

## RENOVATIONS

# Small Projects That Pay Off Big

Make your home more appealing to buyers (and yourself) with these easy indoor upgrades you can do on your own BY ARIANNE COHEN

**HOPING TO SELL THIS SPRING?** Then you may want to put these winter weekends to good use by fixing up a few rooms. Prices are softening, homes are sitting longer. You need a leg up. "You're competing with new developments, and builders have really thought through what details impress buyers," says agent Katherine Camp of Prudential Douglas Elliman in New York City. Because you're unlikely to recoup full renovation costs these days, bypass a contractor and focus instead on what you can do yourself, in rooms buyers pay the most attention to. These five projects should get your house noticed—and snapped up sooner. "Sellers who don't offer these kinds of touches may find their homes languish on the market," says Camp.

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## THE ENTRYWAY

### Tile the Floor

"The foyer is the buyer's first impression of your house," says Sid Davis, author of *Home Makeovers That Sell*. "If people walk in and see a bad floor, they're going to wonder, 'What else is wrong with this dump?'"

**DIY COST:** \$200 for tiles (four feet by four feet); \$65 for tools

**WHAT YOU'D PAY A PRO:** \$1,000

**SKILL LEVEL:**  (out of four) **TIME:** 1 day

**DO THIS IF...** Your neighbors all have tile entries and you don't. And definitely if you have carpeting or linoleum, says carpenter Rick Crowe of Albany, N.Y. "The cheapest ceramic tile has more curb appeal than the most expensive linoleum."

**PAYOFF** A buyer's first impression will be a good one. "Tile makes a house look worth something," says Adam Berlin, a contractor in Littleton, Colo. and host of DIY network's *Sweat Equity*.

**WHAT SELLS A HOUSE BEST** Anything that looks like stone, says Berlin. "Natural stone is timeless—everybody wanted it 2,000 years ago in Rome, everybody wants it now." It's also pricey (\$4 and up per square foot); porcelain is a durable, cheaper alternative (\$2.50 and up) that can look similar.

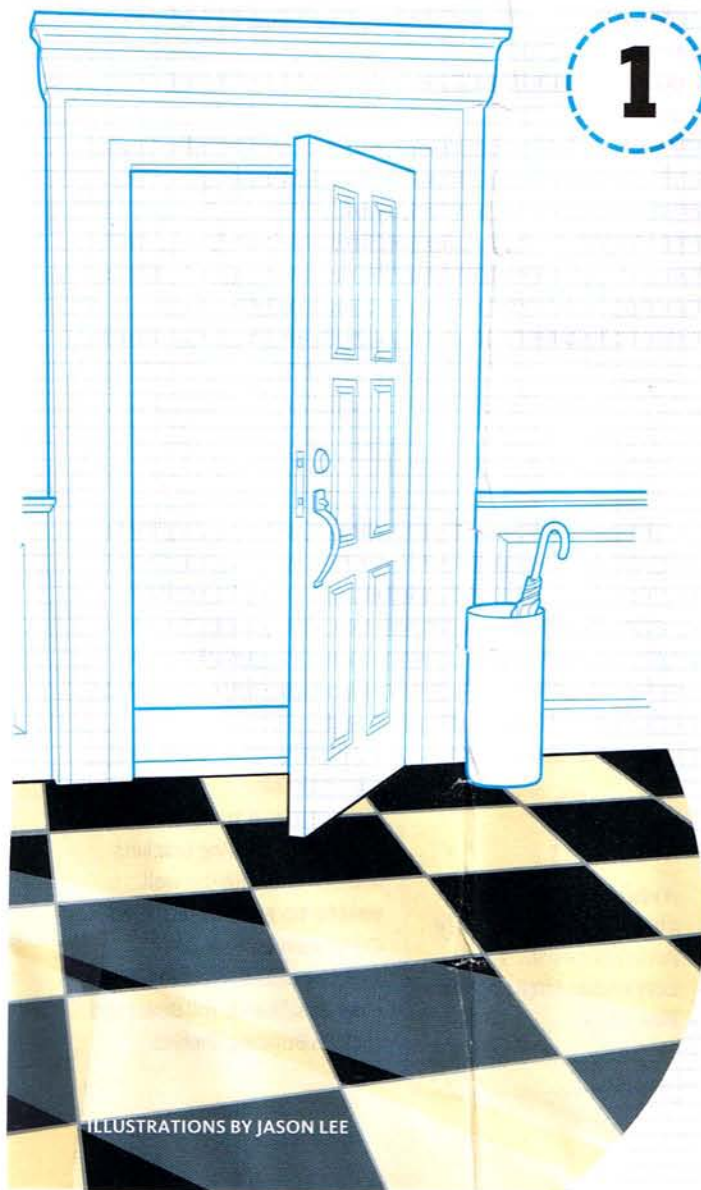
**YOU NEED** Tiles, spacers, adhesive, notched trowel, grout, sealer and plywood

