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Kitchen Makeover: How to turn reverie into renovation

"I feel like I have a new house," I said to my husband as I walked into our newly renovated kitchen.

"Well, I'm happy you're happy," D.C. said, a comment that, as anyone who is married knows, carries the subtext for all you've put us through.

"Seriously," I said, "every time I walk in, I can't believe it's my kitchen. It's light, it's open, it's updated, it's ..."

"... expensive," he says, finishing my sentence. "After this, we are done with home improvements for a long time."

I probably could have picked a better time to express my kitchen bliss, as D.C. was, at that moment, in the middle of paying bills. "Well, it's totally worth it," I said. "And be glad it was just a renovation and not a remodel," I said, implying somehow that being married to me is a bargain.

For the uninitiated, a kitchen remodel involves changing the footprint, relocating appliances, putting in new everything — in other words, a total gut. With a renovation, the footprint remains, and changes are more cosmetic.

I had been wanting to transform our home's 20-year-old kitchen since we moved in five years ago. However, like many homeowners who wish their homes were different in some way, my plans never went past the daydream stage.

When I thought of all the decisions I'd have to make, the time, the disruption, the money, the spousal conflicts, the Pandora's box of trouble, and the uncertainty that I might not like it in the end, I froze like a glacier in Greenland.

Then, a few months ago, for reasons unknown, my desire for a better kitchen grew to an obsession. I called interior designer Sally Ward and asked her to come by "just to



AT HOME WITH Marni Jameson

height. This would open site lines and give the kitchen a cleaner, more modern look.

- Replace the counters. I would look for a light cream stone material to replace the brown Santa Cecelia granite that seems to have followed me to every house I've owned since the 1990s.
- Replace the old, stainless-steel sink and small, worn faucet with a

ing where to go to find stone, fixtures, appliances, sinks, and installers. Off I went.

Several weeks later, once I had my materials purchased and workers lined up, the bedlam began. For a few days, the hub of our home was a loud, messy, dust-filled trench harboring strange men carrying heavy artillery.

And then ... bliss.

For those looking to turn their home improvement reveries into reality, here's some advice:

• Find a designer you click with.

I am good at making decorating decisions, but for something this big, permanent, and expensive, I wanted back up. Ward, who charged by the hour, provided ideas, validated my good instincts, and protected me from my bad ones.

• Do what you can do. The more you can do yourself, the more you'll save. Don't do what you should hire a pro for, but absolutely do the legwork and the projects that require

SEE MARNI, 4H

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talk" about what I could maybe, possibly, probably not, do to refresh my kitchen.

Ideally, I wanted to make a few small moves to net big results. (Who doesn't?) However, I worried the advice would be to gut the place, mortgage the house, and start over.

To my delight, Ward was on board, and, within an hour, we had a reasonable (though D.C. had another word for it) game plan:

- Cabinets would stay but with new hardware. That right there saved thousands of dollars. The dark brown walnut cabinets were in good shape and matched the cabinetry throughout the house. We'd leave them but replace the vintage satin-nickel hardware with transitional knobs and pulls in a shiny polished-nickel.
- Cut down the tall, bar-level counter to make all counters one

larger, white, cast-iron sink and more distinctive faucet, also in polished nickel.

- Update appliances that need replacing. In our case, that was the cooktop and dishwasher. We can live with our refrigerator and oven a while longer.
- Last, replace the backsplash. We'll do that right after the holidays, as Ward advised us to wait (that four-letter word) until the counters were in place, so we could see how different backsplash options looked against the counters in the actual light.

With Ward's clear-eyed direction, I could see not only the vision but also the path to get there. We agreed, I would GC the project, that is, serve as general contractor, but she would serve as a sounding board and point me to the right resources and professionals, includ-





In with the new: To update this 20-year-old kitchen, we made the high-low counters all one-level, replaced the brown bullnose granite with creamy quartzite counters cut with an eased (or squared) edge, replaced the stainless sink and faucet, and changed out the vintage knobs and pulls. Soon, a new glossy tile backsplash will finish the renovation. Photos courtesy of Marni Jameson



MARNI

FROM PAGE 2H

little skill. D.C. and I changed out all the knobs and pulls in one evening.

- Be sure your changes work with your home. A mistake some remodelers make is they pick a kitchen out of a magazine and try to replicate it, only to realize it doesn't fit with the rest of their home. A good designer can make sure your new look integrates with your house by keeping some elements, like flooring and cabinetry, consistent.
- Have your ducks in a row. Before you start demolition, have all the materials and appliances in hand and workers lined up, or you risk getting partway through the project, then stopping while you wait for a missing element, which causes your crew to leave for another job.
- Brace yourself. Though our workers were reliable, professional, and competent, we had a couple of rocky days. The power tools blew the electrical circuits. The water was turned off, so we skipped showers. The clamor of saws, drills, and sledgehammers sabotaged all thinking and conversation. Meals didn't happen, unless you call microwave cauliflower in a bag topped with queso from a jar dinner. And the dust was so thick it turned our brown dogs gray.

But, after years of dreaming, weeks of planning, and a few days of inconvenience, I'm happy. And I'm happy I'm happy.

