



# Make Over Your House

## Without Going Broke

**Kitchen too small?  
Depressed by your rooms?  
No matter what  
your budget, there's a way  
to solve the problem.**

by DUO DICKINSON

**A home that isn't a good fit** is as bad as a pantsuit after some holiday weight gain—tight, ugly, and frustrating. A few years ago you might have sunk six figures into a colossal rehab or simply ditched the house altogether. Now it's time to start viewing home makeovers as a long-term project rather than a one-shot deal. On the following pages you'll see examples of smart, value-conscious renovations that build on the framework you've already got in place.

# In the Kitchen, Think Simple

The place we eat reflects the way we want to live. That's why it's so tempting to throw big money at kitchen rehabs. But if you stick to the same basic layout and focus on key aesthetic changes, you'll get a far bigger impact for your renovation dollar.

LIGHTING CABINETS FLOORS APPLIANCES WINDOWS

## 1 TRIM THE COST OF CUSTOM CABINETS

In the quest for attractive, durable cabinets, homeowners often overspend. Opt for painted wood and forgo fancy detail to cut the price of custom work by about half. The brand-new cabinets pictured at right cost just \$15,000.

## 2 USE WOOD FOR FLOORS

Wood costs \$10 per square foot, vs. \$20 for ceramic tiles. That would save \$3,000 for a 300-square-foot room. And wood lasts far longer than vinyl.

## 3 DON'T MOVE WINDOWS AND DOORS

Replace old doors and windows, but keep the same location and size to save about \$500 per opening. If you don't move the sink, you'll save another \$500.

## 4 STICK TO MID-RANGE APPLIANCES

Vikings and Sub-Zeros are great, but the mid-range GE models offer everything an amateur chef needs for thousands less. Think you'll trade up later? Size the space to accommodate higher-end units.



1. CABINETS  
Save \$15,000

2. FLOOR  
Save \$3,000

3. WINDOWS AND DOORS  
Save \$1,000

4. APPLIANCES  
Save \$4,000+

5. SKYLIGHT  
Save \$6,000

5 OPEN THE CEILING  
Adding a couple hundred square feet to your floor plan will cost at least ten grand. Instead, put in a skylight (\$1,500) and raise the ceiling to the rafters (about \$2,500), which will give you the same sense of spaciousness.

# Reshape the Molding

If your home was built in the past 50 years, chances are you have dull trim that was essentially designed to obscure a multitude of carpentry sins. To tear it out and replace it, you'd spend as much as \$2,000 for a room with four or five openings. Or, for as little as \$500 to \$1,000, you can give that old trim new life using the three methods below.

TRIM



## 1 CREATE NEW LINES

A well-placed cornice around the perimeter of the room can give mass-produced trim a unique look; a chair rail a few feet off the floor gives a boxy room dramatic flair.

## 2 GIVE DOORS A WRAPAROUND

Put a cove (a molding with a concave face) around a plainly trimmed door or window to create interesting shadows within the room.

## 3 ADD SOME ORNAMENT

Hand-carved decorative pieces look nice, but they are expensive. The plastic versions offered by distributors Outwater (outwater.com) or Focal Point (focalpoint-products.com) are far cheaper and appear almost identical.



Courtesy of Focal Point (right)

# Cut the Deck, Grow the Patio

The obvious way to build a cheap deck is to use inexpensive yellow pine, but that will get you little more than a splintery playpen that degrades over time. Instead, use "faux teak" decking such as ironwood or ipe, or a plastic composite such as Trex (cost: about \$25 per square foot), and use these methods to slash expenses.

RAILINGS FOUNDATION MATERIALS CURVE



Save \$5,000

Save \$800+

Save \$2,000

Spend \$500

## 1 SKIMP ON SIZE

A deck needs structure underneath it, which is costly. So keep your deck size modest (about 10 by 18 feet) and cut the typical \$10,000 deck price in half.

## 2 EXPAND THE PATIO

The patio doesn't need a foundation: Terrace stones can go directly onto sand, with gravel underneath for drainage (save \$3 to \$4 per square foot, or \$800 for a 200-square-foot area).

