

Thrifty Solutions for an Outdated Kitchen

In the eight years that we've operated our design and building business, WMS Construction in Marin County, Calif., my husband, Bill Shideler, and I have collaborated on a number of kitchen remodels for other people. A few years ago, we moved into an outdated ranch home and decided to use that collective experience to expand and update our own kitchen.

The challenge we faced involved a key element in limited supply: money. We knew that we'd be doing a substantial amount of the work ourselves or supervising subcontractors called in for selected jobs. But our budget couldn't exceed \$40,000—a bargain here in California. Here are some of the lessons we learned that sellers can use in turning that old, tired kitchen into a showplace buyers will clamor to call their own.

1. Add space and light by removing a wall. Instead of shelling out thousands of dollars to build additional floor space for our cramped kitchen, we took a simpler, less invasive approach. We replaced the partition walls with a single supporting beam and extended the exterior wall to enclose an underused 8-by-9 foot deck. For more light we added a large skylight and enlarged the garden window.

2. Don't move the plumbing. Although it was tempting to move the sink from the back wall to the new island, it would have cost us an additional \$1,200. Relocating the stove was possible, but moving the gas and electricity would have run at least \$500 plus the cost of a new stove to work with the island. We did relocate the fridge to make room for the island, which we use for both food prep and casual dining. However, keeping most of the appliances in the same place saved us an estimated \$2,000.

3. Unclutter the countertops with special hardware. Limited counter space doesn't have to mean limited workspace. Mounting a stand mixer and a food processor on heavy-duty appliance lifts from Rev-A-Shelf kept them out of the way but instantly accessible. The brackets are strong enough to support an appliance in use, so you can lift it up to create an instant workstation. The lifts average about \$90 each.

4. Buy ready-to-assemble cabinets. We chose white melamine boxes for most of the kitchen and cherry for the hutch, all from CabParts. The drawer boxes were ordered from Drawer Box Specialties. Ordering parts by mail and installing them yourself requires careful planning and precise measurements, but the payoff is major savings (for us, about \$15,000).

5. Consider a variety of countertop materials. We wanted granite for its look and durability, but our budget kept us from using it on the island as well as the countertop. By shopping around, we found a 3/4 inch-thick granite slab that cost 30 percent less than a 1 1/4 inch version. The granite's true thickness is visible round the undermount sink, but a laminated edge makes it look like a thicker slab and hides the plywood backing, which adds structural support to the countertop. A maple butcher-block top on the island costs about \$450.

By Sarah Shideler

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