yet. He's already talked about, oh my gosh, it's going to be so much quicker if we don't live there because he could make all the messes he needs or just have everything wherever and he doesn't need to put up as tools at night. It's a big deal. I think it's important to not go into living in a fixer upper lightly, but it's totally doable. Even with three kids like we have.

Segment Three

Tsh: [00:51:40](#) I am here with my friend Stephanie Langford to answer your travel questions. And this one is from, I'm going to butcher her name. Sonya Hume. We're going to go with Sonya Hume. Hi Sonia! This is a fun one because you asked, places you've never been on your travel list, meaning tell us where you want to go that you haven't been. I just laugh at that because that list is literally a mile long and it never ends. So Steph, I know you feel the same way, but let's have some fun with this one. Let's go back and forth and share a few places with the listeners that we super want to go to and still haven't been to.

Stephanie: [00:52:20](#) Why don't I start out with the Polynesian Islands. That is a region that we have never explored. For us, that would include Easter Island, we so want to go to and Hawaii, but also some other places like Tonga or Fiji or Samoa. We've never even been to Hawaii as a family, but just that whole area, the culture, so fascinating. And just the swimming and the snorkeling and the animals, like the wildlife that you can see there. I don't know, it just looks incredible to me.

Tsh: [00:52:50](#) That's a fun idea that I had not thought of. I love Hawaii so much and I love the little bit I've seen around that area. But I agree, we've barely done any, I guess because it's remote and it's hard to get to. It's also pretty expensive, so it's not an easy place. Steph, I just have to say, I love how much more into the water you guys are. A few years ago when I first started getting to know you guys being Canadians and talking about how swimming just isn't as much of your repertoire as it is for maybe me as a Texan. It's just fun to see you guys really embrace that side.

Stephanie: Oh, well thanks. It's been fun for us. Tsh, where would you love to go that you've never been?

Tsh: [00:53:28](#) High on my list, I've talked about this before is Scandinavia. I have really never been up there and it is so high on my list. It's one of these, I can't believe I haven't been there before, but I have just always been fascinated with Denmark and Copenhagen. Sweden, Norway, all those places. Even Estonia. I did a World at Home deep dive for my patrons a few months ago and ever since I did that about Estonia and that it's the most digital country in the world in terms of connectivity and Wifi everywhere and just where so many digital companies come from. I've just been fascinated with that culture that is still pretty, there's still a lot of great old things to see yet it is so modern and just do that whole area up there. I just love Scandinavian aesthetic and style. I love their approach to life. I love a lot of their policies and I've just always been fascinated by Scandinavia so that's high on my list as well.

Stephanie: [00:54:28](#) Yeah, that's a really cool place. We've only been to Norway and I'd like to do so much more.

Tsh: [00:54:33](#) All right, so Steph, what else is on your list?

Stephanie: [00:54:36](#) I so badly want to get back to Africa. We have been very briefly to Morocco and then we spent five weeks in east Africa, so in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda. Next time we would really like to deep dive into more of southern Africa. I'm thinking Namibia, Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe and all of those countries down there. I keep seeing travelers who are going there and I'm seeing their photos and their videos and it just looks like such an interesting diverse area. There's so much wildlife there, I mean incredible safaris, but you've also got some really interesting coastline and deserts. Partly, Africa just gets under your skin in this way that it feels like nowhere else really can. I definitely felt that in eastern Africa and so I'm expecting we'll feel more of that in southern Africa, but it'd be interesting to explore really different region of the continent.

Tsh: [00:55:31](#) I adore Africa. I was surprised how much I loved that continent. Of course, I'm saying it as though I've seen it all. I have barely scratched the surface. It is such a huge continent with so many different cultures and I think we westerners can be guilty of monolithising all the cultures there thinking of it as one big place and it's so diverse. I spent basically a week in Zimbabwe and that's it. And I adored it. The people were so fun and friendly and we saw Victoria Falls and that was just unbelievable. I think that's a great choice. I do see the safari photos a lot and the more natural stuff. Cape Town is also a city in South Africa that is high on my list as well, so that's a fun choice you gave.

Stephanie: [00:56:20](#) Yeah. Agreed. It looks beautiful. Okay. What's next on your list?

