

8 NO-COST/LOW-COST WAYS TO TWEAK IT

MOVE IT. Simply rearranging the furniture can reenergize a room. Add and remove furniture, lamps, rugs, and accessories from other parts of the house to create a whole new look. Mirrors are particularly useful when it comes to updating a room. Try one out in different rooms to see where it fits best. Even just moving a mirror to a different wall can create a more welcoming feel.

PLANT IT. Houseplants are a generally undervalued design component that can add texture, warmth, and color to any room. Just drop plants in their store containers into decorative planters. Small plants can be moved easily and regrouped to change a room's look, while larger ones make a statement on their own. Group plants of differing heights, fullness, and color for the most dramatic effect. Jettison the scraggly specimens, Westman says. "It's important to have plants that are well maintained and in tip-top condition."

PAINT IT. Paint is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to make a substantial change. Use dramatic colors in powder rooms and dining rooms, and more neutral colors in living spaces. When selecting colors, "be sure to ask, 'What am I trying to do? How do I want this to feel?'" Birdson says. "And always, always do a test before you paint the whole room."

ORGANIZE IT. "Clutter just happens," Birdsong says. "So neaten up!" She advocates a variety of organizing tools to make a space feel polished while maintaining utility. Hooks and shelves inside the door give people a place to hang coats and keys, while canvas bins or natural baskets help contain magazines and mail. "Just a row of hooks preattached on a board is so easy to install," she says. "And shelves are a great way to neatly display collectibles."

HIDE IT. Have a banged-up wall? It may be easy to camouflage. Paintable wallpaper (available for as little as \$16/roll from Creative Wallcovering) will smooth out an uneven wall or hide minor dents and dings. Adventurous home owners can even try a simple two-step painting process for a more complex finish. Birdsong suggests applying a solid base coat, then a glaze. "These days, it's pretty user-friendly," she says. Caution: Your intent should never be to mislead buyers; be sure to disclose flaws that would affect home value.

REPLACE IT. Cabinet handles, switch plates, and other small pieces of housing hardware can update a home for just a few dollars a piece. Westman suggests scanning each room to see what looks worn or outdated and then replacing it. Inexpensive quick-connected faucets can make upgrading the look of your bathroom a snap. Just be sure to measure before you go to the hardware store. Some sinks are drilled for an eight-inch spread. Others require just four inches. "And don't forget the toilet seat," adds Westman. "Fresh towels and a new toilet seat go a long way toward making a bathroom feel clean and new."

LIGHT IT. Lighting can have a major impact on a home's look and feel. Whether a room seems dark or too bright and harsh, try "layering" the lighting by adding accent pendants and lamps. Make sure they have independent controls, so that you can turn them on and off at will. "Light is such a mood setter," Westman says. "You can create a cozy feel just by turning down the lights." Add dimmers in the dining room, bathrooms, kitchen, and even the hallways for less than \$4 each. Then adjust the lighting to create the mood you want.

CLEAN IT. Turn a critical eye to the flooring to make sure it's up to snuff. Scrub grout and seal natural stone. Rub out scratches and nicks on wood floors with scratch cover. "Get down on your hands and knees and detail the floors," Birdsong says. "It takes a little elbow grease, but the results are well worth it." Vinyl flooring is a bit harder to spruce up but usually can be replaced easily and inexpensively.

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