SHEET 05

RESOURCES WORTH BOOKMARKING

Six things I get asked about more than anything else. No jargon, no fluff — just what I'd tell you if we were sitting across the table.

01 / GUIDE THE HOMEOWNER'S YEAR-BY-YEAR CHECKLIST

Owning a home isn't "set it and forget it." Here's what's actually worth your attention, and when.

YEAR 1

Get your systems in place

- File your homestead exemption if your state offers one — it's free money left on the table if you skip it.
- Set up a maintenance fund. A good target is 1–3% of your home's value per year, saved a little at a time.
- Walk the property every season once, so you know what "normal" looks like before something goes wrong.
- Confirm your homeowners insurance coverage actually matches what it'd cost to rebuild — not just what you paid.
- Keep every closing document somewhere you can actually find it. You'll need some of it at tax time.

YEARS 2–3

Start paying attention to equity

- Check your Homebot report — this is when PMI removal and early refinance opportunities start becoming realistic.
- Reassess your insurance every renewal. Rebuild costs and coverage gaps creep up quietly.
- Knock out the maintenance items that are cheap now and expensive later (gutter guards, sealing, caulking, servicing the HVAC).
- If your income or credit improved, it's worth a quick conversation about whether your current loan still fits.

YEARS 4–7

Bigger-picture decisions

- This is the window where refinancing or a HELOC for a renovation starts to pencil out for a lot of people — worth checking in.
- Major systems (roof, water heater, HVAC) are entering mid-life. Budget ahead instead of getting surprised.
- Revisit your property tax assessment, especially if values in your area have moved a lot.

YEAR 7+

Make the equity work for you

- You've likely built real equity — worth a conversation about whether it should stay parked or be put to work (move-up purchase, investment property, debt consolidation).
- Think ahead on big-ticket replacements before they become emergencies.
- If retirement or a life change is on the horizon, this is a good time to talk through your options, reverse mortgages included.

02 / GLOSSARY

MORTGAGE TERMS, DECODED

The words that come up the most, explained the way I'd explain them out loud — not the way they're written in your loan docs.

ESCROW

The account your lender uses to collect a little extra each month and pay your property taxes and insurance for you, so you're not stuck with one giant bill once a year.

PMI

Private mortgage insurance — an extra monthly cost that protects the lender, not you, when you put down less than 20%. It goes away once you've built enough equity.

EQUITY

The part of your home you actually own — what it's worth, minus what you still owe on it. It grows as you pay down your loan and as your home's value goes up.

APR

Your interest rate plus most of the fees, rolled into one number so you can compare loans apples-to-apples. It's usually a little higher than the rate itself.

POINTS

An upfront fee you can pay to lower your interest rate. Makes sense if you're staying in the home long enough to recoup the cost — otherwise, skip it.

LTV (LOAN-TO-VALUE)

How much you owe compared to what the home is worth. A lower number means more equity, and it's the number that decides things like PMI removal.

RATE LOCK

An agreement that freezes your interest rate for a set window while your loan closes, so you're not exposed if rates move before closing day.

AMORTIZATION

The schedule of how your payment is split between interest and principal over time. Early on, more goes to interest; later, more goes to paying down the actual loan.

APPRAISAL

An independent, licensed estimate of what your home is actually worth — used to confirm the loan amount makes sense for the property.

UNDERWRITING

The behind-the-scenes process where your loan gets a final review — income, credit, assets, the property itself — before it's officially approved.

DTI (DEBT-TO-INCOME)

What percentage of your monthly income goes toward debt payments. Lenders use it to figure out how much loan you can comfortably handle.

CASH-OUT REFINANCE

Replacing your current mortgage with a new, larger one, and taking the difference in cash — using your home's equity without selling it.

03 / GUIDE

WHEN DOES REFINANCING ACTUALLY PAY OFF?

Rates moving is not, by itself, a reason to refinance. Here's the simple test I actually use.

Refinancing isn't free — there are closing costs involved, same as when you originally bought. So the real question isn't "did rates drop," it's "will the drop actually save me enough to make it worth paying those costs again."

My rule of thumb: $200+ a month

If a refinance saves you $200 or more a month, it generally recoups the closing costs and pays you back over time. Below that, the math gets a lot more case-by-case — it still might make sense, it just needs a closer look.

