



# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

OPEN THE DOOR AND LET THE REMODEL BEGIN!

• By Dale Gardon

**W**ith many of us hesitant to sell our homes because of the depressed real estate market, we should turn our focus to adding value to our residences through minor or major improvements. These undoubtedly can add great long-term value to your home and help distinguish it in the marketplace when the market for real estate returns. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that this is the time to take advantage of the current beneficial cost of construction, which can afford greater livability to your home, indoors or out.

Many of us live in homes that are now ten to twenty years old, some perhaps older, and frankly, we become comfortable just sitting around and not paying attention to what we really don't see about our homes' quality and character. They may be dated or worn and generally need sprucing up. This is often painfully obvious to our guests, but not to us. What you need to evaluate your home's aesthetic needs is an objective critique from professional resources like architects, interior designers, or qualified homebuilders and remodelers. I'm sure that, if you are like most people, you have recently considered a few ideas on how to refresh the appearance of your home's interior or exterior.

Whoever you are and wherever you live, it may not seem obvious at first, but **now** is the perfect opportunity for those ideas. There has been no better time in the past ten years to consider a makeover, regardless of how minor or major. Homeowners who are reasonably financially secure enough to invest in their homes are the real winners and can now reap the benefits of market conditions

that have caused a lot of stress in the residential contracting industry. Factors such as rising unemployment, falling home values, and diminished financial portfolios have certainly put the pinch on the demand for new home construction, and therefore the squeeze is on residential contractors who find their crews

now idle, waiting for the calls. That spells savings for those who can afford to remodel **now**, since most contractors are able to bid projects significantly lower than they did just a year or two ago. The costs of building products are coming down, labor prices are falling, along with profit margins, and the savings are coming to you—and, in most cases, to the tune of 20 percent or more compared with a year ago. In what other area is your money earning you 20 percent?

Out of everything that you could possibly do inside your home, where are the real value returns for your efforts and expense? Historically, the kitchen has been considered the heart of the home and still marks one of the best locations to get the most bang for the buck. It may be just a cabinet makeover; or it can be a complete surgery to enhance the appliance package, an opening of the room up to other adjacent spaces, and a complete cabinet upgrade.



→ This before-and-after example from Sesshu Design Associates demonstrates the benefits of a complete cabinet and counter top redo, creating a warmth and openness to the kitchen that has a dramatic effect on the perception of the space.



• This small 100-square-foot pool-bath addition by Saleito Custom Homes is the perfect complement to the outdoor entertaining area and demonstrates the power of good design and material selection in small spaces.

We do spend a lot of time in the living and family room areas of the home. Unique ways to enhance those areas can involve major changes to the interior finish, material, and colors, as well as a reconsideration of the flow and furniture arrangements and potential incorporation of adjacent under-utilized spaces.

Bathrooms are often right behind kitchens as the focus for remodeling dollars. Opening up the visual connectivity or flow of a home can have a dramatic impact and does not have to drain the already stressed bank account. Don't look past the exterior living spaces, either. Adding or enhancing the outdoor living areas to visually expand the perception of your home's indoor livable square

home and community for many years and find it too hard to give up, even to the point of considering it irreplaceable. Therefore, a complete renovation and financial reinvestment may make the most sense for them. Many homes can be significantly dated in the exterior appearance, yet the interiors may be in great condition. Consider for a moment the idea of completely transforming the exterior façade without requiring extensive structural retrofitting. A home can be transformed from a nondescript mid-1980s monolithic styling to a timeless contemporary character with the added richness of new color and texture.

This example of significant or expansive renovation may in fact be the wave of the near future as opposed to newly constructed homes. This is an opportune moment for making a home purchase and remodeling the residence, as existing homes available in a distressed sale condition will easily represent the greater value on a cost-per-square-foot basis. This is as compared with new homes for several years to come until the bulk of that inventory has scaled back

back to reasonable levels. Again, what this means to you is that if you are interested in transitioning from your current residential property, you should seek out these opportunities now. Again, to protect yourself from a bad investment, you should seek the advice of the professional resources previously cited. This type of guidance could be the smartest money spent if you choose to engage professionals for design concepts prior to your purchase. You will get the most creative ideas of how to differently utilize space indoors or out. These ideas will more than pay you back in the long run. Additionally, they can identify the real pitfalls that may lie ahead in what could be the proverbial money pit. There is usually much more than meets the eye to a remodel—many things can lurk below the surface, and the untrained observer won't necessarily notice them. Major issues

such as structural defects, electrical hazards, and plumbing disasters all need to be evaluated thoroughly before you embark down the remodel trail.

You might also be pleasantly surprised at how much good advice you can get for a minimal investment



➔ This mid-1980s nondescript triplex townhome building was redesigned by Dale Gordon Design with a proposed exterior makeover consisting of exterior material modifications and some minor architectural feature enhancements to achieve a dramatic visual transformation.

➔ Brooks-Henry Interior Design Studio accomplished a stunning transformation of the living area of this home by adding a textural richness to the interior material palette.



feet can be another great strategy. Consider upgrading the overgrown or sparse landscape and updating the adjacent exterior terrace materials that may have cracked or faded over time.

And does size really matter? In the case of additions, it may not, since a 100-square-foot pool-bath addition that is exquisitely detailed may be the perfect element to complete your existing lifestyle and provide the added convenience that your home needs.

It is not inconceivable to consider a makeover that can entail more than 50 percent and maybe up to 100 percent of the area of a home. This may require moving out temporarily, but it is worth all the interim disruption of living in the home just to return, upon its completion, to the refreshed home and site. The reality is that many people find that they have enjoyed their

of a professional's time. Most are willing to have an initial consultation without cost to you. Additionally, you can expect that they will freely share not only experiences similar to yours but also initial ideas about how to maximize the value of the home or potential purchase. If you're thinking, *I can't afford an architect, interior designer, etc.*, you also must consider the cost of not hiring one.

If you believe, as I do, that there's no place quite like home, this is a good time, economically speaking, to put that belief into practice. This type of spiritual and financial reward of accomplishing a remodel, renovation, or addition benefits the home's long-term value as well as the enhanced quality and livability. What more could you ask for in a time that has placed so much unwanted stress on us all? ☺

#### IDEA CHECKLIST

Makeover ideas can start with simple elements that can provide dramatic results. Consider the impact of modifying just one of the following:

- + interior wall colors
- + cabinets
- + countertops
- + floor materials
- + showers and bathtubs
- + appliances
- + closets
- + lighting
- + exterior materials or color
- + landscaping
- + outdoor kitchen/barbecue areas
- + terraces