

Ashton Woods' **Carrie Schonberg** on affordability, design, and first-timers



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Ashton Woods has been adept at attracting move-up buyers with its high design and homes priced at \$1 million and up. The Georgia-based builder even turned its selections process into a boutique experience for clients with its Studio by Ashton Woods, winning a 2017 National Sales & Marketing Award for Best Design Center.

Now the company is among a growing number of home builders targeting the entry-level buyer. Its new brand, Starlight Homes, will roll some of the design touch points from its upscale homes into its more affordable offerings, with a focus on turning renters into homeowners. Starlight communities are selling in Atlanta, central Florida, Austin, Texas, and Phoenix. The brand is offering as many as 15 floor plans, along with upgraded flooring and stainless steel appliances, programmable thermostats, energy-efficient construction, and HVAC with fresh air ventilation. Monthly mortgage payments range from the high \$700s to the low \$1,000s, depending on location.

Q In addition to the tagline “Guiding You Home,” what will be the brand attributes for Starlight Homes?

A “Guiding You Home” is more than just a tagline for Starlight, it speaks

to the heart of who we are and what we represent: a trusted guide throughout the homebuying process. The brand aims to be both authentic and approachable, evoking a certain sense of nostalgia.

Q Are there Ashton Woods design elements that will migrate to the Starlight brand?

A Absolutely. Although Starlight is targeting a different consumer from the Ashton Woods brand, high design and attention to detail are in our DNA, and we believe that everybody deserves the opportunity to live in a beautifully appointed home, regardless of price point. The same team that’s behind our Ashton Woods floor plans has created a series of homes for Starlight that promotes livability with comfortable open spaces. And the same internal design team that’s behind many of our flagship Ashton Woods model homes was involved in selecting the finishes for our Starlight inventory homes.

Standard features for Starlight include 36-inch-high kitchen cabinets in a rich coffee stain, granite countertops in kitchens and bathrooms, luxury vinyl plank floors, and stainless steel appliance packages. The homes are beautiful and definitely push the boundaries of what people expect when they think of an entry-level home.

Q Could you describe the extent to which Starlight will be involved with prospects in getting them ready for homeownership? For example, will there be counseling for cleaning up their credit

and applying for FHA and USDA loans? Are there other services needed to prepare renters for becoming owners?

A As mentioned earlier, the notion of “Guiding You Home” is more than just a tagline for Starlight; it encapsulates the heart behind the brand itself. Many first-time homebuyers are intimidated by the idea of buying a home, and our goal is to be a trusted guide during the homebuying process.

That starts with helping potential buyers realize that the dream of homeownership is, in fact, attainable, and Starlight’s role extends to providing guidance on everything from selecting the right floor plan to figuring out what buyers need to have ready for closing.

Q Tell us about Starlight’s marketing message in its outreach to renters and Millennials?

A We are not specifically targeting Millennials for the Starlight brand. In fact, we’ve found equal interest in our homes from Millennials, Gen Xers, and even Baby Boomers who are looking to downsize. Regardless of the demographic, our marketing message is one of affordability, and the notion that everyone deserves the chance to make their dreams of homeownership a reality without breaking the bank. In our efforts to focus on renters as future homeowners, we are communicating the value of homeownership in terms of a monthly payment, rather than a sales price.

For the complete interview with Carrie Schonberg, see probuilder.com/schonberg