

www.chicagotribune.com/classified/realestate/home/ct-mre-0523-cheap-remodeling-20100523,0,3304198.story

chicagotribune.com

Cheap yet chic updates

Easy and inexpensive ways to remodel a home on a tight budget

By Leslie Mann, Special to the Tribune

May 23, 2010

Before Lisa Elkins' contractor remodeled her Chicago row house's bathroom last year, she did her own demolition. Out went the 1960s toilet, sink, medicine cabinets and tile, plus "lots and lots of mortar," Elkins recalls, that had been hiding under the tile.

"It's amazing how many bags of stuff we hauled out of that small room," recalls Elkins, an architect.

Bottom line, says Elkins, she and her husband sacrificed a weekend but saved about 5 percent of their cost. "Worth it," she says.

Cindy Grier, of Naperville, on the other hand, wanted to update her family-room cabinetry, which was stuck in the 1980s. Her designer, Elizabeth Marusin of Asparagus Interiors Inc. in Naperville, suggested she keep the lower cabinets and replace the upper shelves with glass to showcase her exotic plants.

"We painted the cabinets off-white, gave them new hardware and added an IceStone (recycled glass) countertop," Marusin says. "Then, we painted the trim work in the room to match. It took the room from Colonial to contemporary, kept the cabinets out of the landfill and saved money."

Thanks to the Bermuda Triangle of loan restrictions, deflated home values and high unemployment, many homeowners are choosing to stay put instead of moving to new homes. Like Elkins and Grier, they find ways to improve their homes without breaking the bank.

We asked home improvement experts for additional tips. Here's what they had to say:

Expert tips

One of the least expensive ways to update your house is painting. "Now, some brands, including Behr, have primer/paint combinations. And, most brands have test pots you can buy for less than \$5 to try out a color before you buy a gallon." — **Paul Fatigato, Home Depot, North Avenue, Chicago**



www.roomandboard.com

Ads by Google

"Most Ace Hardware stores have a shelf of 'mismatched paint' that customers didn't want. They sell for only \$5 a quart or \$10 a gallon." — **Lou Manfredini, home improvement expert**

"Instead of replacing your laminate countertop, you can use Rust-Oleum Countertop coating to repaint it. It costs about \$25 to redo the counter. We also have paints you can use to paint your old refrigerator and to paint your old cabinets. The new cabinet paints give you an auto-bodylike finish. The paint self-levels so you don't see brush strokes." — **Manfredini**

"If you're doing your own demo, sort the waste instead of dumping it all into a bin. Wood, drywall, metal and concrete can be recycled. You save on dumping fees." — **Mike Holmes, host of HGTV's "Holmes on Homes"**

"Before adding a room, consider knocking down walls to access a room you don't use. If you have an unused dining room, for example, take down the wall between it and the kitchen instead of expanding the kitchen." — **Tom Dredge, Board Room Designs Ltd., Aurora**

"If you plan to spend more than \$20,000 or are significantly changing the value of your house, call an architect. Many of us use software to create 3-D models of the room, so you can 'walk' around the room. That helps you plan ahead so you don't make changes later that will cost money." — **Lisa Elkins, 2 Point Perspective Inc., Chicago**

"Consider buying some of your products from Habitat for Humanity's ReStores in Chicago Heights, Elgin and Gurnee. They have everything from tiles to appliances. This saves you money and helps a good organization." — **Ron Cowgill, D/R Services Unlimited Inc., Glenview**

"Many contractors will let you use their contractors' discount to buy things like tile and bathroom fixtures. Because we buy a lot from the building-supply companies, they give us a lower price than they give the consumer." — **Bruce Pinsler, Galaxie Construction, Lincolnwood**

"Pick up the building products yourself, even if you have a contractor doing the work for you. Caveat: Ask your contractor what to buy so he can advise you on quality brands." — **Wayne Owczarzak, Mr. Handyman, West Chicago**

"Before you buy an expensive new tool for your project, see if you can rent it. A miter saw that you would use to cut crown molding, for example, will cost you \$43 for 24 hours from Home Depot, as opposed to buying one for much more." — **Fatigato**

Even if you aren't handy, you can operate a broom. "Do your own (daily) clean-up and you can take 4 to 5 percent off your contractor's price." — **Daniel Rumpel, Hi-Tech Builders Inc., Chicago**

Before you replace a well-built bathroom vanity that is 30 inches tall with a new, 36-inch version, consider raising it. "A contractor can trim it out and/or give it legs for less money than it costs to get a new one. Caveat: You will probably have to move the plumbing connections." — **Jeff Hoerter, The Drudge Meister, Highland Park**

"We fix the broken tile, seal the grout and replace things like soap dishes, then use a water-resistant enamel that gives the tile a new finish. You pick the new color, so you can get rid of that 1950s pink." — **Jim Wagner, ARK Porcelain Refinishing, East Dundee**

If your kitchen cabinets are in good shape but predate the Clinton administration, call a "cabinet refacer" to replace the doors and drawers. "You save 20 to 30 percent (compared to buying new cabinets), get the new soft-close drawers and a whole new look for your kitchen." — **Monica Butler, Granite Transformations, Vernon Hills/Tinley Park**

"Instead of spending money replacing your 30-inch upper kitchen cabinets with the newer 42-inch type, hire a carpenter to trim that cavity with wooden back panels and molding. The result is an open cabinet that's great for display items. Or, replace your upper cabinets with open shelving for a contemporary look, at a fraction of the cost." — **Leslie Markman-Stern, Leslie M. Stern Design Ltd., Chicago**

Take a class. Home Depot, for example, offers free classes in tiling, installing molding and replacing faucets. "Once a month, we have one for women only — 'Do-it-HERself.' " — **Fatigato**

"Know your limits. If you do something you're not qualified to do, then you spend more money in the long run hiring someone to redo it. The best example is replacing the bathroom fan. Not only does it involve electrical, which not every do-it-yourselfer can do, but it's heavy. I've seen them fall after not being installed correctly." — **Hoerter**

As you choose building products, consult energystar.gov to determine which ones trigger tax credits. They include windows, insulation and HVAC equipment, for example. For your tax files, save your sales receipts and obtain copies of the manufacturers' certificates. The latter takes some legwork; best to start with the manufacturers' Web sites.

Copyright © 2010, [Chicago Tribune](http://www.chicagotribune.com)