

Is a Partial Kitchen Makeover Better Than None?

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A [new year](#) is the perfect time to freshen up your kitchen's look. But you [don't have to sink a lot of money](#) into a major [renovation](#). You can make some dramatic changes in both atmosphere and value by opting for simple and potentially less labor-intensive (and less expensive) fixes.

"I'd recommend upgrading the element that needs it the most," says Jamie Gold, a San Diego-based certified kitchen designer and author of "New Kitchen Ideas That Work."

"What sticks out like a sore thumb that you can address fairly affordably?"

One thing to keep in mind, adds John Bugea, a Baton Rouge, LA-based owner/broker and certified residential specialist with John Bugea Real Estate, is "to be sure you maintain a cohesive look throughout, insofar as how updated the various pieces of the kitchen are relative to each other."

For example, a new stainless-steel fridge won't heighten the kitchen's value if it's sitting alongside dingy

lamine-finish countertops.

“Cost absolutely matters in terms of the quality of the materials and service, and in terms of buying what’s appropriate for your home,” Gold adds. “A \$100,000 kitchen will not turn your \$200,000 townhouse into a \$300,000 property. At the same time, don’t underinvest on a million-dollar home if you want to preserve its value.”

Updates that are worth the effort

Here are some big-impact changes that can instantly update your kitchen and add value:

Appliances

Choosing one or two new appliances can significantly upgrade your space.

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“When choosing a finish for a new appliance, stainless steel is still the gold standard,” Bugea says. However, if you’re on a budget, you can often get by with black appliances or a faux stainless-steel finish, he says. “Black appliances go with most other finishes you choose in a kitchen, so you can definitely get away without replacing them; instead spend your money elsewhere.”

Price tag: A new stainless-steel dishwasher, range, or fridge costs anywhere from \$400 (for a new dishwasher) to a few thousand dollars, depending on model, size, and brand. You can purchase stainless-steel appliance film at most big-box retailers or online at www.fauxsteel.com from \$20 to \$75 per length.

Countertops

While granite will probably get you the most bang for your buck, Bugea says, there are a variety of [options in countertops](#), including low-maintenance quartz patterned as marble, granite, and natural stone.

“Those engineered products are overtaking natural stone countertops in popularity, as they’re lower-maintenance, highly durable, family-friendly, and fully warrantied,” Gold says.

Price tag: If you’re sinking money into countertops, it’s generally better to leave installation to the pros. Budget \$4,000 to \$8,000 for countertops, says Gold. Replacing countertops with something high-quality “will pay dividends in both value and practicality,” she adds.

Hardware and fixtures

“Cabinets can often be given a fairly substantial face-lift by adding new, more contemporary hardware,

which is a very cost-effective option,” Bugea says. Swap out shiny faux-brass 1990s knobs with glass handles or nickel cup pulls.

Replace dated light fixtures with something with clean lines or texture, such as a linen drum pendant over a kitchen table.

Add a new faucet in chrome or oil-rubbed bronze to pull together the look.

And you don’t have to match fixtures. “It’s OK to go with brushed-nickel cabinet pulls and a polished chrome faucet. Simple, clean designs are the top choice,” says Kerry Flanagan White, kitchen designer and cabinet salesperson with Houston, TX-based Factory Builder Stores.

Price tag: To get a more expensive look on a budget, search eBay and Amazon.com. Amazon.com offers six oil-rubbed bronze cup pulls for \$10, and eBay features hardware lots, which can save dollars. In general, pulls range from \$2 apiece on up. Faucets run \$175 to \$375 on average. Expect to pay around \$100 to \$375 for light fixtures, says Gold.

Handy tips for further cutting costs

Declutter, advises Gold. Don’t underestimate the impact of [clean cabinets and countertops](#) to make a kitchen feel larger.

Do it yourself. It costs less. And with so many DIYers getting their hands dirty, there are a plethora of how-to videos on YouTube and other websites and blogs. Even big-box stores such as Lowe’s and Home Depot offer instructional videos.

Enlist the help of handy friends. Sometimes getting friends who own a paintbrush and a little know-how and paying them in pizza go a long way in cutting down the time of a kitchen renovation.

Clean. Use a mild detergent to degrease cabinets. [Touch up](#) nicks and dings on baseboards and walls. No detail is too small.

Seek out items at discount stores. The local Habitat for Humanity ReStore, for instance, stocks builder supplies such as flooring, cabinets, doors, light fixtures, paintbrushes, stains, rollers—even doorknobs and handles.

Paint. A fresh coat of paint, especially in a [neutral tone](#), offers a blank canvas and will create the illusion of more space in your kitchen.

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