

THE REAL SIMPLE GUIDE TO

KITCHEN UPGRADES

THIS TOP (CABINETS) TO BOTTOM (FLOORS) PRIMER GIVES YOU THE INSIDER INFO YOU NEED TO RENOVATE WITH CONFIDENCE—OR JUST START FANTASIZING ABOUT IT.

Written by Amanda Lecky and Virginia Sole-Smith
Photographs by Johnny Miller Prop Styling by Glen Proebstel

COLOR THEORY

A deep blue like this one (Hague Blue by Farrow & Ball) is a sophisticated shade for cabinets. Or try it on walls to make white cabinets pop.

SOLID CHOICE

If you want natural countertops that aren't speckled with different colors, consider soapstone. It's one of the few natural options that come in a solid color.

TO BUY (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): ARCHITECTONICS HANDMADE FIELD TILE IN NILE; ARCHITECTONICS HANDMADE FIELD TILE IN DRIFT; PROMENADE FIELD TILE IN MATTE BLACK; ETOILE PORCELAIN KNOB IN CHROME; GROVE BRICKWORKS FIELD TILE IN UPPER COVE GREY; WATERWORKS.COM. PACCHA BY POPHAM DESIGN FIELD TILE IN HONEYCOMB; ANNSACKS.COM. SOLMA SINGLE-HANDLE ARTICULATING KITCHEN FAUCET IN BRILLIANCE STAINLESS; BRIZO.COM. SUMNER STREET SATIN NICKEL MINTED BAR CABINET PULL, LOWES.COM. GREVSTA DOOR IN STAINLESS STEEL; HISHULT HANDLE IN PORCELAIN WHITE; IKEA.COM. CHAMBERLAIN SHAPED BOWL IN PEWTER, WATERWORKS.COM.

THE COUNTERTOP QUESTION

BEFORE YOU COMMIT, ANALYZE YOUR OPTIONS: HERE ARE THE HARD-AND-FAST FACTS ABOUT 10 POPULAR SURFACES, ALONG WITH THE DIRT ON KEEPING THEM CLEAN.

GRANITE

PRICE: \$20 to \$150 a square foot.*

PROS: This natural stone is durable and heat-resistant, and it comes in many colors and patterns. Upkeep is relatively easy.

CONS: Porous. Must be sealed by a pro at installation to protect the surface against stains. After that, reseal at least once a year.

CLEANUP: Wipe up spills with a damp paper towel. Clean with soapy water or a stone cleaner.

MARBLE

PRICE: \$25 to \$125.

PROS: Marble's gleaming surface looks luxe, and its high thermal mass keeps it cooler than other surfaces (a boon to bakers).

CONS: Soft and porous. You have to reseal it every six months or so and be willing to live with a "patina" that develops over time (scratches, stains, and etching from acids, like lemon juice).

CLEANUP: Wipe up spills promptly. Clean with a paper towel and a stone cleaner.

* ALL PRICES ARE PER SQUARE FOOT, INCLUDING INSTALLATION. PRICES ARE APPROXIMATE.

QUARTZ

PRICE: \$20 to \$90.

PROS: Once known as "engineered stone," quartz surfacing is 80 percent natural quartz stone mixed with resin and colorants. It is ultra-hard, durable, nonporous, and stain-resistant and is available in many colors and patterns.

CONS: While it mimics natural materials, quartz doesn't have the pattern variation or free-form grains of stone. You'll need a pro to fix chips.

CLEANUP: Wipe up spills as they happen. Clean with a formula designed for stone or quartz.

QUARTZITE

PRICE: \$40 to \$125.

PROS: Newly popular, this natural stone offers the hardness of granite and the lighter palette of marble. It's less stain-prone than marble, too.

CONS: Like all natural stones, quartzite needs to be sealed regularly to help it resist stains: once at installation, then once or twice a year after that. Variations in slabs make it difficult to get a consistent look in a large space.

CLEANUP: Wipe up spills as they happen. Clean with a solution formulated for natural stone.

CONCRETE

PRICE: \$25 to \$125.

PROS: Has a handmade look. (The color may vary slightly in the slab, and the surface can be a bit irregular.) It's poured to order, so you can pick the shape, the thickness, and the color and even opt for an integrated draining board or a specialty edge.

CONS: Must be sealed at installation and after that at least once a year. Can develop nonstructural hair-line cracks. (The durability depends on the fabricator's and installer's skills.)

