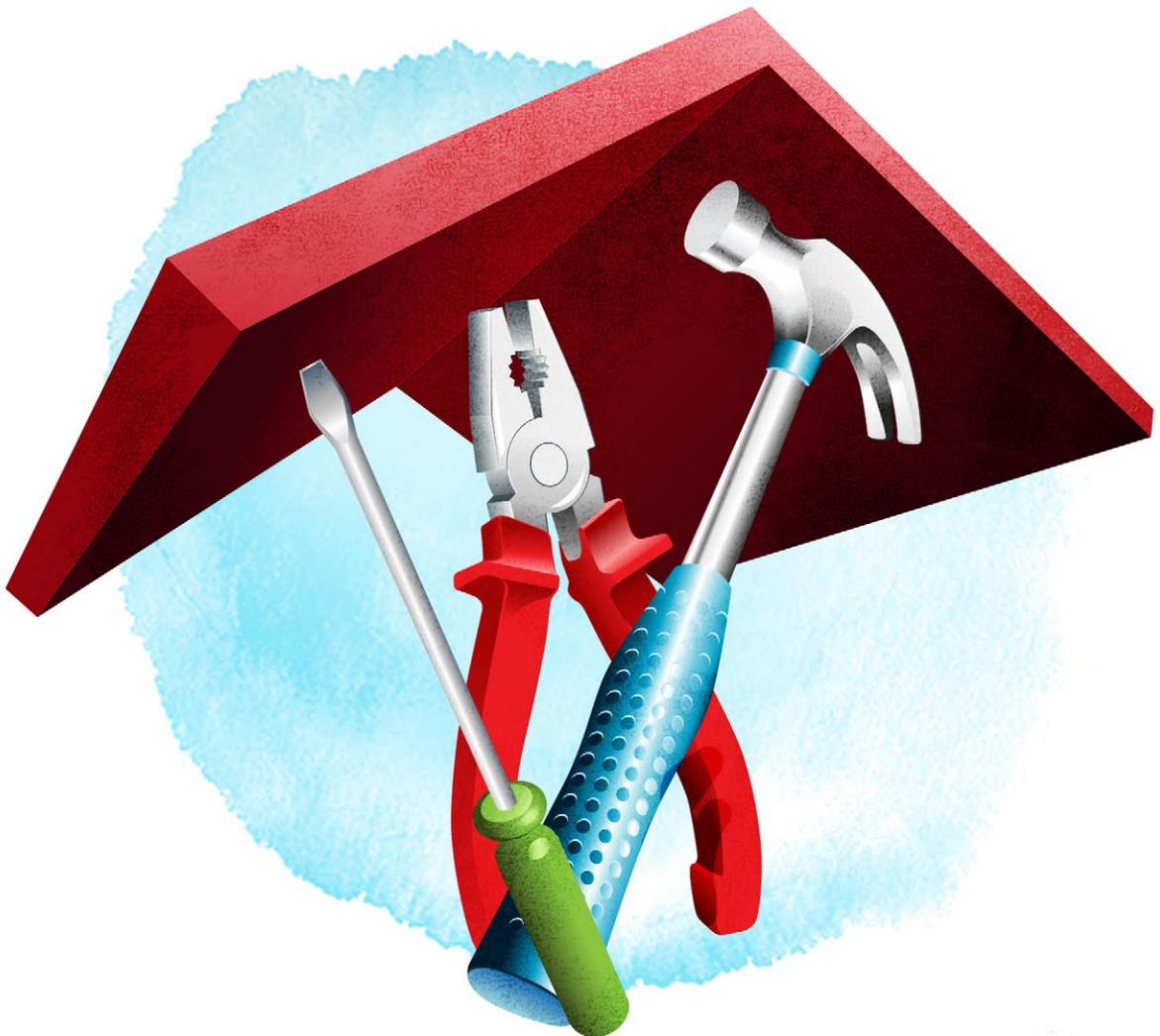


# 7 Easy Ways to Boost The Value of Your Home

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# INTRODUCTION

Merle Grace, an interior designer with 25 years' experience, shares some well kept secrets that improve value without overcapitalising. The result? A designer finish on a shoestring.

Key elements that add value to a property are:

- Flexibility of space
- Good lighting
- Views and natural environment
- Easy maintenance

The first step, before spending money, is research. Know your property, know the market and set a realistic budget.

## KNOW YOUR PROPERTY

**Look beyond the clutter to the 'bone structure' of your space and look carefully at the light and ventilation.**

Strip-back elements that don't work or that you don't like. Remove unused furniture and broken blinds, wash windows and floors and sugar-soap walls. Make sure all doors and windows are in good order, repair or replace any broken fixtures.

Next make an honest assessment of the property. Where are the trouble spots? What can be improved cheaply and efficiently?

