As real estate prices continue to climb, the cost to trade up to a larger home is on the upswing across the country, especially as markets remain hampered by tight inventory levels. As a result, more and more Americans are choosing to renovate their current homes instead of relocating. In fact, some forecasts predict that 2015 renovation spending could exceed the record of $324 billion set during the peak of last decade’s housing boom. While the hunt for more square footage can be challenging, homeowners shouldn’t feel like a costly second story or complete addition are the only options.

Here are five great ways to create or optimize space in your existing home.

1. **Finish an unfinished basement.** A basement renovation can hold limitless potential and increase the resale value or income potential of your home. Think about the possibilities: a home theater, office, spare bedroom, basement apartment or recreation room. The key to doing it successfully is to focus on what’s behind the walls, especially since moisture is a common issue in basements. Choosing the right insulation is critical. Look for products that are vapor permeable, dimensionally stable and mold and moisture resistant. Many contractors use Roxul Comfortboard IS semi-rigid sheathing board paired with Comfortbatt batt insulation to combat thermal bridging and protect against mold and mildew growth. An added benefit of this type of mineral wool insulation is that it’s also fire-resistant to 2,150 F. For interior walls and ceilings, Safe ‘n’ Sound insulation is ideal because of its ability to absorb noise and indoor traffic sounds, ensuring your newfound space is a peaceful one.

2. **Create a more open-concept feel with light and color.** If your home wasn’t blessed with towering windows, installing French doors and pot lights can encourage light to travel more freely, creating the illusion of space. Likewise, choosing a paint color for walls, trim and moldings that is lighter and cooler in tone (think soft grays or blues) will help to reflect light and give the room a more open feel.

3. **Remove non-load-bearing walls.** Homeowners have the opportunity to rethink the layout of their home by removing non-load-bearing walls. Removing structurally unnecessary walls can make your whole home feel larger, improve flow, lighting and the function of your home.

4. **Convert your garage into usable living or work space.** For many homeowners, the garage becomes an overflow room for storage — and is often a walk-in headache. Convert your garage (or a portion of it) into another living space, guest bedroom or home office. Install carpet and quality thermal insulation to block outdoor noise and keep in warmth.

5. **Choose furniture and accessories carefully.** Adopt a minimalist’s eye. Begin looking around your home for furniture or accessories that overwhelm the space. Interior designers recommend choosing low-profile or small-scale furniture for rooms with less square footage. Dual-purpose items, such as ottomans with storage chests inside, are a budget-friendly way to save on space while staying organized.
Pros And Cons To Including An Island In A Kitchen Redesign

Homeowners planning a kitchen remodel are no doubt considering whether to include a kitchen island in the new design. When the space allows, an island can be a fine way to enhance the look of a kitchen and impart an upscale appeal. Interest in kitchen islands has grown steadily for the past several decades. Introduced in the 1970s, islands became a popular place for guests to congregate and provided extra counter space for meal preparation and entertaining. The suburban migration led to bigger homes with larger kitchens. Through the 1980s and 1990s, homes grew even larger, and islands became a popular feature of kitchens across the country.

The increase in food-based programming on television has also contributed to the popularity of kitchen islands. As more people dabble with preparing their own gourmet meals, kitchen islands have become more convenient. Although there are many benefits to an island in the kitchen, there are also some disadvantages to kitchen islands. Weighing all the options can help homeowners design a kitchen layout that is functional, affordable and practical for the space they have.

Pros

Arguably the most significant advantage to having a kitchen island is the added space it provides. Many times islands are built with cabinetry that matches the rest of the kitchen design, and those cabinets provide storage space for pots, pans and other kitchen tools. Islands may double the storage space available in the kitchen.

Kitchen islands are also advantageous when preparing meals. Kitchen counter space can be easily gobbled up by toaster ovens, rotisserie cookers, microwaves, coffee makers, and various other countertop appliances. These appliances can take up valuable real estate that’s sorely missed when preparing meals. An island can be used solely for cooking and preparation, and some homeowners have incorporated cutting boards and a prep sink into the design of the island.

Islands also can be customized according to a homeowner’s needs. Instead of simply having cabinetry beneath the counter, some opt to have a wine cooler or even a bookshelf for keeping cookbooks within reach. An additional small dishwasher or beverage refrigerator may be tucked into the design of the island. For others, the island may be a makeshift kitchen office space.

