

Easy Solutions for Kitchens & Baths

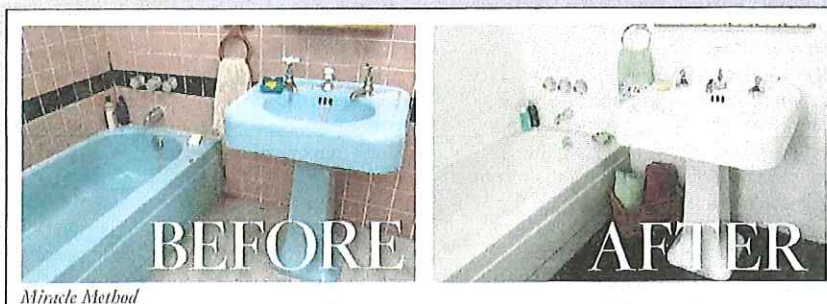
It's too easy for a remodeling budget to go down the drain when improving a kitchen or bathroom. Small, inexpensive improvements such as painting or refinishing tubs, sinks, cabinets, countertops, and even grout can give old kitchens and baths a fresh feel.



Kathy Burke, Sensational Home Staging, Danville, Calif.



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Miracle Method

Counters.

Granite is still king when it comes to countertops (with quartz a close second). The price of granite has dropped considerably in recent years, even as low as \$29 per square foot, which makes it not much more expensive than laminate, says David Alderman, president of the National Kitchen and Bath Association. But if granite still doesn't fit sellers' budget, they may be able to get the look for less with updated laminates that resemble granite, or by enhancing the look of the countertops they have. Some companies offer kits to help make countertops resemble granite styles. In her listings, Fisher has used a \$49.95 color kit from Giani Inc. (www.GianiGranite.com) that takes laminate, ceramic tile, or other countertops from plain to a marble-like appearance. For a modern look, liquid stainless steel finish is also available. Even those old tile countertops can be saved. Fisher suggests hiring a professional to clean or paint the grout. Fisher turned to The Grout Doctor, a grout cleaning company with nationwide franchises, to overhaul white tile countertops that had dark purple grout. The purple was off-putting in photos, she says. She had the grout refinished in a light cream color. It cost less than \$220 and made a drastic improvement. (Tip: Cleaning and refinishing stained or dirty grout on floors and bathtubs can make a big difference, too. Just be sure to keep your grout color neutral for best results.)

Cabinets.

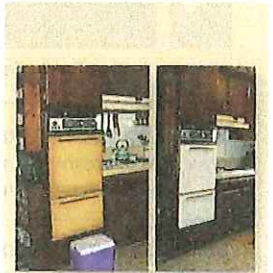
Dark cabinets can make a kitchen look cavelike. But your seller doesn't need to spend the big bucks for new cabinetry. As long as the cabinets are in good condition, you can update their look for under \$250. New cabinet knobs or handles—an easy do-it-yourself project—can instantly upgrade a kitchen. You can get hardware for as little as \$2 to \$3 apiece. "It's amazing how you can transform decent cabinets by just swapping out the hardware and bringing it up to date," Millholland says. Brushed nickel hardware looks high-end, Fisher says. Chrome is also a good option, while black and bronze are gaining popularity. Avoid dated brass knobs. For outdated cabinets get out the paintbrush. Painting cabinets a rich, neutral color or refinishing the cabinets with a clear coat can greatly enhance their appearance and brighten the kitchen. Popular color choices are warm earth tones, such as off-white cabinetry with butterscotch glaze (it really pops when combined with a tannish gold granite countertop) or cream colors, Millholland says.

Fixtures.

Instantly make a dated bathroom more modern with just a few enhancements to the fixtures. For example, removing that large plated glass mirror or old medicine cabinet and replacing it with a framed mirror in a rich finish like oil-rubbed bronze, can make a big change at a small cost, says Bill Millholland of Case Design/Remodeling Inc. "It'll make the bathroom look much more sophisticated," he notes. "Typically a bigger mirror is better than a smaller one, but consider its proportion to the room—it will look awkward if it's too big." For an easy, elegant look, add sconces on each side of a framed mirror, adds Alderman. If your faucets have forever lost their shine, you might consider replacing those too, even for as low as \$20. You'll want to make sure your lighting and faucet finishes all match, Millholland recommends. The most popular bathroom faucet finishes are brushed nickel, followed by polished chrome and satin nickel, according to an NKBA trend report.

Surfaces.

Terrylynn Fisher has seen multitude of colors in bathroom countertops, sinks, and tubs—from pink sinks to brown tubs to baby blue tiles. But it's not easy to sell a pea-green tub, and it's pricey to replace it. Fisher, a salesperson with Empire Realty in Walnut Creek, Calif., has covered up such bathroom color dilemmas by hiring pros to refinish the problem areas in a neutral white. Two national franchises, Miracle Method and Permaglaze, can refinish porcelain, fiberglass, and acrylic, among others, and repair cracks to make the material look new. Fisher has found that to be a cost-effective solution: She paid Miracle Method about \$350 to refinish a pink bathtub and shower and about \$200 for the counter and sinks, changing them to a neutral white. For \$550, the change completely transformed the once-colorful bathroom into a more pleasing neutral one for resale that no longer had buyers grimacing.



Appliances.

Kitchen appliances that are mismatched or dated can be difficult for buyers to look past. As long as the appliances still work, an increasingly popular option is painting them. Several companies, such as Rust-Oleum and Krylon, make special paint to spray or brush over appliances in black, white, or other shades. Stainless steel paint, such as Thomas' Liquid Stainless Steel, will give a refrigerator, dishwasher, or range a brushed-on look. Costs for the special paints start at \$19.95; you can often find kits designed for specific appliances. Of course, you'll want to disclose such updates to buyers and make them aware of any upkeep issues.

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