## 3 DITCH THE RAILINGS

Instead, keep the deck low—less than two feet above the ground. That will save you about \$2,000 for a 10-by-18-foot deck.

## 4 ADD A CURVE

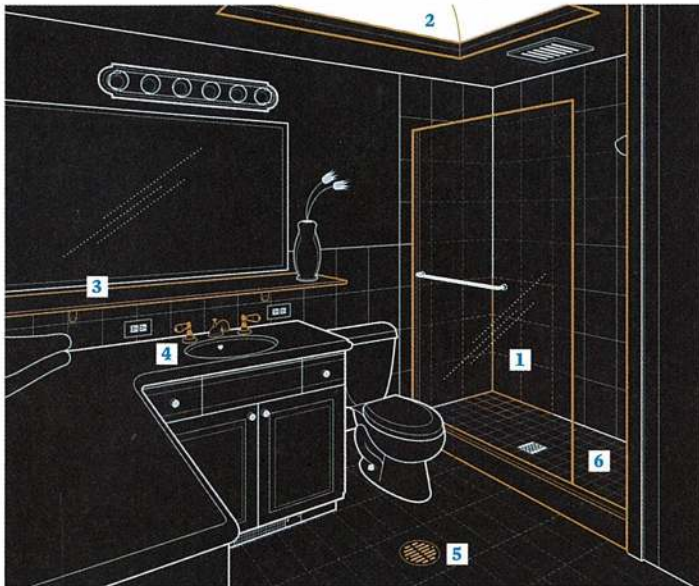
A modest deck doesn't have to look boring. Budget \$500 to \$2,000 for an angle or curve at a focal point of your deck, and the effect will transform a simple box into art.

Designer: Gary Marsh Design; garymarshdesign.com

# Get a Better Bath Without the Tub

Back in the day of huge credit lines, bathrooms were transformed into “spas”—and \$30,000 would fly out the door. There are plenty of sensible changes that will give the room a whole new look for less than half that price.

LIGHTING | TILE | FIXTURES | TOILET | SHOWER



**1 TAKE IT EASY ON TILE**  
Handmade tiles are a budget buster at about \$20 a square foot. Tile that costs half as much will shed water just as well. To save more, tile only around the shower, toilet, and sink.

**4 GET A SWEET DEAL ON FIXTURES**  
At websites like faucetdirect.com and fixtureuniverse.com, you can find faucets, showerheads, and sinks for a third of the retail price. Caveat: If the item breaks during installation, you may have to pay to replace it.

**2 SHINE A LIGHT**  
For about \$1,500, a skylight will transform a tight space. If natural light isn't an option, consider spending \$1,000 for a mirror that covers an entire wall.

**5 ADD A DRAIN**  
An extra drain in the floor can prevent a far more costly flood disaster, especially if your teenage daughter can't manage to shower in less than 30 minutes. Cost: at least \$1,000.

**3 PUT IN A SHELF**  
Instead of replacing the vanity, add a shelf along the wall over the sink. That will give you far more storage and cost only a couple hundred dollars.

**6 SWITCH TO A SHOWER**  
A new tub will cost you at least \$2,000, vs. about \$1,000 for a shower. Cut the cost even further by opting for a doorless opening with a showerhead facing away from it.

# Three Smart Splurges

Home renovation inevitably means mess and disruption. But a single piece of extraordinary furniture can transform a room almost as much. Handcrafted pieces might cost more than their big-box-store counterparts but will retain their value far better over time.

FURNITURE



**A SOFA**  
Buying a one-of-a-kind piece like this \$1,975 sofa means you can often select the upholstery, finish, and some detailing as well.



**A TABLE**  
Avoid veneers, which can bubble and crack. This \$4,800 solid-wood table should hold up well even in high humidity.



**A BED**  
Curved shapes and decorative carving drive up the cost of custom furniture. Pieces with straight lines, like this \$2,195 bed, are a relative bargain.

FEEDBACK: money\_letters@money.com

Sources: mortisetenon.com (chaise); nwfinewoodworking.com (table); Fairhaven-furniture.com (bed)