Tsh: [00:56:23](#) Okay, next for me is a place I know you've been to and that's the Patagonia region of Argentina. I have always wanted to go there. Kyle for sure

has wanted to go there because he's a mountain climber. I don't think we would go to or maybe I wouldn't go there to do that, but I do love the outdoors and that area just seems so rugged and different and interesting compared to other places I have been to and in general, Argentina is high on my list. Buenos Aires the city because of all the cultural interesting things that I'm fascinated with. The history is so fascinating to me. I did an another world episode for my patrons on Argentina, specifically Buenos Aires and that was really cool. I learned a lot then and just the food seems really fascinating, so I would love to just, I mean, honestly, I could spend just a couple months in Argentina just going around, but then really spending some fun quality time down at the southern tip and just that Patagonia region, at least if it's in the summer. I'm not a big fan of being cold, so it would have to be in the summer where it's still a little chilly but not freezing like it would be in the winter.

Stephanie: [00:57:30](#) We were there in late summer, at the very end of summer and you could feel fall coming in and we were like, ooh, it gets cold here. I would stick to summer. But I mean like rugged, wild beauty like that, that's exactly what it is. So that's such a good pick.

Tsh: [00:57:47](#) All right. What's next for you, Steph?

Stephanie: [00:57:49](#) I would really like to see more Southeast Asia. We've been in Southeast Asia a little bit. We spent a lot of time in China, in Japan. Ryan and I have both been to the Philippines, although not with our kids and we've been to Cambodia and very briefly to Malaysia, but we want to dig a little deeper and we haven't been to Thailand surprisingly, but also Vietnam is extremely high on our list that I'd also like to go to Laos and Myanmar and dig into some of the Indonesian Islands as well. That area just seems so diverse, so rich in beauty and a lot of culture traditions that have really remained and stayed strong and I want to understand more about it and I feel like it would be very a very family friendly area as well.

Tsh: [00:58:37](#) I'm sure it would and such a great foodie place. I mean, oh my gosh, just thinking about the food there, it makes my mouth water and relatively affordable compared to the rest of the world.

Stephanie: Yeah, for sure. What's your next one?

Tsh: The next one for me is specific. I want to walk the Camino de Santiago in Spain. This is of course, it's not just one particular route. There's 10 to 12 different ways you can do this. But it's a walk that you do that ends in the place, I guess it's Santiago, but it's an area that's just full of rugged beauty. But also it's not super challenging. I am not a backpacker in the classic sense. I'm not going to scale mountains and then just camp. These are tours where you can walk from village

to village relatively simply, I mean still with a backpack, but it's not hard. You're walking roads or trails that aren't super steep and then you stay the night in little villages and eat the local cuisine and then up and at it the next day. These things are like a 100 to 200 miles. They take a couple of weeks and you get to experience the culture. You get to experience more of the quieter side of Spain, even though I know that it's touristy, so it can happen. I'm holding up my two fingers really close. We came this close to doing it, me and Tate for when she turned 13 and it just fell through at the last minute. After doing all that research, it became really high on my list of a thing that I would just love to do, cross off my list.

Stephanie: [01:00:07](#) It's a really good pick. And the people who I've talked to who have done it, it sounds like it's a really transformational experience. That appeals to me

Tsh: [01:00:14](#) Right. I agree. What else?

Stephanie: [01:00:18](#) Next is Nepal and Bhutan. In the Himalayas, Bhutan in particular is really interesting one, you can actually only go there through organized tours. From what I have seen, they have just so preserved their country's culture and ways of doing things and traditional dress. Also things like the famous, what is it called? The Tiger's Nest Monastery? You've probably seen pictures of it perched up there. There's just some really fascinating things there. But in Nepal particularly, I've kind of been researching a little bit in a couple of years when our youngest is a bit bigger. It would really like our family to hike the Annapurna circuit. That sounds like one of the areas that a bit more family friendly for hiking than some of the other tracks like getting up to Mount Everest base camp sounds a bit more challenging. Maybe not something you're going to do maybe with teens but not with little kids. Whereas the Annapurna circuit actually sounds like one that a family could totally do if they just set a nice slow pace. That's gotten pretty high on my bucket list.

Tsh: [01:01:23](#) What a cool idea. I honestly had not thought of that area. Kyle is dying to go to Nepal. I think he wants to go by himself. I think that's one of his personal, I want to have some transformational alone time there.

Stephanie: [01:01:38](#) I was going to say come hike it with us, but it's okay, Kyle, you can go by yourself.