Also try to become familiar with the look and feel of other homes in your area. People buy into neighbourhoods because they like the age and style of houses. Radical changes like modern facades or an incongruous colour scheme can impact the value of your home.

## KNOW YOUR MARKET

**Ask a local real estate agent for an evaluation and research the average selling price of similar properties in your area. This gives you understanding of how you should renovate to suit the area (and if you should renovate at all).**

For example: If an un-renovated apartment in your neighbourhood sells for \$380,000 and a completely re-fitted equivalent is only reaching \$410,000, you'd need to keep costs well under \$20,000 to make a return of \$10,000 (before tax).

A real-estate agent can tell you whether buyers in the area prefer an extra bedroom, covered car-space or outdoor entertainment area.

## SET A REALISTIC BUDGET

Two kinds of renovation improve value in your property: structural and cosmetic.

- Structural Renovations: change to the way the space can be used, including reworking the floor plan, adding rooms and knocking down walls. Generally they are expensive and require expert input.
- Cosmetic Renovations: are cheaper and easier to manage and take less guidance. They involve changes to the look and feel of an existing structure such as repainting and updating fittings and fixtures.

Renovating for profit is very different to creating your 'dream home.' It requires concrete "value-add" reasons for expensive structural work. Unused extra bedrooms and butchered floorplans can prove costly mistakes when selling.

Better returns usually come from maximising the existing structure and minimising structural changes.

Use this table to work out how much you're prepared to spend:

Calculate Your Renovation Budget		
Description	Example	Your Figures
<b>Un-renovated Sale Price (Estimate sale price if you did nothing and put the property on the market tomorrow)</b>	\$380,000	
<b>Renovated Sale Price (Estimate sale price of renovated property based on sale price of similar refurbished properties in the area)</b>	\$410,000	
<b>Ceiling Price (The highest price a renovated property similar to yours has reached in the last several months)</b>	\$430,000	
<b>Capital Increase (The difference between Un-renovated sale price and renovated sale price)</b>	\$30,000	
<b>Budget (Percentage of potential capital increase you are prepared to invest in renovating the property)</b>	\$15,000	
<b>Profit (Capital increase less renovations budget)</b>	\$15,000	

With budget in hand, pull on your coveralls and get your hands dirty.

# 7 WAYS TO IMPROVE THE VALUE OF YOUR HOME WITHOUT OVERCAPITALISING

## 1. MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

**You only get one first impression, so make it a good one! The entryway to a home should be inviting, clean and free of clutter. A lot can be achieved in a single weekend with a \$200 trip to a hardware store.**

Sweeping up, fixing the letterbox, repainting the front door and adding a new welcome mat, street number and doorbell can make a difference.

If you repaint the exterior, make sure it's in keeping with the neighbourhood and surrounds. Steer clear of bright colours that could age quickly and put off potential buyers.

Greet buyers with a welcoming, well-lit space and design feature. If there's space, set up a small panel table with a mirror above it, a generous vase of flowers on a pedestal or art that suits the colour scheme.

**DO** - Invest in a good quality security door

**DONT** - Clutter up your entryway with mismatched flower-pots, old bicycles and knick knacks

**TIP** - For freestanding homes, a good security door is a worthwhile investment. An elegant wrought iron screen with a classic pattern on it will add security without making visitors (or prospective buyers) feel like they're under interrogation

## 2. RE-PAINT

A coat of paint is the cheapest and easiest way to add value to your property. A neutral colour scheme makes the property as inviting and saleable as possible. Buyers ought to easily picture their own furniture and mementos in the space.

The good news is that neutral doesn't have to mean boring! When deciding on your palette, go outside and collect elements from the surrounding environment; pebbles, sand, leaves, blooms from the garden or your balcony herb garden. Use them to choose shades for the walls. Bringing the outside inside with a continuity of soft colours makes the building feel settled in its environment.

A classic, neutral colour scheme usually involves three shades of paint. Two neutrals, one noticeably lighter than the other, and a feature colour to add interest by echoing the natural environment or offering a change in texture with a sandy or metallic finish.

Remember you can repaint yourself, and there are plenty of tutorials online. Consider painting the walls yourself and paying a professional to do the tricky parts like architraves and timberwork.

Not sure what shade should go where? This painting guide will help...