**THE BASIC JOB** You must pull up the old flooring and install a layer of plywood. Then glue, grout and seal. The hardest part is cutting the tile, which you'll likely have to do around borders. Ask the tile store if it provides this service for free.

**WHERE TO FIND DIRECTIONS** Go to [doityourself.com/miscellaneous/floor](http://doityourself.com/miscellaneous/floor).

**Tip:** Go for six-inch tiles or bigger. The less grouting there is, the easier cleanup will be.

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## THE KITCHEN

**Paint the Cabinets**

"You'll make or break your sale in the kitchen," says author Davis. "It's the first room people head to when they look at a home, and if it doesn't meet their expectations, forget it."

**DIY COST:** \$135 for tools and paint supplies; \$5 and up per knob

**WHAT YOU'D PAY A PRO:** \$1,200, refacing; \$5,000, replacing

**SKILL LEVEL:**  **TIME:** 2 days

**DO THIS IF...** You're selling soon. You won't recoup the cost of fully replacing shabby cabinets with new ones (that's \$5,000 and up). Refacing them is harder and costly too (\$1,000-plus). A coat of paint, on the other hand, can cheaply do a lot to spiff up what you have, even if it's a bit of a cosmetic fix. "Over the long run, it'll chip and wear," cautions contractor Berlin. But hey, that's someone else's problem.

**PAYOFF** "If buyers like your kitchen, they will go through the rest of the home," says Davis.

**WHAT SELLS A HOUSE BEST** Neutral colors like white or brown, suggests Berlin

**YOU NEED** Drill, bits, tarp, sandpaper, primer, oil-based or latex acrylic paint or stain, paintbrushes (avoid rollers because they can add unwanted texture) and knobs

**THE BASIC JOB** On the first day, you'll remove the cabinets, sand them and apply primer. Wake up the next morning and paint or stain. Add fresh hardware to make them look brand new.

**WHERE TO FIND DIRECTIONS** [doityourself.com/stry/paintcabinets](http://doityourself.com/stry/paintcabinets)



## THE FAMILY ROOM

**Build Bookshelves**

"Since about 20 years ago, when builders started putting in family rooms off kitchens, these spaces have really come up in importance," says Davis.

**DIY COST:** \$500 for two six-foot-by-eight-foot oak shelves; \$200 for tools

**WHAT YOU'D PAY A PRO:** \$1,200

**SKILL LEVEL:**  fixed  adjustable

**TIME:** ½ day, fixed; 1½ days, adjustable

**DO THIS IF...** You have an odd nook that otherwise would seem like wasted space—say, under the stairwell or alongside the fireplace—or you need to add dimension and character to a room that lacks any architectural detailing.

**PAYOFF** "You'll give the buyer an idea of how the space can be used," says realtor Camp.

**WHAT SELLS A HOUSE BEST** Hardwoods like oak (\$10 a linear foot) and mahogany (\$12) are sturdier and more appealing to buyers

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than cheaper fiberboard and particleboard (both \$15 per eight-foot piece). Fixed shelves are beloved by realtors and designers for their clean look. Read: no unsightly brackets. But there's also a case for adjustable. "Some people will have vases, others books," says New York City interior designer Chris Coleman. "This gives the buyer some flexibility." As for color, aim for innocuous—natural woods or woods painted off-white or beige are best.