Tsh: [01:01:43](#) Another one for me is I would love to just somehow do a tour of the Mediterranean by way of the water. Kyle and I jokingly slash not jokingly talk about how it'd be fun to learn to sail and I don't think we would ever get experienced enough to actually sail the Mediterranean by ourselves. But there is something just to be said about going somehow by way of water. I don't know if

it's a cruise, but not a cruise because I don't want to be on a cruise, but somehow going to Spain, Malta, Italy, Greece, Turkey, those sorts of places. And then down the southern Mediterranean, Tunisia, Morocco, all those, but just off the beaten track islands. When we lived in Turkey, we would go to Greek Islands that weren't highly visited and that was so fun. We frequently talk sometimes when you have your escapist mind or you just want to be fill in the blank right now for me and Kyle, it's frequently one of these Greek Islands because it's just a dot in the middle of the Mediterranean. Nobody knows where you are. It's just local food and beaches and mountains and you can just escape. To me it would be fun to do several months just hopping around the Mediterranean in different little spots and just sampling the food and hanging out. I don't know that that might be an empty nest kind of trip but it sounds fun to me.

Stephanie: [01:03:16](#) I would invite myself on that one. It sounds really good.

Tsh: Okay, sounds good. Okay, you got one more?

Stephanie: I have one more. This is for real, a trip that I'm actually working on planning for our family. Right now I have it in the books for the summer, fall of 2020 so it is central Asia, sort of, starting in Russia. We've always wanted to go to Russia. We would go and spend a little bit of time there. But then the journey would be to take the Trans Siberian railway across Russia, over to eastern Russia down into Mongolia. Then you travel through Mongolia and I want to do a circle. I want to circle back through Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Georgia and then back over to eastern Turkey. We've been to western and central Turkey but not eastern. And the reason is there's something called the World Nomad Games that's like a Olympics for nomadic peoples, which is like mind-blowingly cool. It's going to be held in eastern Turkey in September of 2020. That is literally something that I'm working our family schedule around because I think it would be the coolest trip ever.

Tsh: [01:04:20](#) What a fun idea. I would've never thought of that one as well. I've been to some of those central Asian countries, but not for a long period of time. I would love to do more. I love that you've picked that one. I mean honestly, they love children in those places, so I can't think of a place that's probably more family friendly than that Central Asia area.

Stephanie: Do you have any more, or are you done?

Tsh: My last one is one that you know because we've talked about it on the podcast and that's Japan. I still haven't been to Japan and I really want to go. We have friends that go almost every summer and spend a good chunk of their summers there. You've been there. Tate talks about wanting to go to Japan all the time. That's probably a highest on her list of travel. We will make it there. I'm bound

and determined at some point that we will make it to Japan. It's just in the meantime, I keep just looking at photos and dreaming that one day we'll get there.

Stephanie: [01:05:18](#) I was just thinking as we finished talking, what a ridiculous conversation topic this is for us because we can basically just pick almost any spot in the world right now. Yes, it's on my list.

Tsh: When I saw Sonya's question, I laughed because it's as though we are different than most people on earth. I think all of us, those of you listening, you have your bucket list as well. We all have our bucket list and it might not be crazy exotic. It might be the next state over. It might be something in your general area. But I want you to be encouraged that just because we're talking about these places and we've been to some places does not mean that this thirst will ever be slaked. And I think that's part of the beauty of it. That's what I wrote about in my book, that if you go and travel as you're going to conquer different places and feel like you've arrived, then you're always going to be dissatisfied because that's never gonna happen.

But go for the enjoyment of it and to realize that there are so many great places on earth that we can experience in different ways and different reasons to enjoy that it just makes it more fun to think about all the great places there are that we will never get to see. You know what I mean?

Stephanie: That's such a perfect way to finish so I don't have anything to add to that. I love that.

Tsh: Well, perfect. Sonya, hopefully that answered your question. If you have a travel related question for me and Steph, I would love to hear it. Email hello@theartistsimple.net and toss it in that email, send it our way and we will try and add it to the queue.

You can find Stephanie at WonderlingFamily.com or on Instagram [@wonderlingfamily](#). You can find Andrea at AndreaDebbink.com and on Instagram [@andrea.debbink](#) and to keep up with me, I'm on Twitter [@Tsh](#) and Instagram [@tshoxenreider](#) and of course at TheArtofSimple.net where you can find my writing as well as Andrea's. Head to the show notes of this episode number 187 at TheSimpleShow.com where you can find all sorts of things, links to things we talked about, where you can sign up for my weekly email called Five Quick Things, how you can become a patron and support the work it takes to create the show for just a few dollars a month as well as how to connect with Andrea and myself. The show was produced by Chad Michael Snaveley and Jesse Montonya and thanks also to Caroline TeSelle, Andrea Debbink, and my furry

intern, Ginny. Thanks so much for listening. I'm Tsh Oxenreider and I'll catch you back here soon.