

# 6 Top Home Reno Projects

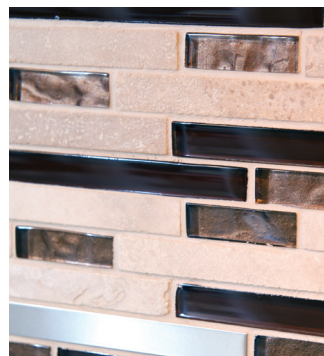
BY ROBIN ROENKER • PHOTOS BY JOE IMEL

*Maximize the value in your home—add new kitchens and baths, windows and doors, and siding—but remember, the details matter*

When Shannon and David Spicer purchased their mid-1960s two-story home in Paducah last August, it needed updating. Lots of updating. “It still had all the original everything,” says Shannon. “The carpet, when we pulled it up, was dated 1965 on the backing. There was even a rotary phone still on the wall.”

Still, the Spicers saw potential—the house had “good bones,” in the words of their realtor, John





## TAKEAWAYS

■ In the kitchen, two walls were removed to make room for an island, and recessed and pendant lights were added.

■ Shannon Spicer and husband David relax at the kitchen island. The granite top was large enough to provide extra pieces for the dining-room bar and the half bath shown at top.

■ The master bath's walk-in shower has built-in recessed nooks for soap and shampoo; painted maple cabinets match those in the kitchen.

■ The green freestanding computer desk/bookshelf/office storage space only looks built-in.

■ The kitchen tile backsplash combines glass, stainless, and stone.

Shadle, owner and principal broker of Purchase Realty in Paducah.

For five months the couple and their kids, Austin, 19, and Abby, 15, worked to gut and completely remodel their home. They removed walls to allow for an open-flow concept kitchen, dining room, and great room. And with Shannon's and David's vision and a lot of TLC—including natural stained hickory floors, custom-built ivory cabinets, new lighting, granite countertops with dine-in peninsula, new dual vanities, and stand-alone glass showers in place of aging tubs—they brought their dated kitchen and bathrooms into the 21st century.

Their instinct to focus much of their budget on their kitchen and baths was savvy.

Updating a home's kitchen and baths with modern appliances and amenities is a great way to add instant value to your home, say both realtors and remodelers across the state.

"Kitchen and bath updates are what potential buyers are looking for," says realtor Pam Featherstone of Semonin Realtors in Elizabethtown. "They don't want to buy a home and have to come in and redo all those things themselves."

But kitchens and baths aren't the only changes



■ A cook's dream: a counter-depth French-door fridge, a gas cooktop and oven, and pantry-style slide-out spice racks on each side of the oven.

■ Son Austin Spicer, 19, relaxes in his bedroom. Closet Maid closet organizers were installed in all bedroom closets.



that promise a large return to add value to your home. Each year, *Remodeling Magazine*, in partnership with *Realtor Magazine* and the National Association of Realtors, issues its annual Cost vs. Value Report ([www.costvsvalue.com](http://www.costvsvalue.com)), which surveys realtors and home appraisers nationally to outline home remodeling projects with the largest return on the dollar.

Here, we share just a few of the top home remodeling projects for adding value to your home, with current trends and issues to consider before you invest in an upgrade.

### Kitchens and Baths

“Probably the upgrade that adds more value than anything else is the kitchen and bath,” says Marshall Todd of Marshall Todd Builders near Somerset, who is president of the Lake Cumberland Homebuilders Association and vice president/treasurer of the Homebuilders Association of Kentucky.

According to the 2014 Cost vs. Value Report, mid-range kitchen remodels—with an average cost of \$18,856 nationally—averaged an 82.7 percent return on investment in value added to the home, one of the highest returns on the list.

To add immediate value in your kitchen, for start-

ers, make sure your appliances match, says Ron Hughes, principal broker with RE/MAX Realty Group in Paducah and president of the Kentucky Association of Realtors. “Mismatched appliances can give potential buyers the perception that you haven’t taken care of your house,” he says.

For a fresh, updated look, consider opting for painted, rather than stained, wood cabinets. Builder/remodeler Marshall Todd and remodeler Rob Hundley, executive vice president and partner with Back Construction Inc. in Lexington, say they are seeing a growing trend toward off-white or other color cabinetry in place of natural wood. “Oftentimes that might be paired with a contrasting, stained wood cabinet for the island,” Hundley says.

In bathrooms, replacing outdated harvest gold, blue, or green tubs and toilets with modern ones in white or off-white will go a long way toward improving how buyers perceive the house, Hughes says. Bath liner products, like those sold by America’s Window, offer an easy means of replacing outdated tub and tiles with an acrylic overlay, typically a one or two day install, says John Prescott, sales manager at America’s Window in Lexington and Charlestown, Indiana.

Gold is out for fixtures and hardware. Opt for

silver—either polished chrome or nickel—or antique bronze instead, says Hundley.

When updating baths, the trend is toward “universal design,” or making the bathroom functional for all levels of mobility, Hundley says. With a goal of aging in place, homeowners are being proactive about replacing shower/tub combinations with easier-to-enter stand-alone, glass-door showers that are wheelchair-accessible. “People are saying, let’s go ahead and add some nicely done grab bars. Let’s make sure that the sink is wheelchair-accessible and that the toilet is placed so that it is easy to access and utilize,” Hundley says.

Small details matter. Fancy, hand-held showerheads, full-body sprays, and rain heads in showers are in demand. Travertine is still a very popular tile option in bathrooms, while white subway tiles are the most requested kitchen backsplash, says Todd. When

selecting granite for kitchen and bath countertops, be sure to opt for neutral tones that would appeal to any future buyer, advises Hundley.

