

# How To Dress Up Your Kitchen

By Curt Hagedorn

Statistics show that, after upgrading bathrooms and outdoor siding, one of the most cost effective home renovation projects you can undertake is sprucing up your kitchen. While you may not get a 100 percent return on your investment (particularly if you pay for a complete makeover from top to bottom) even some relatively inexpensive fixes may help potential buyers get over that “dated kitchen” hump toward meeting your asking price. Here are a few suggestions, from the bottom up:

- 1) **Fantastic floors.** If you're as addicted to home improvement shows as I am, you already know that 99 percent of the kitchens they go into, even if they're barely usable, usually have flooring that looks like it came out of the remainder bin. What were people thinking back in 1975? Fortunately, flooring is one of the easiest things to replace. The best way is to remove layers of tile or whatever else is there down to the sub floor, make sure you have a clean, smooth underlayment and lay a new floor. However, if your ugly flooring is determined to stay in place, you can lay new floor over old floor. This may require a new underlayment of some sort, depending upon what kind of flooring you choose. Most desirable these days for kitchens is either ceramic or stone tile, or laminate flooring that will take the traffic for at least 20 years according to most manufacturers. Don't skimp on a kitchen floor, it's the most used room in the house and the one that can make a deal for potential buyers.
- 2) **Creative cabinets.** Cabinets are a bit like furniture, everybody has their own taste. Therefore, if you're planning on staying in your home for awhile, invest in those beautiful hardwood cabinets you love, or the designer steel or frosted glass. If, however, you want to save a bit of money, consider a coat of (neutral) paint and new hardware. A nice coat of white enamel, professionally done (either by you or a professional) can make old cabinets look new again. The sparkle and style of new hardware can be the icing on the cake. But remember, a lousy job is worse than no job at all. If a good cleaning and some new knobs will help make the existing finish palatable, don't ruin it with an hour's work and some cheap latex paint. Another option: there are now many companies that will replace cabinet doors and drawer fronts with new, if you have high quality cabinets but hate the carved Spanish doors for example, you can add new doors for a whole new look.

- 3) **Captivating countertops:** If you're tired of staring at that expanse of red Formica, take heart. Replacing your countertops is another relatively inexpensive way of giving your kitchen a whole new look. Relatively inexpensive, that is, depending upon what material you choose. At the top of the most wanted list these days is stone: granite, marble, and then engineered stone, which is basically a composite of stone particles. An up and coming inexpensive alternative is concrete. Concrete can be custom poured and colored, you can even imbed your childhood marble collection in it if you want. After stone comes solid surface counters, often like Corian. Solid surface countertop comes in a wide variety of colors, is about as easily milled as wood and is highly durable, as well as being less expensive than stone. Next in the popularity line is tile, ceramic and otherwise. Then stainless steel and butcher block. Finally, there's laminate. Though laminate may be what you already have, there are so many styles, colors and patterns that you can refresh your kitchen's look very inexpensively. And while you're at it, get a new sink and fixtures for a complete transformation.
- 4) **Amazing appliances.** Though this can be an expensive option, nothing shines up a kitchen like gleaming new appliances. Stainless steel is currently popular, other than that you have to spend a great deal of money to get beyond white, black and almond. If you're planning on moving, you might not want to get the highest end items, unless it's already an extremely high end home or renovation. You can, however, get updated refrigerator, stove, hood, dishwasher and microwave for a few thousand dollars.