Paint Type	Paint	Merle's Tips
<b>Lightest Neutral</b> Use flat paint on ceilings except in wet areas where you should use a semi gloss. Doors and woodwork are best done in a satin or high-gloss finish	Skirtings, doors, doorframes, architraves, ceilings and timberwork that needs a facelift	Ceilings don't have to be stark white. Using the same tone on ceilings, architraves and woodwork will keep your paintwork looking fresh and unified
<b>Medium Neutral</b> Flat, Satin or Semi-Gloss	The main body of the walls throughout the house	Choose the right texture of paint for the surface you're covering. A satin or semi-gloss paint will be easier to clean but glossy paint will reveal every imperfection
<b>Feature Colour</b> Washable acrylic or special finish paint	Walls to add architectural interest. For example walls behind fireplaces, bedheads or to make a dining space more intimate	A large colour block feature wall is not always necessary. A subtle change of texture and tone with pearlised paint can make a space look 'expensive' without putting-off potential buyers

**DO** - take time to prepare your surfaces before painting. The more attention you pay to cleaning, filling imperfections and sanding the more professional the finish will be

**DONT** - be afraid to paint up old timberwork. Especially in older houses where architraves are dark and ageing, painting the woodwork a light colour will make the place feel new and fresh. Painting also costs a lot less than stripping back and re-staining

**TIP** - When buying paint don't work room-by-room. Plan ahead and buy paint in bulk. When buying large amounts of paint you'll be more likely to be able to negotiate a discount. Try a few different paint suppliers and request a discount - the worst they can say is no!

If telling the difference between shades of white isn't your forte enlist the services of a professional. A colour consultation isn't hugely expensive, and for something that will have such a major impact on the look and feel of your property it's a worthwhile expense.

### 3. ADD LIFESTYLE-FRIENDLY STORAGE

**Storage is extremely valuable to a family home. Assess each space individually for its storage potential.**

Walk through your home and record ways each room might be used. Wherever possible, you want spaces to feel multipurpose. You might use a sunroom as your home office but to a buyer it could be the gym, nursery or games room. Once you have your list, think about what your buyer may need to store and create as many practical and intuitive storage spaces as you can. As a starting point you could:

- Install slim line cupboards in the foyer or hallway for shoes and schoolbags and coats so that they don't end up on the floor
- Install built in wardrobes in every bedroom
- Add shallow shelves into existing 'storage' spaces like the garage, attics or under the stairs so that people can picture the orderly, mess free and stress free life they could have in the space

Adding storage is easy, and cheap! Build them yourself or check out IKEA's huge range of cheap and easy to install rails, cupboards and shelves. Always choose good quality and work with your décor. Shelves inside cupboards or the garage don't matter as much, but anything visible should be chosen to match or painted to disappear into the walls. Keep an eye on the detail – If the shelves are going to be exposed, make sure that the brackets and shelving materials don't look cheap and nasty.

**DO** - Install storage to make the most of wasted space and keep mess orderly and out of sight

**DONT** - waste your vertical space - Australians often do! If you're wondering where you could add storage - look up! Install additional kitchen cupboards right up to the roof, above the sink, toilet or bath, around your entertainment system or by opening up access to your roof

**TIP** - Interspace cabinets and shelves with mirrors so you don't lose the sense of space

## 4. UPDATE THE BATHROOM

**It's very easy to go overboard on bathroom renovations. As soon as you take tiles off the wall, you'll need to re-waterproof to meet building standards. On top of plumbing and tiling that can involve spending a big chunk of your budget on expensive professionals.**

Before you replace, see how you can clean the bathroom up. Work with the existing space. If your bathroom is out of date there is lots you can do without completing a major renovation.

If the tiles are passable, you could polish them up and re-grout (inexpensive DIY kits are available in all hardware stores) and give the room a refresh with a new shower screen and a mirror. If they're really a problem, you could panel over them with mirrors, glass splashbacks or lightweight bathroom surface products like Laminex Aquapanel. The great thing about these options is that they're thin and light so you can apply them directly over old tiles without losing much space. Just make sure old tiles won't shine through the surface you choose.

A good shower screen is a worthwhile investment and will offer you the maximum impact even in a tiny bathroom. A frameless shower screen with clear glass will maximise the light and sense of space in a room. Or if there's something about the shower cubicle you don't like, choose an opaque screen for more privacy.

If you choose a framed variety, make sure the frame matches your tiles – a mismatch will look haphazard and unprofessional.

Other good additions include mirrored shaving cabinets. They provide additional storage and cover old tiles. Mirrors with a bevelled edge provide an elegant finish.

**DO** - Invest in a good shower-screen. It will instantly transform the feel of the bathroom

**DONT** - Get upsold in expensive showrooms! In most cases a classic middle of the range item will do and you can add a lot of charm with accessories when you come to sell the property

**TIP** - If possible, avoid buying from retailer's altogether. You'll pay through the teeth for those convenient show rooms! Tiles, doors, fixtures and fittings can all be purchased inexpensively at markets and auction houses. A quick search online should reveal a handful of potential destinations – go armed with all your measurements and make a day of it!

## 5. MAKEOVER THE KITCHEN

**There's no doubt about it – kitchens sell houses. But there's no point installing your dream kitchen if you're planning to move on.**

Your goal should be to create something inviting and functional. You can give 30 year-old kitchens a facelift for sale without blowing the budget.

