

## D.I.Y.

# Spruce up your home without breaking the bank

By Barbara Ballinger

**Y**ou may not be in the mood to undertake a \$100,000 kitchen remodeling. But there are dozens of inexpensive remodeling and decorating changes you can make that will give your home a fresher look and even fool some to think you spent big bucks.

The trick is to be sure the changes are functional for your family's needs and attractive — yet not so personal and trendy that they discourage a future sale. Even if you're not moving today, resale always should be factored in a bit. We've rounded up 11 ideas that offer great impact and value.

## Use paint

It's still the most affordable change-maker, whether you paint an entire room or one wall, says designer Thom Filicia, host of the Style Network's "Dress My Nest" and author of "Thom Filicia Style: Inspired Ideas for Creating Rooms You'll Love" (Simon & Schuster, 2008).

## Spruce up your main entry

First impressions count, and architect Fernando Pages Ruiz suggests fixing up the area of your home that you and family members use most — possibly a side or back entry, though it also could be the front doorway. If outdoor steps lead to the interior, be sure the railing is sturdy and the steps are wide enough. Add an incandescent bulb in the room so that lighting is bright and cheery. Paint the space a favorite color, add some artwork or a bench, and you'll immediately feel, "I'm glad to be home," says Pages Ruiz, author of "Building an Affordable House" (Taunton, 2005).

## Outfit your kitchen cabinets

Everyone thinks about repainting old cabinets and installing new pulls, but what about the interior? Make them more efficient with the right systems, such as spice racks and cutlery holders.

## Install a new concrete countertop

A new countertop or two can provide immediate impact in a kitchen, bathroom, den or any space, and with the instructions in Fu-Tung Cheng's book, "Concrete Countertops Made Simple" (Taunton, 2008), you can do the work yourself and save more. The material will cost about \$8 a square foot, and with the necessary rental equipment, you may be up to \$20 a square foot, less than the cheapest granite at \$40 or stainless steel at \$60, says Cheng. In addition to being affordable, it's durable and can be stained and sealed to resist acids.

## Create a better backsplash

The backsplash can become a focal point in any room. But instead of using plain tiles in traditional rectangular shapes, consider mosaics in random sizes, patterns, colors and even from different materials such as glass, stone and metal, says Eli Mechlovitz, CEO and founder of Glasstilestore.com in Brooklyn, N.Y. Many mosaics run from \$20 to \$50 a square foot, but some retailers sell them for less. If you can't afford to do all the backsplashes, consider changing one, Mechlovitz says.

## Fashion a resort-style bathroom

From Atlanta-based home-staging expert Kathy Nielsen come the following affordable tips: Light scented candles to add romance and tranquility; hang a chandelier on a dimmer at the center of the room for a dressy accent; pick neutral-colored, fluffy towels in beige or ivory to add more calm; have a good selection of scented soaps, herbal lotions and bath salts to pamper yourself; keep a plush robe on hand for getting into after a bath or shower. For an extra splurge, bring in a flat-panel TV.

## Re-accessorize with what you have

For any room that needs freshening, take art off walls, take everything off shelves, remove lamps from tables, stuff from a coffee table and place everything in the center of the room — or better yet in another room. Then



## Fix your flooring

Nothing dates a room as much as old, worn, wall-to-wall carpeting, so consider putting down the surface that many homeowners want: hardwood flooring. A 12-by-12-foot room can run about \$2,500 for an oak floor; something more exotic like Brazilian cherry may run double that amount, says Kaufman. Jeff Taub, president of Kittle's Flooring Co. in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., offers a slightly different suggestion: Fool the eye with single-plank laminated wood, which now comes in a variety of patterns from many manufacturers.

## Ditch the dark paneling

Many dens built in the late '60s and '70s were paneled with dark wood that now looks dated and sometimes even depressing. Jeff Crane, president and CEO of Concept to Creation, a Gilbert, Ariz.-based home consulting business, suggests removing paneling, patching walls and painting them a neutral tone for a dramatic change. Depending on the size of the room, a few gallons of paint might run less than \$100. With some new wall hangings, a plant and a few other new accessories, the room may be barely unrecognizable, he says.

## Install a new frameless shower door or spiffier curtain

Replacing an outdated shower door with frameless glass one can add a clean look. A quality door may run from \$300 on up, with installation from \$40 or so an hour, Crane says. If that's not an option, consider a colorful shower curtain. Material to fashion the curtain, plus a rod, may run from \$75 on up, depending on the quality.

## Get rid of clutter

Almost every room in a home is filled with too much stuff, especially the kitchen and its counters. "Do we really need 25 variations of the same container?" asks Crane rhetorically. Best of all, the cost of getting rid of all the nonessentials in a room and having clean, appealing counters can be zero dollars.