CLEANUP: Wipe up spills with a paper towel. Clean with warm, soapy water.

WOOD

PRICE: \$20 to \$150+.

PROS: Butcher block (strips of wood glued together) and solid woods (teak, walnut) lend a rich, rustic look. You can cut on butcher block as long as it's not varnished.

CONS: Easily scorched, scratched, and damaged by water. It's better suited to secondary spots (islands, breakfast bars). If you cut on the surface, marks will show. Requires sealing with a food-safe mineral oil every three to six months.

CLEANUP: Wipe up spills with a paper towel. Clean with soap and water. To avoid scratches, scrape away dried matter with a flexible spatula.

LAMINATE

PRICE: \$10 to \$60.

PROS: Laminate is super-affordable and comes in many varieties, including patterns that replicate stone.

CONS: Even the best stone-look patterns can't rival the real thing. The surface nicks and scorches easily. If water seeps under the joints, the edges could peel up.

CLEANUP: Wipe with soap and water, taking care not to flood the seams. Dry with a soft cloth.

TILE

PRICE: \$5 to \$30+.

PROS: Wallet-friendly and offered in many varieties, including natural stone (granite, marble), hand-painted ceramic, and durable porcelain. It's heat-resistant and, unless you drop something heavy on it, durable. You can lay patterned tile in various configurations.

CONS: Uneven surface. Also, dirt can catch in the grout.

CLEANUP: Wipe with soap and water; dry with a cloth. Use a toothbrush to clean the grout using the manufacturer's recommended solution.

SOAPSTONE

PRICE: \$20 to \$100.

PROS: A metamorphic stone that's a blend of at least 50 percent talc and other minerals, it has a silky texture and is heat-resistant and nonporous.

CONS: Comes in only one color: a light greenish gray that darkens to charcoal when you rub mineral oil over the surface, a recommended treatment. It is softer than granite and marble and can scratch, nick, or chip.

CLEANUP: No sealing required, but a monthly mineral-oil rubdown will keep it glossy. Wipe up stains promptly. Clean with soapy water.

STAINLESS STEEL

PRICE: \$20 to \$145.

PROS: Sleek, nonporous, easy to clean, and sustainable. (It is 100 percent recyclable and is typically made with some recycled content.) A stainless sink and backsplash can be seamlessly integrated into the counters.

CONS: Scratches easily and shows fingerprints. Can be loud when struck with, say, a pan.

CLEANUP: Wipe up spills with a damp paper towel. Clean with soap and water. Buff with a dry cloth to restore the shine.

THESE PAGES: ALL INSET PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF WWW.DEVOLKITCHENS.CO.UK

TO BUY (OPENING PAGES, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): EVOLVE WHITE TILE, AKDO.COM. WHITE GLOSS CERAMIC WALL TILE, LOWES.COM. STEEL MATTE SOLID FIELD TILE; GROVE BRICKWORKS FIELD TILE IN UPPER COVE GREY; WATERWORKS.COM. CARRARA HONEYCOMB MOSAIC MARBLE, LOWES.COM. ZEBRA POLISHED TILE, AKDO.COM. MARRAKECH TERRACE CEMENT TILE; BELGIAN BLACK FRENCH REPRODUCTION HEXAGON TERRACOTTA; CLETILE.COM. CERUSED BLACK-WALNUT CABINET DOOR, WATERWORKS.COM. KEYSTICK WALL SCONCE, REJUVENATION.COM. KEYSTONE IN BLACK BRAZILIAN SLATE, WATERWORKS.COM. GLAZED THIN BRICK IN BLACK GLOSS, CLETILE.COM. HAKWOOD FLOORING IN SHADOW, LVWOOD.COM. PURIST TWO-HOLE DECK-MOUNT BRIDGE KITCHEN-SINK FAUCET IN MATTE BLACK, US.KOHLER.COM. PENNY TILE IN CHARCOAL, WATERWORKS.COM. BELGIAN BLACK FRENCH REPRODUCTION SQUARE TERRACOTTA, CLETILE.COM. TINGSRYD DOOR IN BLACK; ULVSBO HANDLE IN BLACK; IKEA.COM. BARDIGLIO NOVOLATO POLISHED TILE, AKDO.COM. KEYSTONE FIELD TILE IN THUNDER CLOUD HONED, WATERWORKS.COM. POLISHED WHITE VENATINO MARBLE; AMERICAN OLEAN STARTING LINE WHITE GLOSS CERAMIC WALL TILE; AMERICAN OLEAN MOORELAND CARRARA WHITE CERAMIC WALL TILE; LOWES.COM. ARCHITECTONIC FIELD TILE IN WINDMILL GLOSSY, WATERWORKS.COM. AMERICAN OLEAN MOORELAND CARRARA WHITE CERAMIC BULLNOSE TILE, LOWES.COM.

