



TRANSFORM YOUR HOUSE!

Dramatically & Cost-Effectively Update & Upgrade ... without Major Remodeling

Special Report

Home Remodeling Success Secrets:

Essential Tips Before You Buy, Sell, or Remodel a Home

** Learn the 3 Critical Steps for Success **

by
Laura Martindale

<http://www.TransformYourHouse.com>

This is a free report!
**You are welcome to forward it to
a friend, give it away, or offer it as
a bonus on your own web site
or to your own subscribers.**

**You may NOT sell it or change it in
any way without proper written
consent from the author. This report is
copyright protected.**

<http://TransformYourHouse.com>

Succeed in a Challenging Housing Market: Essential Tips Before You Buy, Sell, or Remodel a Home
Copyright © 2009 by Laura Martindale

All rights reserved.

Reproduction or translation of any of this work beyond that permitted by Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act without the permission of the copyright owner is unlawful. Requests for permission or further information should be addressed to the author at info@transformyourhouse.com.

Disclaimer: This document is published for informational purposes only. It reflects the author's opinions, and should not be construed as personal advice to fit anyone's individual situation or circumstances. Use and/or reliance on this report is strictly at the reader's own risk. The author is not a REALTOR or licensed contractor. The reader should consider seeking the advice of licensed professionals before undertaking any home improvement project. The author shall not be liable for incidental, indirect, special or consequential damages or for home improvement projects that do not meet the homeowner's satisfaction.

“Champagne living...on a beer budget.”

How often have you heard variations of that theme? We all want to maximize the value and utility of our expenditures, whether it is for cars, TV's, vacations, restaurants, or our kids' education. And it's no different with our homes. In fact, because of the huge financial commitment, I'd say that it's more important to seek value in your home purchase and home improvement projects than for anything else—especially given today's challenging housing market.

Perhaps you are considering buying a home that needs a little TLC. Or maybe you are considering selling your existing home. Whether your target date is a few weeks or a few years away, you may be wondering how putting some money into the house now will pay off later. But even if you simply want to improve your home for your own enjoyment without any plan to sell, resale value should always be a consideration in your planning.



Hi, I'm Laura. If you are a current or prospective homeowner who wants to do some updating or upgrading, welcome to my world. I started out 16 years ago with a simple house and a few ideas for making it a little nicer. After observing the residential housing market and performing dozens of projects on several homes over the course of those 16 years, I have arrived at two somewhat startling observations:

- 1. Sellers are often unsure how to improve the image of their homes**—resulting in lower sales prices and more time on the market.
- 2. Buyers often lack the vision for what a prospective home might become with a modest investment in upgrades**—leading them to pass on a house that might have been ideal for them.

In a challenging housing market like we have now, you can't just throw money at any old house and expect to make a killing. Many people made a lot of money during the amazing bull run in housing and came to think of themselves as something of a real estate genius, when in fact almost anyone with some business savvy and willingness to take a risk could do well.

But today, things aren't so easy. In fact, they are downright scary. Foreclosures are epidemic. Many people who tried to get in on the act late and over-leveraged ended up going bankrupt...or worse. More than ever, you have to make smart decisions...about what you buy, where it's located, how much mortgage you can handle, which remodeling projects to invest in, how to stage the home, whether to use a Realtor, and so forth....

There are **3 Critical Steps** you must know to succeed in such a climate. You need to 1. Buy smarter, 2. remodel more cost-effectively, and 3. Stage & strategize to sell quickly & profitably. Let me elaborate.

1. Buy smarter

You must find the right house at the lowest possible price. Be patient. Always think ahead to eventual resale. You can't simply buy any property that seems like a "good buy." Location is more important than ever. You can find statistics on home prices in a given area, but those are the averages. There are always certain areas that better maintain their value...and hold up the mean and median prices. And then there are the lesser desirable areas that under-perform the averages—those you must avoid.

