

How To Update Your Older Home

By Curt Hagedorn

Whether your home is 20, 50 or 100 years old, there comes a time when it begins to look a little ragged around the edges, inside and out. While you may not want to invest in a complete top to bottom renovation, there are things you can do to freshen up your home's look, as well as maintain its value in the marketplace. Here, in no particular order, are a few tips.

- 1) **Consult the professionals.** For the most part, bids and advice cost nothing and, if you have any sort of budget at all, it's going to be a lot easier to pay for some things like masonry work outdoors and plumbing and electrical indoors. So talk to architects and designers about what you can do to give your home more "curb appeal" outside and upgraded comfort and convenience inside. They're bound to think of things, both inexpensive and over the top, which have never occurred to you. A less complicated alternative is buying a stack of architecture, renovation and decorating magazines and cutting out things you like. Finally, drive around the neighborhood, see what your neighbors are doing.
- 2) **Identify the major problem areas.** Now that you've talked to a few designers, read a few magazines and checked out the neighborhood competition, write down what you think are your major problems. Of course anything that goes deeper than cosmetic improvement should come first. This means if you have a severely cracked foundation, substandard electrical or plumbing service, a roof or siding that's coming off in sections or a yard that looks like a wasteland, forget about building those decorative columns out by the driveway. Accomplish the big fixes first. For those of you without such major problems, set your priorities based on your own personal needs. Is having an attractive house outside a more pressing concern, or is your cramped kitchen where you want to start swinging the sledgehammer. Whether your project is big or small, planning and budgeting makes all the difference.
- 3) **Adding Value to your home.** Some of the top updates that can add value to your home inside and out include new siding outside, and upgraded bathrooms inside. Large and luxurious master baths are particularly in demand. Other top of the list items include a new roof (if your current one is aging or damaged), new windows (again, particularly if you have window problems) and an upgraded kitchen. Not so cosmetic but still important include new heating, cooling and ventilation equipment and, surprisingly, an updated (or

at least organized) garage. Don't underestimate the value of a nice lawn, neat walkways and other landscaping as well as outdoor living space. Again, adding an elaborate outdoor kitchen and expensive decks and patios probably won't pay for itself except in the most high end developments and competitive markets, so keep your updates basically within the standards of your neighborhood. In other words, if most of your neighbors don't have solid gold faucets and marble floors, you probably won't get anything more than personal satisfaction out of them either.

4) **Put on a new coat of paint.** New colors inside and out (particularly neutral colors) can freshen up an older home beautifully and inexpensively. Invest in some new trim: shutters and pergolas and trellises outside, crown molding and wainscoting and baseboards inside. A bland home can get a whole new lease on life just by adding a bright color to the front door, or a new color scheme for the siding, trim and so on. Color can be more complicated than you think, so take advantage of the fact that many paint manufacturers are now offering small quantities inexpensively as samples. Before you paint your whole house say, black with orange trim, get a lot of opinions and again, look around the neighborhood to see what others are doing.

5) **Change out your floors.** There is so much available in flooring these days from laminate wood floors to custom terra cotta tiles to genuine stone to linoleum and carpeting and area rugs and combinations thereof. If your older home is a sea of dingy beige carpeting, new floors and new rugs can add value as well as warmth and comfort.