Cons

Expense is a leading negative factor with regard to a kitchen island. The additional material necessary and the labor involved in installation may bust some homeowners’ budgets. Stationary islands can cost several thousand dollars to install, and this is money a homeowner may be better off investing elsewhere. In smaller kitchens, an island may be impractical because of the space limitation. Islands are typically at the heart of the kitchen and may interfere with walking space or cause clearance issues when the refrigerator door or cabinet doors are open. For homeowners who find space is at a premium in the kitchen, an island may not be the best idea. However, a rolling island that can be moved into position when needed, then stored in a convenient, out-of-the-way location might be a viable option.

Depending on the complexity of a kitchen island, its installation may extend the amount of time required to complete the kitchen renovation. This can prolong the length of time needed to complete the work. Running a gas or electric line and plumbing to the island may require a major overhaul and demolition. Kitchen islands are popular components of home designs. Before homeowners engage in any kitchen renovation that may include the incorporation of an island, they should know the advantages and disadvantages.

Homeowners should question whether a kitchen island is a practicality for their renovation projects.
No Room For A Door? Slide It Aside The Wall

(HIT) - There are many places through most houses where doors that slide rather than swing can provide space saving advantages. But genuine pocket doors that slide inside of walls can’t always be installed, due to obstacles such as room configuration or costs.

However, you still gain the advantages that pocket doors offer by using a unique hardware system from Johnson Hardware to install a wall mount door. Unlike a normal pocket door, a wall mount door is surface mounted outside the wall. Because it slides on a track, a wall mount door is ideal for locations where space required for a swinging door would be wasted.

It only takes a moment to think of how many of these locations there are in typical households. The obvious ones include baths, kitchens, halls, closets, storage or utility rooms, garage entryways, playrooms and home offices. With imagination, you will come up with many more. The ease of operating wall mount doors also makes them suitable for homes where there are disabled residents.

The Johnson 2610F Wall Mount Door Hardware makes installation an easy job. No close fitting is required, and the hardware can be readily adapted for particular installations. Virtually any door may be mounted because the hardware can support even solid core doors of up to 125 pounds.

Several quality features ensure that wall mount doors installed with the Johnson Hardware set will operate smoothly. The aluminum track has a concave, one point hanger channel for an unobstructed glide. Double wheel ball bearing hangers with swivel design hold nylon wheels evenly on track, are jump proof and never need lubricating. Track lengths are available up to 192 inches.

For help in understanding all the ways that wall mount doors can be put to work saving valuable floor area and adding decorative beauty to your home, write to L. E. Johnson Products, Inc., 2100 Sterling Avenue, Elkhart, IN 46516 or visit our web site at http://www.johnsonhardware.com.

In places where a swinging door would waste space and a door-in-the-wall can’t be installed, an easy to use hardware set from Johnson Hardware solves your problem by letting you wall mount a door. Johnson also offers Privacy Locks that can be installed in minutes—without invalidating the door manufacturer’s warranty.
Concrete is a popular structural material among homeowners. One of the more affordable options for patios and other structures, concrete also can be durable and attractive. However, because no material is impervious to damage, concrete will need to be maintained, and certain problems can arise when concrete is not properly installed.

Though an excellent material, concrete is not perfect. Even under ideal conditions, concrete can crack and breakage can occur. Here are some of the common complaints regarding concrete.

- Scaling and spalling: Scaling and spalling is the crumbling effect of concrete. Very often this occurs from changes in climate, particularly freezing and thawing that causes structures to expand and contract. In areas where freezing and thawing conditions exist, masons should not overwork the concrete in an effort to keep an abundance of air in the mixture. Entrapped air will help buffer the freeze/thaw conditions. Use of chemical fertilizers in and around concrete can also lead to scaling. Chemicals can break down the surface of the concrete. This is a particular problem when using rock salt and de-icing products during the winter. Over time, something as simple as table salt can etch concrete or cause spalling. The National Research Council’s Strategic Highway Research Program has found that magnesium chloride salt blends produce the least amount of damage on concrete surfaces.
- Discoloration: Concrete should have a uniform color if the same mix is used. But discoloration can occur if water is added at the job site, the concrete is of varying thickness or if the material does not cure uniformly. Color issues can also occur if hard troweling is used on the exterior concrete.
- Crazing: This is a phenomenon when the concrete shows several interconnected fine cracks. Cracks will appear when the concrete is
damp. Usually this occurs when cement paste comes up to the surface and then shrinks. To avoid this, masons should be careful not to finish concrete until all water has evaporated and not sprinkle water onto the concrete while finishing it. Using a broom finish also can help.