Also, it's true that many families often prefer to live in a planned community, like a planned unit development (PUD). But be careful. Many such developments are now saddled with numerous foreclosures and many others simply languishing unsold. PUD-type houses are pretty much generic and sale is mostly driven by price, which is a dicey proposition in a soft

housing market. On the other hand, if you own a house that is unique or special in some way so as to fit the particular preferences of only a handful of niche buyers, they will pay more for it in just about any market conditions—although you might have to wait awhile for the right buyer.

All things considered, I prefer to make a house somewhat unique and special. In fact, my passion is to find an architecturally appealing house with “good bones,” as they say, and try to bring out its innate character. In a soft market, you can get a great buy on such a house, and with some cost-effective remodeling, you likely will find that eager buyer looking for your final *turnkey* product rather than a *fixer-upper*.

And finally, you must be willing to walk away from the deal if you can’t get the right price. To do this you cannot fall in love with the house (or if you do, you can’t let the seller know it). Again, always think ahead to resale.

2. Remodel more cost-effectively

It’s always desirable to get good value for your expenditures, i.e., “bang for the buck,” but today it’s absolutely critical that you spend your remodeling dollars wisely—especially if you are planning to sell soon after the remodel is complete. Importantly, do not overextend yourself financially, because it might take awhile to sell, even with the improvements.

Whether or not you plan to sell your house in the near term, resale value should always be a consideration whenever you are planning out a home improvement project. Also, consider the lifetime cost of an upgrade, especially if you are planning to stay in the house for awhile. As an example, vinyl-covered wood-frame double-pane windows might be desirable for their triple benefit: strength, energy efficiency, and low maintenance.

There is much that can modernize and enhance the look & feel of a home without having to do major remodeling or add square footage. Start with curb appeal by cleaning up and cutting back foliage (or adding plants, if needed). An impressive front door helps a lot. Earth tone exterior paint and bright, neutral tones inside will do wonders. Worn out or multiple floor surfaces should be addressed--there's nothing like stunning, continuous floors when you first walk in. New faucets & fixtures can do wonders for the kitchen & baths. Especially today, homeowners must focus on high-value-added projects that are appropriate to their market and neighborhood. I have a lot more detail at <http://TransformYourHouse.com/blog>.

3. Stage & strategize to sell quickly & profitably

To sell quickly, you'll want to stage your home in a way that makes it the most appealing to your target buyers. As any Realtor will tell you, you only have one chance to make a first impression, and once it starts languishing on the market, people wonder what's wrong with it.

First, *curb appeal* is essential. You can add as much as 10% to the sales price of your home if you knock 'em out with curb appeal. Trim overgrown bushes or install new lawn & landscaping if needed; haul away debris; install pillars and fencing to create separation with the street; and make the front door & entry impressive. Second, you must keep it clean and eliminate the clutter. The more clean, clear, and open you can present your home, the better. Also, try to appeal to the visitor's senses: pleasing smells, ample lighting, soft music, open, clean, uncluttered, and dust-free. Eliminate pet smells, but don't use a lot of overpowering air freshener to do so. A fire in the fireplace is a nice touch.

Have the carpets cleaned if they are still in good shape. Otherwise, replace worn or stained carpeting. Walk around the house. Do you have a lot

of spider webs in the eaves? If so, consider power-washing the outside walls and eaves for spiders and dirt, and repaint the eaves and trim if necessary. You might even want to hire an inspector to do your own pre-purchase inspection so you can identify and correct deficiencies in advance.

When it comes time to sell, many homeowners wonder, "Should I hire a full-service real estate agent?" (Note: I am NOT a licensed agent.) I get asked this question a lot, but there is no simple answer. It depends on the housing market. It depends on what you feel are your capabilities. It depends on whether you have the time to manage the process. It depends on how quickly you need to sell...or whether you have to get it sold at all.