BACKSPLASH BEAUTY

Tile lends itself to low-cost customization: Even the simplest shapes laid out in a creative pattern (herringbone, tumbling block) can become an artful element.

WORTH THEIR METAL

Far from purely functional, fixtures help define a kitchen's style. A gooseneck faucet, for example, gives a cook space a traditional farmhouse feel.

TO BUY (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): PROMENADE BABYBLOCK HEX DECORATIVE FIELD TILE, WATERWORKS.COM. LUGCA HONED CORETTO IN WHITE VENATINO, WALKERZANGER.COM. LAVA STONE IN BLACK, BOFFI.COM. EURO OAK IN LIGHTHOUSE, LVWOOD.COM. ABBOTT LEATHER PULL, WATERWORKS.COM. LARKIN DRAWER PULL IN POLISHED CHROME, REJUVENATION.COM. ARC CEMENT TILE IN BLACK AND WHITE, CLETILE.COM. CALAIS ONE-HOLE GOOSENECK KITCHEN FAUCET WITH WHITE PORCELAIN LEVER HANDLES, WATERWORKS.COM. ULVSBO HANDLE IN WHITE, IKEA.COM. PROMENADE FIELD TILE IN MATTE NAVY, WATERWORKS.COM. ESAGONO MARK CHROME PORCELAIN TILE, AKDO.COM. STELLA CONCRETE CABINET KNOB, REJUVENATION.COM.

CABINETS, PULLS, AND PAINTS

AND THE REST OF THE STUFF THAT KITCHENS ARE MADE OF: REAL SIMPLE

EDITORS (AND READERS!) GRILLED THE EXPERTS ON THE DETAILS.

Q

I want to get the most bang for my buck. What's best to splurge on: cabinets, appliances, or countertops?

If you're looking for a big impact that also boosts resale value, pick countertops or appliances. Those are the kitchen features that buyers notice the most, says Seattle-based residential remodeling pro Jason Kyser. Cabinets aren't typically as splurge-worthy because you can reface or paint them for a fraction of the cost of replacing them, freeing up more funds for counters and appliances. Also, if you're set on new cabinets, you can find very well-made ones at a home store for about 40 percent of what it would cost to build custom cabinetry, says Kyser. Bypass the cheaper white melamine or plywood and look for these key markers of quality: soft-close drawers, pullout shelves, and hardwood drawers joined with dovetails.

Q

If you're painting cabinets instead of replacing them, what's the best kind of paint to use? And is it better to stain or paint? (What's best for resale and less hassle down the road?)

The experts all agreed: Although staining may ultimately be more durable, because it penetrates the wood's pores, making it tougher to damage, painting can be less expensive and easier to get right—meaning less trouble and less worry about recouping your investment. To get the best results, use a water-based alkyd enamel paint designed for cabinets (typically \$35 to \$70 a gallon). "These have the smooth flow of oil paint without the noxious fumes, and they clean up with water," says Don Vandervort, a home expert based in Glendale, California.

Q

Everyone seems to be doing white cabinets and subway tile with black granite countertops. How do I get a look that is up-to-date but a little less stark?

"The high-contrast black counter is what makes this look feel cold," says Kyser. "I would choose a quartz that looks like Carrara marble, like Silystone's Helix. Not only does it look warmer but it's also more durable and stain-resistant than granite." If you're set on black counters, you can

bring in warmth with hardware (try matte brass knobs or pulls) and paint colors (such as a yellow-based gray, like Heron Plume; or a blue-toned gray, like Snowdrop; both by Sherwin-Williams).

Q

Our kitchen gets barely any natural light. How can we brighten things up?

Swap out all your existing lightbulbs for daylight-style LED lights, which have a higher wattage, suggests Chicago-based home expert Lou Manfredini. Elaine Griffin, an interior designer in New York City, adds LED strip lighting under cabinets to boost brightness and rope lights inside glass cabinets to make them sparkle. You can also maximize the light that you do get by painting your walls and cabinets a light color. Some of Griffin's favorites: Mountain Air by Sherwin-Williams, a pale greenish blue; Crafted White by Valspar, a soft yellow; and Tundra by Benjamin Moore, a warm gray.