- Cracking: It can be disheartening to have a pristine concrete surface only to see cracks begin to form. Sometimes even with the best application, concrete can crack from subgrade settlement or shrinkage during drying and curing times. Utilizing flexible concrete joints to help with the expansion and contraction of the concrete can help. Also, including a low-shrinkage aggregate in the mix may alleviate major cracks.

- Staining: Staining does not result from concrete installation or finishing. Staining occurs after the fact, when liquids or other materials discolor the concrete. This can happen when fluids from a car in a driveway stain the concrete. Leaves and plant matter left on the surface of the concrete may also cause staining. The best way to alleviate stains is to prevent them in the first place. Always sweep or blow away debris. Maintain vehicles so they don’t leak fluid. Power washers can remove some stains, but it’s still best to prevent them in the first place. Problems can arise when building with concrete, but finding an installer who understands the nature of concrete can reduce the risk of those problems presenting themselves.
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The dishwasher is an unsung hero of many a kitchen. When a dishwasher is working properly, it can make fast clean-up of scores of dishes, silverware, and glasses.

As handy as dishwashers can be, sometimes they seem to lose their cleaning power. While inadequate cleaning may indicate the time has come to replace the dishwasher, many times all the appliance needs is a little maintenance and TLC.

Begin by investigating the interior of the dishwasher. Check for any visible food particles or debris, cleaning out any food traps at the bottom of the dishwasher. The mat-like item at the bottom is called the coarse filter and is meant to catch big particles that could prevent your tub from draining. Don’t forget to clean the rubber seals around the perimeter of the dishwasher where the door meets up with the tub of the dishwasher, as this is a prime location for debris to gather.

Running an empty dishwasher with a clarifying rinse can help wash away any residue and improve performance. Plus, this maintenance task can remove odors and refresh the dishwasher. Put two cups of white vinegar in the bottom of the dishwasher so that it will distribute through the appliance during the cleaning cycles. White vinegar will naturally break down old dishwasher soap and scale buildup inside of the unit. Consider a short rinse afterward with some baking soda to remove odors and scour the interior of the appliance as well. Baking soda and vinegar are popular cleaning substances and are safe to use around food items.

For more intense cleaning, create a bath of vinegar and water in your sink basin. Remove parts from the dishwasher, such as shelving and the utensil holder, so that they can soak in the solution.

Some dishwashers have removable spinning cleaning arms. Take these off, if possible, and let them soak to dislodge any residue that has clogged the water jets. Use a pipe cleaner or another flexible device to carefully remove

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any debris from the water holes. You may be amazed at what has built up in these small holes.

You also may need to inspect the drain line, which is often made of plastic and connected to the trap under the kitchen sink. On occasion, this tube can get blocked and prevent the dishwasher from draining effectively.

In addition to these cleaning techniques, using a rinse agent may help the dishwasher work better. According to Jet Dry, the maker of a popular rinse agent, rinse agents help your dishwasher rinse away residue that causes spots and film on dishes and glasses. They are designed to lower the surface tension of the water, causing it to sheet off the dishes during the final rinse.