Update bench tops, change the splashback or invest in new shiny taps and sinks if they're dated. If you already have marble or stone bench tops have them reconditioned or polished.

If the surfaces are passable, update kitchen handles, door and draw fronts. If they're timber, sand them back and paint them.



If you have room, add an island bench with extra storage. If space is tight, choose one on wheels to double as a kitchen perch, bar or bench space for entertaining.

**DO** - Spend on good bench tops and splashbacks

**DONT** - Tear the kitchen out and start from scratch if you can possibly help it. Kitchen renovation costs can quickly spiral out of control

**TIP** - The kitchen is the ideal spot for thrifty renovation shopping. For storage, check out the range of handy and inexpensive rods and racks from IKEA

For affordable appliances try Winnings Appliances, Harvey Norman or Bunnings. Or for real savings, take your shopping online. Reputable Ebay stores offer end of line products with guarantees. Also, keep an eye on local private sellers on Ebay and Gumtree. With a little resourcefulness you'll pay just \$200 instead of the \$1200 it would cost for the same item in-store. Make sure you have them run it for you before you pay too

## 6. PLAY TRICKS WITH THE LIGHT

**Light is essential for mood and ambience. Make the most of natural light and views brighten up any gloomy spots.**

Use mirrors to double bring a view into the room.

For rooms without a view consider using obscure glass to provide privacy without sacrificing light.

Consider adding a skylight or solar tubes to dark or unfriendly rooms.

If your home is on a long narrow block with rooms off a single hallway you can use doors with glass panels to borrow light from other rooms and lighten up a dark hallway. When borrowing from a bedroom, use obscured glass or curtains.

**DO** - Spend money on making sure your wiring is up to date. Put safety first and install an earth leakage detector

**DONT** - Don't waste money installing extra ceiling lights. You can easily turn a dark corner into a romantic niche with a beautiful standing lamp - an investment in ambience that can move with you!

**TIP** - Think twice about knocking down walls and remodelling for an open plan look. Open plan living costs a lot more to heat and cool

## 7. CULTIVATE AN EFFORTLESS GARDEN

**Gardens are time consuming and lawns consume loads of water so a beautiful, low-maintenance garden will have the broadest appeal.**

For busy people, lawns are a scourge – they take a lot of water, fertilizer, weeding and mowing. As an alternative you could install garden beds and use environmentally friendly ground covers such as crushed roof tiles and steppingstones. For courtyards, grow soft Mondo-grass and native violets between recycled pavers.

In garden beds, choose plants that will work well en-mass and are easy to maintain. Make sure you plant natives that are proven to grow well in your area.

If you have time before you actually plan to sell, slow-growing box hedges are an excellent option. They don't require a lot of maintenance and can be inter-planted with flowers, herbs and vegetables so that the water you use will give you something back to use in the kitchen.

Edible gardens are very popular at the moment. Herbs like mint, oregano and parsley will take off if given the chance.

Water features can be a lovely addition but quickly become a breeding ground for mosquitos if not properly maintained. A mirror or piece of wall art above a garden bed can have the same effect and add interest without the maintenance cost.

Another great gardening trick is to plant prickly plants such as rose bushes, holly or bougainvillea outside windows and balconies. These sorts of climbing plants will add greenery and softness to your home and also make for very picturesque theft deterrents!

**DO** - Invest time in cultivating a low-maintenance garden

**DONT** - Spend a huge amount of money on landscaping

**TIP** - Recycling building materials is also a really good idea – buy second hand pavers or crushed roof-tiles and paving seconds for stepping-stones. For planting, wherever possible, take cuttings from friends and family. For the best prices on plants and flowers take a little drive outside of the city centre

# 4 MAJOR MONEY WASTERS

- **Swimming Pools** are expensive investments and have massive ongoing operational costs. Not everyone will want a pool and the maintenance that goes with it.
- **Reverse Cycle Air Conditioning** will easily set you back \$12,000 or more for a typical family home. That's a massive chunk of your renovation budget with little to show for it. Air conditioning is a worthwhile value-add for a property you hope to sell, but a split-system (at \$1200-\$1500 a piece) is a more economical approach. Putting a split system into the main bedroom and living space is enough to add value without blowing your budget.
- **Heritage Restorations** are a sure-fire cash drain. While your restoration job may be authentic and look amazing to a professional eye, there are very few buyers who would understand the value in it. Source doors, windows and other features such as fireplaces from demolition sales or salvage yards. Or opt for more affordable reproduction hardware.
- **Solar Panels** are expensive and take a decade to start paying you back so it's not worth throwing money at them if you're planning to move. It can even put people off buying because dodgy installations are a fire hazard. What's more, if your panels are feeding electricity onto the grid and wiring is difficult to access the fire department won't touch your house if it's burning.