

Don't Move...Improve!

Remodel that 1970s House for Greater Efficiency and Style

Enjoy an improved living space that saves you money on your energy bills and your taxes.

by Barbara Baird

SHAG CARPET, WAGON WHEEL CHANDELIERS AND avocado appliances are easy and inexpensive items to replace when you're looking at giving a 30-something-year-old house a makeover. The big budget biters, however – especially windows and siding – can cost thousands of dollars.

How can you know which renovations matter and how will they improve the look and the “feel” of your home? Whether your project is replacing the oven or the front door, putting the emphasis on energy efficiency will definitely save money and add resale value to your home.

Start out small

If you live in the last generation's style of house and the appliances have not been replaced, it's time to start switching from harvest gold to stainless steel. Considering that the average homeowner spends \$1,900 on energy costs, it is worthwhile to look for appliances that have earned the EnergyStar® rating.

These qualified appliances use 10 percent to 50 percent less energy and water than other models use. Many appliances offer increased product performance in heating by offering higher British thermal unit (Btu) outputs, which means faster and safer heating capabilities and more off time for appliances.

Buy only one more water heater

Older water heaters, made of thicker steel and more porcelain than today's units, lasted longer. Most water heaters need replacement when their tanks rust through. When it comes time to replace your water heater, check with your electric cooperative to

see if it offers a Marathon® brand water heater – complete with seamless polybutylene inner tank, reinforced with filament wood fiberglass. Marathon water heaters are guaranteed not to leak for as long as you own your home.

This type of tank does not contain an anode rod, preventing corrosion. Instead, the elements include a thermally fused top element and a Teflon coated, stainless steel lower element – which protects the tank from an accidental “dry firing.” The whirlpool effect of its heating reduces sediment build-up on the lower element.

The energy savings of this tank offset the higher price of these water heaters that lies somewhere between two to three times as much as a conventional water heater. Some cooperatives offer financing or rebates for these units.

Stoke the fire

Nothing tops a real wood fire burning in the fireplace. Yet, even though a fire gives you warmth, the fireplace can actually suck heat out of a house and up the flue. Tight-fitting fireplace doors minimize the heat transfer and when a fire is not burning, an inflatable chimney pillow stuffed into the fireplace cuts down the heat loss, too.

You can upgrade your old fireplace by adding a heat-circulating grate made of steel pipes with a built-in fan that draws in the cool room air in one side and returns heated air out the other side. This grate's heat output can be as high as 40,000 Btu per hour.

There are other fireplace efficiency products – from throat dampers to inserts with fan systems and air control, operating more like a wood stove than an old-fashioned fireplace and saving you money.



Re-feather (or foam) your nest

If you think you're getting colder in the wintertime because you're getting older, think again. Maybe the insulation in your home is not all it should be, or where it should be. Some homes built 20 or more years ago have little or no insulation.

R-value recommendations will vary from climate to climate. Check locally to see what your R-values should be. Many electric cooperatives will offer a free energy audit of your home that not only includes consideration of its insulation, but also cold-air filtration, heating systems and other non-electrical systems. Almost any home can be buffed up with more insulation and the results will boost the R-value considerably. Insulation comes in various forms – fiberglass (in both batt and blown forms), cellulose, rigid foam board and spray foam – and lots of materials.

In hot climates, reflective insulation (aka radiant barrier) will save energy costs. When a radiant barrier is placed on an attic floor, it reflects the heat back toward the roof. A roof-mounted radiant barrier reduces the amount of radiation incident on the attic's insulation.

According to the Tennessee Valley Authority, radiant barrier insulation can yield an average of 17 percent savings.

Seeing the big picture (window)

According to EnergyStar, you will not recoup the cost of new windows by energy savings alone. The average savings is \$125 to \$450 per year for replacing single-pane windows with energy-efficient windows and \$25 to \$100 per year for replacing with double-paned windows. However, in a survey conducted in 2006 by Remodeling and Realtor magazines, costs recouped at resale by replacing old windows with either wood or vinyl fell between 71.5 percent (midrange vinyl in west north central U.S.) and 102.2 percent (midrange wood in Pacific coast states).

The Doors (not the band from the '70s, but your exits)

After 30 or more years, most doors have seen better days. Dings, nicks and kicks not only create unsightly entryways into homes, but also affect the doors' abilities to seal living



Appliance Life Spans

FROM APPLIANCE.NET

- 6 years – trash compactor
- 9 years – dishwasher, microwave
- 10 years – clothes washer
- 11 years – freezer, water heater (electric)
- 12 years – garbage disposal
- 13 years – refrigerator, clothes dryer, electric range
- 14 years – range hood
- 10 to 15 years – air conditioner, garage door opener
- 20 to 50 years – whirlpool tub

spaces. A better-fitting, energy-efficient door not only improves the gateway to your palace, it also improves your energy savings. And, a new door adds an instant facelift to your home.

To side or not to side?

If you decide that your home needs a complete facelift, do your homework on the topic of siding. Decide which R-value your home requires and work with a reputable siding dealer in your area to find the best type. Couple that siding with the proper insulation and you'll have a partnership that protects your abode and helps keep the heating or cooling inside. According to the above-mentioned cost-versus-value report by Remodeling and Realtor magazines in 2006, recouped costs vary from 104.7 percent for mid-range vinyl siding in the east south central U.S. to 73.4 percent for upscale siding in the east north central region.

Whatever form of siding you select, be sure it's maintenance free, a big plus for resale value and money savings.

Get paid to improve

Here's the best part of the refurbishing deal. Not only do you get to enjoy an improved living space that saves you money on your energy bills, you can also get rebates and tax credits for making the improvements.

Sometimes EnergyStar partners offer sales tax exemptions or rebates on qualified products. To see if your purchase applies, check the EnergyStar Web site: www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=rebate.rebate_locator.

Ask your tax advisor for an update on the status of the tax credits or go to www.energytaxincentives.org for more information.

R-Value & EnergyStar®

R-value - The function of insulation is to resist the flow of heat and is expressed as an "R" value. The higher the "R," the higher the resistance to heat flow. Go for the highest "R" you can afford.

What is EnergyStar®? It's a government/industry partnership that offers energy-efficient solutions, while protecting the environment for the future. The program began in 1992 and is supported by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Energy. To learn more about EnergyStar, go to the Web site www.energystar.gov.