**YOU NEED** Precut wood, drill, bit, brackets and rails or shelf clips and a handsaw

**THE BASIC JOB** You'll spend the most time screwing brackets and uprights into the wall.

**WHERE TO FIND DIRECTIONS** Go to [acehardware.com](http://acehardware.com) /infohome and select Project How-To's; then scroll down and click on Building Shelves.

**Tip:**

Avoid installing shelves if your family room is small. They can make tiny rooms too cozy.



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## THE DINING ROOM

### Replace the Overhead Fixture

"People who do a lot of entertaining will pay attention to this room," says Jay Fellhauer, a ReMax agent in Grand Junction, Colo.

**DIY COST:** \$39 to \$300 for the lamp; \$40 for tools

**WHAT YOU'D PAY A PRO:** \$700

**SKILL LEVEL:** 

**TIME:** 4 hours

**DO THIS IF...** You haven't replaced the lighting in years, and it's not meant to look antique. Brass should definitely go, says Berlin, since "that springs cheap."

**PAYOFF** "Good lighting is critical, especially in the dining area," says realtor Camp. "The right chandelier sets the tone and makes a dramatic impact on the buyer."

**WHAT SELLS A HOUSE BEST** Think universal appeal. In other words, don't go all Liberace if your house is country-style. Also, beware of an oversize or undersize fixture, which can make the room seem out of proportion. Use your dining table as a judge: The chandelier's diameter should be 12 inches less than the table's width.

**YOU NEED** Chandelier (stick to models that are less than 30 pounds—heavier ones require a fan brace to support, "and you're better off hiring a pro to install that," says carpenter Crowe), metal outlet box, wire nuts, electrical tester, electrical tape, safety goggles, bulbs and wire cutter

**THE BASIC JOB** First you must shut off the circuit breaker. In most homes you'll be able to hang a lightweight chandelier from an existing electrical box (more likely if it's metal). Expose the wires and unscrew the wire nuts to remove the previous fixture; then match up the wires from the lamp with the wires in the box.

**WHERE TO FIND DIRECTIONS** Go to [lowes.com](http://lowes.com) and select How-To Projects from the Project Center pulldown menu, then Lighting and Electric from the menu at left.

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## THE MASTER BATH

### Add Glass Shower Doors

"If you're going to put money into a home, you should start in the rooms with running water," advises Berlin.

**DIY COST:** \$300 to \$800 for the glass-door kit; \$70 for tools

**WHAT YOU'D PAY A PRO:** \$1,150

**SKILL LEVEL:**  **TIME:** 4 hours

**DO THIS IF...** The room isn't particularly spacious. "A curtain divides it and makes it seem smaller," says Camp.

**PAYOFF** Because the eye doesn't stop at the curtain, "glass doors give the appearance of more open space," Camp adds.

**WHAT SELLS A HOUSE BEST** Frameless doors, which have a clean, spa-like look. Thing is, these are hell to install on bathroom walls that aren't quite flush. Framed doors, while less ideal, are still an improvement on a curtain. If you plan to live in the house while you're trying to sell, you might consider frosted glass, "especially if your neighborhood has hard water," says Crowe. "Clear glass will show the soap scum."

**YOU NEED** Caulk gun, silicone adhesive (waterproof caulk), file, hacksaw, drill, bit, punch, miter box and anchors

**THE BASIC JOB** You'll attach the bottom track with adhesive, then drill in the bottom and side tracks. After you install the door and panels, you'll put in the top tracks; finish by sealing the tracks with waterproof caulk.

**WHERE TO FIND DIRECTIONS** Read the paperwork that comes with the door kit—every model is different. \$

**Tip:**

*Pick out doors in person, visiting the showroom with dimensions in hand. Do you really want to mail back a glass door ordered online?*