Current payment	$3,100 / mo
New payment after refinance	$2,850 / mo
Monthly savings	$250 / mo
Verdict	**Worth running the numbers →**

A few other things worth factoring in alongside the monthly savings: how many more years you plan to stay in the home, whether you're shortening or extending your loan term, and whether you're rolling closing costs into the loan or paying them out of pocket. None of that changes the quick gut-check — it just adds color once we're actually running your numbers.

04 / HOW-TO

APPEALING YOUR PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENT

This guide covers California specifically, since that's where most of this applies to.

1

Check your annual assessment notice

Your county assessor mails this out each year (usually around late spring/summer for the coming fiscal year). Compare the assessed value against what you genuinely believe the home is worth.

2

Know your filing window

Most California counties accept formal appeals between July 2 and either November 30 or September 15, depending on the county — so don't sit on it once you've decided to appeal.

3

Pull your evidence together

Recent comparable sales (similar homes, similar condition, nearby, sold around the assessment date), and documentation of anything that hurts value — needed repairs, damage, a busy street, anything the county wouldn't know from a desk.

4

File with your County Assessment Appeals Board

Every county has its own form and process (usually through the Clerk of the Board), and most charge a small filing fee. You can represent yourself — an agent or attorney isn't required.

5

Remember Prop 13

California caps how much your assessed value can increase each year (generally 2%, tied to inflation), regardless of market swings. An appeal is really about correcting an assessment that's already too high — not about long-term protection, which Prop 13 already gives you.

> Licensed in CA, OR, WA & FL — if you're in one of the other states and want to know your process there, just reach out and I'll point you in the right direction.

05 / CHECKLIST

SEASONAL HOME MAINTENANCE CALENDAR

What matters changes depending on where your roof actually sits. Find the climate that matches you.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA / DRY & COASTAL



SPRING

- Check irrigation/sprinklers before the dry months hit
- Inspect roof & gutters before fire season prep begins



SUMMER

- Clear brush & defensible space (wildfire risk)
- Service A/C before peak heat



FALL

- Clean gutters ahead of the first rain
- Check weatherstripping and seals



WINTER

- Inspect roof & drainage before storms
- Check for slope/grading issues near the foundation

PACIFIC NORTHWEST / WET & MILD

SPRING

- Check for winter moss/moisture damage on roof
- Clear moss from walkways & decks

SUMMER

- Pressure-wash siding & decks while it's dry
- Inspect crawl space ventilation

FALL

- Clean gutters — twice, if you've got trees
- Check for drainage away from the foundation

WINTER

- Watch for roof leaks during heavy rain stretches
- Service the furnace/heat pump

FLORIDA / HUMID & HURRICANE-PRONE

SPRING

- Service A/C before the humidity ramps up
- Check for roof wear before hurricane season

SUMMER

- Prep a hurricane plan & check shutters/impact windows
- Watch for mold/moisture in humid spaces

FALL

- Inspect for storm damage after hurricane season
- Clear gutters & downspouts

WINTER

- Check irrigation (your "off season" for watering)
- Service the A/C before it's back in daily use

FOUR-SEASON CLIMATES



SPRING

- Inspect roof for winter/ice damage
- Check foundation for frost heave cracks



SUMMER

- Service A/C, check attic ventilation
- Reseal driveway/deck while it's dry



FALL

- Clean gutters, service the furnace
- Drain outdoor spigots before the first freeze



WINTER

- Watch for ice dams & check attic insulation
- Keep an eye on pipes during deep freezes

06 / GUIDE

REMOVING PMI — WHAT ACTUALLY QUALIFIES

PMI falls off two ways. One happens to you. The other, you make happen.

THE PASSIVE WAY

Automatic termination

By law, PMI is automatically cancelled once your loan balance hits 78% of your home's *original* value — based purely on your scheduled payments, with no appreciation factored in. It happens eventually. It just takes a while.

THE ACTIVE WAY

Appreciation gets you there faster

If your home's value has gone up, your equity grew faster than your payment schedule alone would get you. Once you've got 20% equity based on *current* value, you can request PMI removal — often years earlier than the automatic date.

Here's the part that actually matters: removing PMI early isn't automatic — **you have to ask for it**, and usually back it up with a new appraisal or valuation showing where your home sits today. Nobody's calling you to say "hey, your home went up in value, let's drop your PMI." That's exactly why it's worth keeping an eye on your Homebot report instead of just waiting for the automatic date to roll around — a few years of normal appreciation can easily be the difference between paying PMI for 3 more years or stopping it this year.