Above all, be aware of the value of your home so as not to overspend on your kitchen and bath remodels. The goal is to be frugal with your choices and look for real value. “If you have a 1,500-square-foot home in a medium-range neighborhood and you spend on the inside like you’re building a \$300,000 home, you will not recoup that investment back,” says Hughes.

## Windows

Spending around \$10,000, on average, to upgrade the windows of your home with vinyl replacement windows can net an approximate 78 percent return on your investment in added value to your home, according to the latest Cost vs. Value Report. The high return speaks to the win-win nature of replacement

■ The family room drops down a step from the kitchen, giving it an 8” higher ceiling. Shannon painted the recessed window wall green to match other accents in the house.





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windows—both in terms of adding curb appeal to your home, as well as adding a higher level of energy efficiency.

“In the last five to six years, we’ve seen a big change in the fact that homeowners are looking for energy efficiency as their top priority in replacement windows,” says Prescott. “We’ve seen a huge rise in the move toward triple-pane windows, which have a much lower U-factor (a measure of the rate of heat transfer through the window).”

“We see more and more customers choosing quality in their replacement windows. And quality never disappoints,” says Frank Niklas, division manager

windows are the thinnest part of your walls. They need to be insulated.”

While double-hung windows are by far the most common, upgrading to a bay or bow window during major renovation projects “adds a tremendous wow factor to a room,” says Niklas. “It really changes both the feel and scope of the room.”

### Entry Doors

With a projected 96 percent return on investment, replacing your home’s entry doors with steel energy-efficient replacement doors offers the single highest return of any home upgrade, according to the 2014 Cost vs. Value Report’s national estimates.

Most homeowners opt for simple steel doors for less-visible side or garage entry doors. For the home’s front entry door, wood or fiberglass options with a little more pizzazz are popular, according to Laurie Scarborough and Ann Gregory, sisters and co-owners of Door Store and Windows in Louisville.

“Some owners are going with a simpler door design, with a bold pop of color, like bright green, while others prefer the detailing of intricate glass designs,” says Gregory. “We try to work with the homeowner to choose a door that’s right for the house and the person’s lifestyle.”

“Doors are one of the largest openings in your home,” says Niklas of Champion, which also sells entry

doors. “Replacing a cracked, drafty wood door with a new insulated door system can have a significant impact on your home’s energy efficiency.”

### Garage Doors

Similarly, upgrading from old, wooden garage doors to modern, insulated metal garage doors can have an immediate impact on the comfort and energy efficiency of your home—a change that will be particularly noticeable if you have rooms situated above the garage, says Shanda Lockaby, owner of Overhead Door Company of Corbin, a Cumberland Valley Electric member.

The Cost vs. Value Report estimates an average of 83.7 percent return on investment, nationally, for the



■ The Spicers removed a shared wall in order to move the laundry room, from an adjoining half bath, into this mud room. They added a ceiling fan/light to the previously unlit space. How to update the house’s exterior is still in the discussion stage, but window and door replacements are on the list.

with Champion Windows in Lexington and London.

Prescott encourages homeowners to research the ENERGY STAR Web site ([www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)) when evaluating purchasing replacement windows, including the U-factor and solar heat coefficient of the glass, and the window’s condensation resistance, visible light transmittance, and air leakage rate.

Also check for insulation. “Ask to see a corner cut-away of the window, to ensure that it has insulation inside the frames and sashes,” Prescott says. “The

cost of replacement garage doors.

When shopping for replacement doors, be sure to consider the model's R-value, a measure of its insulation level. Residential doors range from an R-value of 7 to 16, Lockaby says.

As for style, simulated distressed wood finishes are most popular right now, especially those with a carriage house look, which can be accentuated with an array of iron hinges and handles for a personalized look. Many customers opt to upgrade to models that can be opened and closed even away from home via smartphone apps.

"Garage doors take up a lot of real estate on the front of most homes. That's why replacing dated doors with something more attractive really increases your curb appeal," Lockaby says.

## Siding

Homeowners who invest an average of around \$11,000 to replace their home's vinyl siding can expect to net a return of 78.2 percent on their investment, according to the 2014 Cost v. Value Report.

When shopping for siding, look for products that are insulated. "There is a huge difference between insulated and noninsulated products, in terms of

their energy efficiency," advises Prescott of America's Window, which sells siding products. Siding that is made from 100 percent virgin vinyl, rather than recycled vinyl, provides better strength. Ask if the product has a fading warranty. Finally, look for siding boards that are longer and larger in size, to reduce the number of visible seams—thereby improving the home's overall curb appeal, he says.

Don't be afraid to branch out. Many homeowners today are pairing two color tones of siding, or two styles of siding—such as simulated cedar shake along with traditional siding—in order to accentuate their home's architectural detailing, and to differentiate the first and second stories, says Champion's Niklas.

## Decks

When it comes to building or remodeling decks, synthetic composite materials like Trex or TimberTech are increasingly popular with homeowners, despite costing as much as three times more than traditional wood decks.

That's because buyers are increasingly after products that promise year after year of high performance and quality appearance without the worry of routine maintenance, says Marshall Todd.

"Many people are going away from treated wood, because with treated wood you're always going to have repair. The boards are eventually going to twist or turn, or discolor," Todd says.

The appeal of composite materials is their promise of a worry-free deck experience. "That is the going trend, to upgrade with the composite flooring and rails," says Todd, "because with composite, it's going to look as good in 10 years as it does the day we install it."

Other trends in decks: moving away from the standard, outdated rectangular shape in favor of octagonal or custom-designed spaces that are roomy enough to accommodate outdoor kitchens and fire pits.

"People are wanting to spend more time outdoors, so we're seeing all kinds of custom deck designs that incorporate kitchens and outdoor living spaces," Todd says. "Nothing is standard anymore when it comes to decks." **KL**

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