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Room to Improve

By STEPHEN MILIOTI

Q. How do I update my kitchen without spending the money to gut and remodel it?

A. There are features all over the kitchen that can be updated inexpensively.

Outdated lighting is a good place to start. Doyle McCullar, a San Francisco designer, suggests replacing fixed ceiling lights with modern movable track fixtures, which are more versatile. One good source is Bellacor (at bellacor.com), which carries a huge stock of lighting fixtures online, like the adjustable Flatback Three-Light Track Kit (\$82).

Next, consider the cabinets. If refinishing them is out of the question, many designers recommend at least replacing the hardware.

If your cabinets are old, chances are you have small, ornate handles, and you might want something larger. "Today, the style runs more toward oversize, sleek features," said Simon Temprell, an interior designer based near Washington. But "don't think that you can't install big fixtures in place of a small one," he said, noting that you can drill an extra hole to accommodate a new fixture.

Mr. Temprell recommended myknobs.com, a Web site with a large selection of fixtures that "are better than the standard stuff you'd get at a big-box store, but quite a bit less expensive than you'd pay at designer stores."

European-style stainless-steel pull handles, for example, are available in a range of sizes, from 5 1/4 inches (about \$4 each) to 40 inches long (about \$25 each).

The site carries traditional styles, too. But no matter how traditional your kitchen is, Mr. Temprell said, "you should banish the brass fixtures" because they look dated.

Another piece of hardware that's easy to update is the faucet. Mr. Temprell recommends faucet.com as a source for hundreds of faucets in various styles.

Two good choices are the Kohler Forte single-handle faucet in vibrant stainless steel (\$360), above, and the less expensive but equally stylish Forte faucet in chrome (\$110).

After you've replaced the hardware, look at your seating area. Christopher J. Grubb, president of Arch-Interiors Design Group in Beverly Hills, Calif., recommends reupholstering the cushions on your chairs or bar stools, or better yet, buying new seating.

Home Decorators Collection (www.homedecorators.com) has a large supply of affordable chairs and stools,

like the aluminum Sandra Swivel bar stool (\$169) and matching dining chair (\$159).

Changing a backsplash can be costly, because you may need to hire professionals, but “you can get really creative with this one,” Mr. McCullar said.

He suggests covering the backsplash in mirrored glass (you can have a piece cut at a hardware store) so it will reflect light. Another approach is to use colorful mosaic tiles, an option that “shows your personality better than plain, boring old tile.”

The fastest and least costly way to update your kitchen is by removing clutter. “Do you really need the canister set, breadbox and all of the appliances out on the counters?” Mr. Grubb asked. “Put things away and leave out a bowl of fruit for color, a tray of oils and other beautiful bottles you cook with or use. One chic spice set and a plant is always a great way to add life to a kitchen.”

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