Can you write marketing copy, create and place ads, get in the Multiple Listing Service (MLS), take digital pictures, arrange for a video Virtual Tour, hold open houses, produce professional flyers, negotiate a deal, and handle a comprehensive sales contract? For Sale By Owner (FSBO) services can help, but you have to be willing and able to do a lot of the work.

How about setting the right price? Can you develop your own "comps" or comparable home sales? It is critically important to set the right price or you risk having your home languish on the market and become "stale." And it is tough to be objective about how your home compares to others. Sellers almost always overestimate the value of their homes, or imprudently price it high to "test the market." This practice is a big mistake in today's buyer's market.

I have done house transactions lots of different ways, with and without real estate agents. Be sure to consider all of the pros & cons before making a final decision on whether to list with a full-service agent. I'll have more to say on this subject later.

Time to get started!

Yes, launching a home improvement project can be intimidating. It's hard to know where to begin, what to do yourself and what to hire out. But there is a tremendous opportunity for those who are willing to invest a little thought, time, and effort...plus a little cash. I'm not talking about major remodels, either—far from it. Unlike popular TV shows like A&E's "*Flip This House*" in which houses are often gutted, most of my projects have involved simply updating an outdated home or turning an unfinished home into something that feels more like a finished *estate property*.

A personal note

When I got started on my first home improvement project, I had no previous training or experience at all. But I did have:

- the interest to keep learning—starting with a paint brush
- the willingness to make some mistakes as part of the learning process
- the desire to achieve a nicer home than I could afford

Then, each positive experience helped instill the confidence, expertise, and passion to take my well-earned profit and move on to another home project.

Believe me when I say that *you can do it, too!*

I know—you are probably worried about the expenses. After all, you likely already have a tidy sum tied up in your home. And you might be thinking about that old adage about not putting all your eggs in one basket.

Well, I'm here to tell you that you can do some very effective improvements for very little cost. And if you want to go ahead and open up the wallet a bit more, you can do some amazing things with a modest investment.

Through my various projects, I have accumulated a lot of expertise on many aspects of home remodeling & design. Starting with no prior training, I now can do things like free-hand paint tight lines and create textured looks,

install light fixtures, curtains and blinds, and plant shrubs. And my husband has become adept at diverse projects like installing sinks, faucets, electrical outlets and switches, and laying sod. *If we can do it, so can you!*

An Example Project

As I said previously, my passion is to find architecturally appealing homes and bring out their innate character. Let’s take a look at one such home.

Before



After



Before



After



On the left is a *before* shot of the house when we were doing our initial buyer's inspection during the escrow period. Notice the barren front yard and drab exterior of the house. Although the house had a lot of character, the entry and front yard really didn't reflect it.

During the next several months, we did the following:

- added stone pillars with lanterns to each end of the circular driveway
- installed split-rail fencing
- planted Japanese box hedges to line the driveway
- applied concrete stain to the existing driveway
- added a stone veneer to the chimney
- painted a dark glaze on the bottom-story brick
- applied a copper color treatment to the gutters & downspouts
- sand-blasted & stained the front door and added iron hardware & accoutrements, and added an iron awning above the front door



Here I am putting a glaze on the brick of a farmhouse, which had a slump stone lower level from 1948 and a batten board second story. Previous owners had tried to mask the differences in materials and textures by keeping everything the same white color, but I chose to bring out the character and texture of the brick with a dark glaze.

- created a stone patio leading to the front door
- installed iron window planter boxes
- planted additional lush foliage around the entry

For less than \$12,000 in labor & materials, and a little bit of our own effort, it now has more than just curb appeal—it has the look and feel of an *estate home*, greatly enhancing the value and desirability of the property.

Deciding What to Do

My experience in updating and upgrading has in each case involved homes that my family lived in throughout the process. Now, I'll admit that it's preferable not to live in the house while work is being done, but often finances dictate otherwise.

