

9 Ways to Make a Kitchen Look Swank for Less

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According to *Remodeling* magazine's latest Cost vs. Value survey, the average price of an upscale kitchen redo hovers about \$113,000. Even the cost of a mid-range overhaul is a whopping \$58,000.

However, sellers are rarely willing to invest the kind of time and money it takes to do that kind of remodeling job, especially one they'll barely use before they move. But there are affordable alternatives to make this much-used gathering spot more appealing, both aesthetically and functionally. Here are nine easy-to-implement, easy-to-copy ideas for you to share with sellers and buyers. Tell them to try one, two, or perhaps all of them!

- **Reuse existing elements** in the kitchen when possible. "We try to take a hard look before we start any renovation to see what can be salvaged," says architect Talia Braude, AIA, LEED AP, whose firm Braude Pankiewicz Architects is based in Brooklyn, N.Y. For example, when Braude found floor joists that were too damaged to be structurally sound, she reused them as kitchen shelves, for which they worked perfectly.

- Go with **affordable cabinets**, possibly a line with simple maple, cherry, or oak rather than exotic imported wood or lacquered fronts. Also, opt for pressed rather than solid wood interiors and shelves to pare costs. Because cabinets often represent 50 percent to 60 percent of a remodeled kitchen's cost, saving here brings down the price, says Lou Manfredini, Ace Hardware's "Home Expert" based in Chicago. But if possible, spend a bit more on quality hardware that will

eliminate wear and tear when opening and closing doors and drawers. One good place to start looking for affordable cabinets is at IKEA, says Braude, which her client Orli Belman did when remodeling a kitchen in her Los Angeles home. Belman saved even more by purchasing cabinets during IKEA's kitchen sale. Other alternatives include replacing the doors (and reselling the old ones), or repaint cabinets with a product like Ace Hardware's Cabinet, Door & Trim Paint, an alkyd-based semi-gloss finish that yields a smooth, factory-like finish.

- **Appliances** are another huge cost factor in redoing a kitchen, and stainless-steel name brands are among the biggest offenders. Besides opting for less expensive black-and-white fronts and going with cheaper brands, Web sites like Craigslist and Overstock are good resources for new or little-used items others are trying to get rid of. Belman went those routes and found a double oven and refrigerator drawers on Craigslist, each for \$400, when a construction project stalled. She estimates each would have cost about \$3,000 retail. She also found an inexpensive but good faucet at Costco and discontinued Martha Stewart light fixtures on another Web site.

- Changing a **countertop** or several can add an instant fresh look, but instead of replacing them with high-end granite, marble, or manmade quartzes, Manfredini suggests covering tired laminate tops with RustOleum's highly durable Countertop Transformation product, a three-part system that transforms them into look-alike granites in five different colors. Belman also found affordable butcher-block tops at IKEA.

- A new **backsplash** can make a huge difference, and there are many self-adhesive tiles that are easy to install for DIY consumers, including those with the hot metal look in vintage or modern patterns and a host of sizes, shapes, and colors, Manfredini says. Savvy home owners also should consider contacting manufacturers, many of which offer overstocked goods for far less. For instance, Heath Ceramics has been

known to sell them for 75 percent off retail at its factory showroom in Sausalito, Calif.

- New **lighting** is one of the easiest switches to make and offers a big payback since it can make a kitchen look larger and highlight its best features, from a great island to kitchen table to new backsplash. Advise homeowners to locate new lighting under cabinets where main tasks are performed, within cabinets, especially glass-fronted ones, to show off cabinets and attractive contents, and over a dining table or island where one great fixture will shine, literally. When possible, opt for compact fluorescent or light-emitting diode bulbs to conserve energy, even though the initial price is higher. And if the bulb's compatible with dimmers, it's a great way to vary moods.

- Though replacing an entire **floor** can be costly, time-consuming, and expensive, there are handsome options that will last and won't break the bank. Durable and affordable options include Marmoleum, a sustainable linoleum, which no longer resembles what your parents or grandparents had but comes in hot colors and textures; old-growth bamboo that's denser than new variations; and cork, another natural material that's easily repairable if dings (or worse) occur. If a room is partly remodeled, often the floor can be saved with patching and restaining rather than replacing all of it, Braude says.

- Buyers should consider **redoing the layout** if it doesn't work, then save elsewhere rather than the reverse, Braude advises. If they install all new cabinets and appliances, but keep the same old, poorly functioning kitchen plan, they probably won't be pleased. It's better for them to gain a new layout and budget elsewhere – maybe keep cabinets – and later replace them, she says.

- Even when budgeting, home owners shouldn't forget to add in **one or two splurges** for a focal point and some kind of "wow" element to raise the level of the renovation, even if

it's a budget one, Braude says. Examples include handcrafted tiles with beautiful finishes, colors, and patterns, and a great island countertop, perhaps fashioned from a gorgeous CaesarStone as Belman and her husband chose to add.

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