Marni Jameson is the author of six home and lifestyle books, including "What to Do With Everything You Own to Leave the Legacy You Want," "Downsizing the Family Home – What to Save, What to Let Go" and "Downsizing the Blended Home – When Two Households Become One." You can contact her at www.marnijameson.com.



An "after" view of the renovated kitchen area.

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How to handle a lengthy renovation

The global pandemic reignited people's passions for home renovations, as they directed dollars that would normally have been spent elsewhere into the places where they were now spending the most time - their homes. According to the 10th annual Houzz & Home survey of more than 70,000 respondents in the United States, higher-budget projects cost around \$85,000 or more in 2020, compared with \$80,000 in the two years prior. Kitchen projects were the most popular among renovating homeowners.

Even though many COVID-19-related restrictions have lifted and life has largely returned to regular programming, renovations remain a popular investment. Homeowners embarking on home renovation projects understand that a certain measure of upheaval is to be expected, but some may not fully anticipate the impact that renovations have on daily life. The following are some tips for making it through a lengthy renovation.

· Discuss the timeline with contractors. It may be easier to make a plan for how much life will be disrupted if you have an idea of how long the renovation will be (if everything goes according to plan). Sit down with contractors and have them spell out the mi-

nutiae of the project so you'll be able to anticipate what's going on day-to-day.

- Start at the right time. Some contractors may say they can fit your project into their schedules in between other jobs. While this may seem convenient and timely, your work may be put on hold if there are delays with the other job or jobs. Instead, it may be better to hold off until the contractors can devote the bulk of their attention to your renovation.
- · Recreate commonly used spaces elsewhere. A kitchen or a bathroom remodel often requires giving up spaces that are used throughout a typical day. Unless you have a spare full bathroom

or kitchen, you'll need to make due. Set a microwave, tabletop electric burner and a coffee pot on a folding table in the garage or utility room. Rent or purchase a small refrigerator where you can store a few necessities. Ask your contractor to set up a makeshift outdoor shower so you have a place to get clean when the bathroom is under construction.

 Pack up and cover. Remodeling one room may cause a trickle down effect on other areas. Dust from drywall sanding can infiltrate many rooms in the home. Pack and label boxes with items not immediately needed and store them in another area. Cover most things so a film of dust

won't form on them.

- Adjust your schedule. Sleeping in will be a thing of the past for the duration of the renovation, as may be working from a home office. Try to get out of the work zone as much as possible for new scenery and respites from the noises and smells.
- · Ease up on cleaning standards. It's challenging to keep a home clean during a renovation. Relax standards and expect a mess for some time. Explain to guests what they'll find if they drop by.

Renovations can disrupt life, but often are well worth the sacrifices homeowners must make to see them through to completion.





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Simple landscaping strategies that can transform a home's exterior

The interior of a home may be where homeowners and their families spend the majority of their time, and there's no denying that a well-planned interior goes a long way toward making a house a home. However, the exterior of a home, including its landscaping, can serve as a source of pride and catch the eye of prospective buyers when the home hits the market.

It's easy to walk past a home with an eye-catching exterior and assume the homeowner has a green thumb or has spent lots of time and money working on the landscaping. Though that may be true, oftentimes it's the simplest strategies that make all the difference. Homeowners can keep these strategies in mind as they look to transform the exterior of their homes.

- Dress up the walkway. A longer walkway can give guests a strong first impression of a home and won't break the bank. Create new planting beds and plant bright plants and flowers along each side of the walkway. If it's necessary and within budget, lengthen the walkway to create the feel of a more grandiose entryway.
- Make things more symmetrical. A messy landscape can give a poor first impression, even if the area features some beautiful plants. In such instances, a little effort to make things more symmetrical, with equal parts grass and vegetation, can create a cleaner, more inviting look.
- Mulch your flower and tree beds. Mulch is a relatively inexpensive but effective way to add aesthetic appeal to a landscape.

Freshly mulched beds beneath trees and flowers creates a clean and organized look, and the mulch also serves a practical purpose, as it reduces weed growth and helps the soil retain moisture so plants stay healthy and look better throughout the warmer months when rainfall may not be steady or significant.

• Plant shade trees. Shade trees can be especially useful when selling a home. The shade provided by trees can shield grass

from blistering summer sun, potentially helping it stay green. A lush green lawn appeals to buyers and gives the impression the home has been well maintained. In addition, shade trees can be used to create the look of a backyard oasis. A well-placed bench beneath a large shade tree can entice buyers who want a relaxing spot to enjoy warm summer days outdoors without getting a sunburn

• Consider maintenance. The more exotic an exterior land-scape is, the more maintenance it's likely to require. Lawn and garden enthusiasts may not be turned off by landscape features that require steady maintenance, but homeowners who don't have much time for such work should keep things simple. A poorly maintained landscape, even if it includes exotic plants and elaborate designs, will adversely affect curb appeal. An-

other feather in the cap of low-maintenance landscape features is they could prove more appealing to prospective buyers, who may view elaborate, exotic landscaping as a lot of extra work they won't want to do.

Some simple landscaping strategies can help homeowners transform their home exteriors without requiring a significant investment of time or money

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8H

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