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**10** TRIED & TRUE KITCHEN UPDATES THAT PAY BACK

## spring fling

BEAUTIFUL IDEAS JUST WHEN YOU NEED THEM

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A custom-made round island with a radiating design in black granite and green marble doubles as a dining table in this San Francisco house. The base is wire-brushed oak.

# just do it

BY AMY ELBERT

NEED AN EXCUSE TO RENOVATE YOUR KITCHEN? THIS DOWN MARKET MAY BE **JUST YOUR TICKET**

Itching to knock out a wall between your kitchen and dining room, ditch an energy-hog refrigerator, or rip out your tired cabinets? Do it. Sure, the economy is lagging, but that makes now a great time to stay put and update your kitchen.

Contractors and designers are eager for work, retailers are offering discounts, and kitchen renovations are consistently wise ventures, with anywhere from a 75 to 90 percent return on your investment when you sell your home. And the U.S. Department of Energy is offering cash back for buying energy-efficient

appliances with its Cash for Appliances program. (See details at [sears.com/energystar](http://sears.com/energystar) and [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov).)

"It doesn't pay to sell a house now in this market," says Jennifer Allison, a certified kitchen designer in Redondo Beach, California. "It's better to invest in what you have because the housing market will rebound at some point."

Money talk aside, a well-designed kitchen is a great investment in your family's comfort and happiness. "Today, the kitchen is the focus of the entire home; it's the heartbeat of your ▶



## FIT FOR FAMILIES

Creating spaces and work surfaces that allow multiple activities for today's busy families while staying true to the Tudor style of a 1920s house kept California designers Martha Angus and Phillip Parton on top of their game. The pair renovated a kitchen and pantry for a San Francisco Decorator Showcase home, installing classically styled cabinets, a substantial range hood painted to resemble limestone (see page 84), tracery detailing on the ceiling, and a table-style round island. The marble-and-granite island top is perfect for preparing pastries, and the island also functions as a dining table when guests gather in the kitchen. A built-in desk is tucked into one corner of the kitchen, providing a computer workstation and home office. A pointed arch defining the desk niche reflects the Tudor styling elsewhere in the house. An adjacent pantry offers storage and serves as a bar area when entertaining.

house," Allison adds. So why not create a space you and your family can really enjoy now?

Sarah Reep, a certified kitchen designer and director of design at KraftMaid Cabinetry, agrees. "What really makes sense is making sure your home works for you, that your home and the group dynamics within your home are spot-on."

An open floor plan with a kitchen that flows into a family room, dining area, or sitting space lends itself to today's multi-tasking and super-scheduled family life. "We're seeing the kitchen take a larger part of the home's floor plan," Reep says. "Consumers are breaking down walls, opening up, and combining rooms. The dining room is taking a smaller role, and the kitchen is the entertainment and gathering space."

Karen Williams, a kitchen designer at St. Charles of New York in New York City, sees the same trends. "We are staying home more and spending more time with family," she says. "The kitchen is not just opening up to the family room for the kids to watch TV, it also is opening up to dining and >



Top left: A kitchen corner is outfitted with a desk and lamps made with vintage zinc flower stands. Above: Enameled lava stone countertops and classic cabinets in the pantry are quietly understated.

## 10 smart kitchen updates that pay you back—both financially and emotionally



SNAP IT



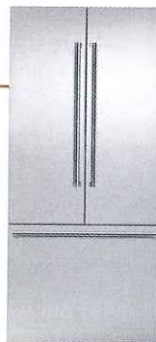
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**1. islands** score big with today's cooks, defining work areas and creating additional countertop space and barstool seating. Rather than matching an island to the cabinets, change up the color and surface materials to resemble furniture.



**2. energy-efficient appliances** are an easy update and pay you back with lower utility bills. Compare Energy Star ratings when buying a new refrigerator, and go to the Web site to see rebate opportunities ([energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov)).



## WORK ZONES

While the kitchen work triangle “worked well for Donna Reed” in the 1950s, it doesn’t apply to today’s kitchens, says Karen Williams, designer at St. Charles of New York in New York City. “Today’s kitchens open to other living space, and there is often more than one cook,” she says. “I like to design stations or work zones.” When Williams and colleague Robert Schwartz designed a kitchen for the Kips Bay Boys & Girls Club Decorator Show House in New York City, they organized the space into zones, including a 7-foot stretch of cabinets housing everything needed for preparing breakfast and snacks. The marble backsplash is motorized so it lowers to conceal toaster, juicer, and other small appliances when they’re not in use, minimizing countertop clutter.



A lined bread drawer and dual refrigerator drawers keep breakfast foods handy. The backsplash rises to reveal small appliances.

living areas, fostering the more sophisticated level of entertaining that we are doing at home now.”

If you’re not ready to take down walls, consider creating a pass-through or adding a peninsula for a breakfast bar. Comfortable seating—at a peninsula, island, or nearby sitting area—is another must-have in today’s kitchens. “When I entertain, I want people to be there with me and feel comfortable,” says Williams. People are including sound systems in the kitchen so they can play music while their guests sit at an island or peninsula with a glass of wine before dinner, she says.

Islands are nearly universal in today’s kitchen updates. “Everybody wants an island,” says David Wagner, a kitchen designer in Long Beach, California. In addition to offering seating, islands define work areas in large, open kitchens and provide additional work and storage space. To ensure adequate ▶



**3. comfortable seating** near the kitchen encourages family and guests to socialize while the cooks prepare meals. Dinners for guests are often served in kitchen spaces, while formal dining rooms seem less important in today’s households.

**4. open floor plans** with kitchens flowing into family rooms, dining areas, or sitting spaces facilitate casual, kitchen-focused entertaining and allow family members to do a variety of tasks while sharing a common space.



**5. pull-down faucets** simplify washing chores with one sweep.

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