Also, the overall price levels of an area will impact the amount of money and the types of upgrades you might want to pursue, depending on your goals (e.g., resale or personal enjoyment). For example, you probably wouldn't invest \$50,000 to replace all the floors with $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch hardwood, or \$100,000 for a fancy swimming pool, if comparable homes in your area sell for \$250,000—you simply won't get your money back. But in an area like Santa Barbara, CA (where I live), where the median price is in the vicinity of \$1,200,000, and with homes in the most desirable areas going for a minimum of \$2,000,000, a \$100,000 investment in something like a decorative swimming pool/waterscape as an enhancement to your outdoor living area might be worthwhile.

However, many great ideas can be carried out quite inexpensively. In fact, some of my favorite improvements have involved, for example, an antique chandelier found in the classifieds, or Saltillo tile flooring—which is used in many of the finest Spanish, Southwestern, and Mediterranean homes but can be bought for around a buck per 12-inch tile.

My personal credo is this:

→ ***Seek simplicity, comfort, and value***

You'll hear me reiterate this often. Simple means muted neutral colors, bright, open, airy, spacious, and uncluttered. And always seek high quality at a reasonable price.

Often you can find workable products and materials at Lowes, The Home Depot, OSH, or Sears, but sometimes you must go to a specialty plumbing, lighting, hardware, or ironworks store, and sometimes you'll have to have it custom made.

When it comes to décor, furnishings, and finishing touches, you can find absolute treasures on Craig's List or the newspaper classifieds. Do not underestimate these as key sources! Many of my favorite items, from sofa sets to

dining tables to chandeliers to lawn jockeys to various one-of-a-kind items at bargain prices, I have found in this way. (However, I'll also note that for me, perusing garage sales is usually not time-efficient or productive, but it might be different for you.)

I'm convinced that anyone can dramatically transform their home without huge expenses or major remodeling—anyone, that is, who has the desire and determination to plan ahead, accept competent advice, roll up their sleeves, and make some positive changes!

Si, se puede! Yes, you can do it!

Helpful hint

I like to read various magazines that have a home design focus or subtext, including Architectural Digest, Home & Design, Home by Design, Coastal Living, and Santa Barbara Magazine, to name just a few. When I find pictures of a design or furnishings that I really like, I tear them out and keep them in a file folder for future reference. Sometimes such ideas are fairly easy to copy at a reasonable price!

My goal is to help you—as a homebuyer, homeowner, or home seller. I have transformed several of my own homes, and I’ve certainly made my share of mistakes...but also gained a lot of experience. The many tips I offer through my web site and publications will help you avoid the same mistakes and succeed in transforming your home. As I said before, my credo is to strive for *simplicity* and *comfort*, and moreover, to achieve elegance at a reasonable cost—seeking *value* rather than “being cheap.”

Now, let’s consider *your* house. Newly built homes reflect the modern American family’s kitchen-centric lifestyle by centrally locating a large kitchen area with unobstructed flow into the primary living areas. Formal dining rooms are forsaken in favor of larger informal breakfast nooks and comfortable family rooms as part of an open, flowing floor plan.

Unfortunately for many of us, the older homes in which we still reside were built with a different design viewpoint whereby:

1. kitchens were small, hidden, utilitarian rooms, better kept out of sight
2. isolated, “Ozzie & Harriet” formal dining rooms were used nightly
3. remote, formal living rooms were strictly for Dad’s easy chair and pipe

But don’t despair if you have a house that is saddled with this type of compartmentalized floorplan, because there are things you can do to make it feel better without tearing down interior walls or adding square footage.

Here are some sample pictures of projects I completed on various homes. Each of these is described in detail in my e-book, ***“Transform Your House! How to Dramatically Update & Upgrade (Without Major Remodeling).”***





Remodeling Green

“Green” (a.k.a., environmentally sustainable) construction and remodeling takes advance planning and a little extra effort, but it can be satisfying and even economically sensible, too. Eventually, green techniques won't be such a niche topic.