Q

I hate the look of our mismatched appliances, but we can't afford new ones. Is there a cheaper solution?

Get out a screwdriver, says Vandervort: "Most appliances—refrigerators, dishwashers, ovens—have removable face panels. Just unscrew the door trim and the panel will slide right out." You can first try flipping the panels to see if their backs match any better than their fronts. (A stainless panel may have a black back, for example.) If not, you can contact the manufacturer to purchase replacement panels (typically from \$60 to \$100) that will coordinate better. If replacement panels are out of your budget, says Manfredini, consider using a spray paint formulated for appliances, such as Rust-Oleum Specialty Appliance Epoxy. It comes in black, white, off-white, beige, and a stainless-steel finish (rustoleum.com).

Q

I have an original 1940s kitchen. I pulled off the linoleum backsplash and found plaster walls underneath. Can I install subway tile directly on the plaster?

Technically, yes, if you first rough up the wall with sandpaper and apply thinset (an adhesive mortar to attach the tile to the wall). But success also depends on the plaster's condition. "You'll get the best results

THE GREAT WHITES

These four paint picks are the pros' go-tos for kitchens.

DECORATOR'S WHITE BENJAMIN MOORE

"This is a true white without any undertones. It's the cleanest and crispest you can find, making it a great choice for kitchens."
—Tobi Fairley, Little Rock, Arkansas-based designer

CLUNCH FARROW & BALL

"If your cabinets are a deep shade, this is your ideal white for the walls. It's bright and fresh, to balance out the cabinets' rich tones."
—Tracy Morris, Washington, D.C.-based designer

WHITE DOVE BENJAMIN MOORE

"With just a hint of gray, this is a warm, natural-looking white that makes a great backdrop for art, too. It's my all-time favorite."
—Elaine Griffin, New York City-based designer

PRECIOUS PEARLS DUNN-EDWARDS

"An easy way to give your kitchen an upscale look is to paint the walls with this white, which has beautiful, slightly shimmery opalescent undertones."
—Nate Berkus, Los Angeles-based designer



WANT MORE WHITES?

Or bolder hues for your kitchen? Find more ideas at realsimple.com/paintpicks.

CABINETS, PULLS, AND PAINTS

if the plaster is flat and intact," says Vandervort. "With older walls, plaster can degrade over time, which can cause tiles to pop off," says Kyser. To play it safe, your best bet is to remove the plaster and replace it with fiber cement board before installing the tile.

Q

There are so many slamming sounds from the doors and drawers in my kitchen. How can we muffle the din?

If you can afford it, consider retrofitting your existing cabinet doors and drawers with soft-close hardware (from about \$35 per drawer). "Their built-in shock absorbers prevent the slam in that last 10 percent of the closing range," says Kyser, who recommends grass.usa.com and blum.com for options. Need a more affordable fix? Consider self-adhesive cabinet silencers (Isolate It! bumpers, \$10 for 144, amazon.com), says Vandervort. Adhere a clear, bubble-shaped stick-on to each door or drawer front where it touches the cabinet for an instantly slam-free kitchen.

FRESH TAKES ON FINISHES

Want artful-looking appliances to have a starring role in your kitchen? Consider these out-of-the-box options.

IF YOU WANT... The sleekness of stainless steel without the fingerprints.

CONSIDER... A modern twist on traditional silver-tone stainless. Appliance manufacturers have introduced a range of newer versions, including GE's slate, a charcoal gray metallic, and Samsung's and KitchenAid's black stainless, a black metallic. Their less reflective finish and darker color camouflage fingerprints better than standard stainless does. **Bonus:** Unlike stainless, these surfaces hold magnets. Care is easy, too. Just clean with soapy water and a soft cloth, then buff with a clean, dry cloth.

IF YOU WANT... A retro appliance that stands out.

CONSIDER... A bright enameled finish, which adds a splash of color. (Red, blue, and yellow are the most popular shades.) This option isn't for everyone or every appliance, however. "The oven range is a great focal point. But colorful finishes don't work well on refrigerators," says Joan Bigg, a kitchen designer based in Croton-on-Hudson, New York. "You don't really want all eyes on your fridge."

Q

I love white tile in theory, but ours never looks clean.