This prevents the formation of droplets of water that can remain on the surface of the dishes and form spots and film. Maintaining a dishwasher with regular cleaning can help it perform better during each and every load. EL156198
Tips to finding the right contractor

Home improvement projects tend to be costly. Because of the considerable financial investment homeowners must make when improving their homes, it’s important to find a contractor you can trust and feel comfortable with. The vast majority of professional contractors are trustworthy and willing to work with homeowners to help them design the homes of their dreams. But there are still some tips homeowners can keep in mind as they begin their search for a contractor:

• Work only with licensed contractors. Licensed contractors have been verified as legitimate by your local governing body, removing much of the fears homeowners have with regard to finding trustworthy contractors. Unlicensed contractors may not be insured or bonded, and their estimates may be lower than their licensed competitors’ because they do not contribute to unemployment. Licensed contractors often are subjected to criminal background checks as well, calming homeowners’ fears about inviting strangers into their homes.
• Ask for recommendations. Word-of-mouth is great when looking for contractors. Oftentimes, a contractor’s best friends are his past clients. Ask friends or neighbors for recommendations on local contractors, inquiring about prices as well as each particular contractor’s demeanor and openness to suggestions. Contact your local Office of Consumer Affairs to check each contractor’s complaint history.
• Get written estimates. Before hiring a particular firm, get written estimates from several contractors. Some contractors will charge fees for the estimate, but they must inform you of those fees before the estimates are provided. Compare estimates so you can get a better grasp of how much your project will cost. While cost is important, try to avoid choosing a contractor based on cost alone, as a good rapport with a contractor who may be more expensive might make spending a little more money worth it.
• Make sure the contract is specific. When you choose a contractor, make sure the contract he or she provides is very specific, going into great detail about the specifics of the project. This contract should spell out the materials and equipment that will be used, as well as the final cost of the project, the payment schedules while the project is ongoing and the work schedule.
• Keep track of all paperwork and pay by check. Once you sign the contract, create a folder where you can store all paperwork. Scan each document so you can store them on your computer as well. When payments must be made, never pay in cash. Pay by check and do not pay for the entirety of the project upfront, opting instead to pay at predetermined intervals spelled out in your contract.

Nerves often come into play when hiring a home contractor, but homeowners who take a careful approach to the hiring process will likely end up hiring a trustworthy contractor who does great work. FH158414
Recolor Your Kitchen And Make It More Efficient

(MS) -- A lot goes on in the kitchen: preparing food, sharing meals, spending time with a friend over a cup of coffee, helping children with homework, baking for holidays -- and much more. If your kitchen could use an update to become an easier-to-use, more pleasant room, Woodcraft has some ideas and products to help you get started. “It’s amazing the difference you can make with just a few functional and decorative changes to your home’s kitchen area. Most of these projects can be completed in a weekend.

Cabinets
If you are not ready to replace kitchen cabinets, consider changing the color and hardware. Since the current trend is for darker cabinets, select an easy-to-use dark General Finishes Gel Stain, such as the popular java or antique walnut. If you choose to remove some doors for an open-shelf look, consider using a General Finishes Milk Paint shade for the interior to complement the exterior color. For easier door opening and closing, choose a Salice Hinge in a darker exterior color.

For cluttered countertops that are home to too many small appliances and other items, consider storing ones used only occasionally elsewhere, perhaps in cabinets. To protect your valuable kitchen knives and save counter space, follow Woodcraft product development manager Ben Bice’s example and build a knife block to mount underneath the kitchen cabinet. Bice designed the block to hold his high quality ZHEN knives. See Woodcraft Magazine Issue 60 (Aug/Sept 14) for Ben’s step-by-step directions to make your own knife block -- and knives, if you are interested.

Furniture
General Finishes Gel and Milk Paint are also good choices to recolor your wood furniture in shades that match or complement the new cabinet look. Milk Paint offers an opportunity to add a splash of color on a small piece of furniture, shelving or a plant stand to brighten the look but not overpower the kitchen. If your wood cabinets and/or furniture only need a cover-up for nicks, scratches and other damage, Touch-Up Pens, Fill Sticks and Burn-in Sticks from Touch-Up Solutions may be the answer. They come in 10 colors, ranging from light oak to black.

Countertop Runners
For kitchen drawers, upgrade the slides, changing from side mounts to undermount slides with Blum Tandem Plus Blumotion Concealed Drawer Runners.

Lighting
Add subtle lighting with Haefele 12-Volt Loox LED Strip Lights in cool or warm white. Ideal for background lighting, use under or around cabinets, around doorframes, and pretty much anywhere you want. Strips are flexible, easy to install and can be cut to size. LED lighting generates very little heat, uses less energy, and has a long service life. For more information about Woodcraft products, contact the store nearest you, visit www.woodcraft.com or call (800) 535-4482. FH149594

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