One important way to limit your environmental impact during remodeling is to limit your environmental impact is to minimize the amount of demolition waste you create, as well as the amount of waste from poor planning of your new materials.

For example, rather than replacement, wood cabinets in the kitchen and vanities in the bathrooms can be cleaned up with lemon oil, or sanded and restained or painted, with only non-toxic materials, then adorned with new hardware to give them a fresh look. Also, when using wood for framing or cabinetry, choose wood that is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, which means it comes from a well managed forest.

Contractors & Subcontractors

Some keys to saving money include acting as your own general contractor and working with the subcontractors directly (although be prepared to handle the associated headaches), and beating the bushes for reasonably-priced, high-quality skilled labor. For example, I learned that our hard-working maintenance gardeners were also competent at simple fencing, plumbing, irrigation, grading, and brickwork.

Ask around through your network of friends and neighbors, or see whom you meet at the local home improvement store (be sure to ask for references). However, I wouldn't suggest doing this on large renovations or new construction—it's just too much for an amateur to handle. But it can work for the relatively simple updating, upgrading and enhancement projects that I focus on.

Beware, however, that if the workers you hire are not licensed, bonded and insured or if they are not legal residents, you might run the risk of getting entangled in legal or liability issues—not to mention ethical questions. If you hire unlicensed workers, be sure to check out the laws in your state. For example, in California, any contractor who is paid more than \$500 for a job technically must be licensed by the state board. Also, unlicensed contractors are not covered by state worker's compensation. The California Contractors State License Board (www.cslb.ca.gov) recommends that homeowners get at least three bids, ask to see their license, and be wary of door-to-door solicitors.

Final Thoughts

A business associate sent me an email the other day with some interesting points. He started by saying, "After teaching real estate development at the MBA level for 7 years, I came away convinced that one of the most valuable

lessons of the class was to treat their personal residence as a *business* project and also to factor into the process the lifestyle implications...."

Okay...then take a business perspective on this. Today's shaky economy and depressed construction & remodeling industries are offering homeowners a real opportunity to make value-added home improvements at prices that are perhaps 25% below what they were 2 years ago, and perhaps a lot less than they will be 2-3 years from now. It's also a great time to refinance.

So, if you have been considering launching home remodeling projects, either for increasing your home's value or for simply updating it for your own enjoyment, now might be the opportune time. But don't jump in willy-nilly. Take the time to prepare. Get consultations and bids from reputable contractors (your friends & neighbors might have some referrals).

See what you can learn online. Seek informational resources that can help you avoid problems, gather ideas and direction, identify green ideas to incorporate, decide what you will do yourself (DIY) or contract out, and learn how to negotiate an appropriate agreement with your contractors.

Finally, always think in terms of resale. Whether or not you plan to sell your house in the near term, resale value should always be a consideration whenever you are considering home improvements, remodeling, or simple home makeover projects. In fact you should be thinking ahead to resale before you even buy a house, because you never know when circumstances will change.

In my opinion, you can either make your house generic to appeal to the masses, or you can make it special so as to appeal to the *niche* buyer. If your house is pretty much generic, such as part of a development of similar homes, the sale is mostly driven by price, which is a dicey proposition in a

weak housing market. But if your house is unique or special in some way so as to fit the particular preferences of only a handful of niche buyers, they will pay more for it—although it might take longer to sell if no such targeted buyer happens to be prowling your market at the moment. All things considered, I prefer to make a house somewhat unique and special—but that doesn't mean crazy, artsy, or eclectic!

Above all, remember to focus on ***simplicity, comfort, and value!***

About the Author



Laura Martindale is a freelance design consultant and expert on affordable home makeovers. She has performed dozens of projects on numerous single-family homes over the past 16 years.

The learning process led her to a full-fledged passion for affordable home remodeling, decorating, and staging. Laura's expertise is a direct result of her pursuit of this passion rather than a planned career choice.

You can learn more from Laura at:

<http://www.HomeMakeoverIdeas.com>