The fix here depends on what type of tile you have.

"Tiles made of natural materials, like marble and other stone, need to be sealed once a year because they're very porous. But then you'll rarely have to clean them," says Kyser, who likes the 511 sealers by Miracle Sealants (miraclesealants.com). To clean other types of tile, says Manfredini, scrub with a Scotch-Brite pad and a heavy-duty cleaner, like Krud Kutter Cleaner/Degreaser, using medium pressure, then wipe clean with a wet cloth. And consider whether it's really the tile or the grout that's the problem: "Traditional mortar grouts are porous and can easily look dirty over time," says Kyser. "A one-time application of a stainproof acrylic grout can solve this problem."

Try Fusion Pro Grout (custombuildingproducts.com) or Bostik TruColor RapidCure premixed grout (bostik-us.com).

Q

My kitchen doesn't have a pantry. How can I create more storage?

Start by being a little bit ruthless. "Free up shelf space by getting anything you don't use frequently or that could live somewhere else out of the kitchen and into a new spot," says Vandervort. Think serving platters that you pull out only once a year, extra paper towels, the big tub of dog food, and any other bulky or hard-to-stash items. Next, measure the available space along any empty wall or corner and find a freestanding storage unit to fit, like a tall cabinet, hutch, or set of shelves. To fake the look of a built-in, paint it the same color as the wall.

Q

My countertops are an unappealing black laminate with gray and white flecks. I wish I could afford new ones, but that's not in my budget. Any ideas for a cheap makeover?

If you're willing to tackle a two- or three-day project, you can paint the countertops a new color, says Manfredini. Try a kit like Rust-Oleum's Countertop Transformations System (from \$150, homedepot.com). But do a test patch first, because not all laminates hold paint well. If it turns out that yours doesn't, says Vandervort, consider tiling over the laminate.

EVERYTHING COMES IN A DRAWER NOW

The trend began with the warming drawer. Now other appliances come in drawer form, too, to go right where you need them and stay tucked away when not in use.

WARMING DRAWERS

These built-in oven drawers (about \$1,000 and up) can go under a wall oven—or anyplace else where you have the room. They heat up to around 200 degrees Fahrenheit tops, so they're not meant for baking or roasting. They are ideal for keeping your daughter's dinner toasty until she gets home from hockey practice, heating bread and plates, and helping you to time a multicourse meal.

REFRIGERATOR-FREEZER DRAWERS

These appliances (starting at around \$2,000 for a single drawer) are as wide as a typical cabinet base unit, so they can go almost anywhere. Install a refrigerator drawer for vegetables right next to the sink where you wash them, or have a dedicated beverage drawer in an entertaining area or where the kids tend to hang out.

DISHWASHER DRAWERS

Double drawers (\$1,200 and up) can match the capacity of a standard dishwasher and allow you to wash one half of your dishes at a time—ideal if you tend to fill up one section (glassware, say) faster than the other. Single drawers (\$650 and up) are great for overflow party dishes if you entertain frequently.

MICROWAVE DRAWERS

Designed for under-counter installation (and starting at about \$900), these drawers solve the problem of removing a hot, heavy dish from an appliance that may be over your head. These must be built in to cabinets; there are no counter models available.

THE KITCHEN-DESIGN EXPERTS

JOAN BIGG, KITCHEN CHOREOGRAPHY BY JOAN BIGG DESIGN, CROTON-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK • SHANNON DAVIS JOHNSTON, SHANNON DAVIS DESIGNS, CHICAGO • JENNIFER DUNCAN, CUSTOM KITCHENS INC., RICHMOND, VIRGINIA • ELAINE GRIFFIN, ELAINE GRIFFIN INTERIOR DESIGN, NEW YORK CITY • JASON KYSER, PRO.COM, SEATTLE • LOU MANFREDINI, ACE HARDWARE, CHICAGO • CANDACE NORDQUIST, CANDACE NORDQUIST INTERIORS, SEATTLE • LENIA PILKONIS, LENIA PILKONIS DESIGN, DOUGLASVILLE, GEORGIA • CHRISTINA SIMON, CS DESIGN STUDIO, FAIRFAX STATION, VIRGINIA • DON VANDERVORT, HOMETIPS.COM, GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA • KAREN WARNER, KAREN WARNER DESIGN, WILLINGTON, CONNECTICUT • REBEKAH ZAVELLOFF, KITCHENLAB DESIGN, CHICAGO