



I have a girlfriend who always looks like a million bucks — even though she prides herself on her frugality. She buys most of her clothes on clearance racks and at used clothing consignment shops, but she has an eye for quality fabrics and great lines. On top of that, she has an innate sense of what types of clothes are personally becoming and a talent for putting things together with panache.

Just as I admire Pam's ability to create a high-couture-look on a budget, I applaud people who pull off classy remodeling projects with limited finances. I'm particularly noticing these transformations now because the home my family built twelve years ago is showing signs of age and wear. So I've started researching ways to match my dreams to my purse. Here are some of the money-saving principles I've discovered.

# Class with a *Twist*

photo courtesy of [www.wilsonartflooring.com](http://www.wilsonartflooring.com)

Wilsonart Flooring now offers textured laminate flooring designs, from smooth and subtle to deeply chiseled, hand-crafted styles.

**LIMIT STRUCTURAL CHANGES.** If possible, find ways to enlarge a room without altering the roof or foundation (the two most expensive elements in construction). Perhaps you can move an interior wall, add a large bay window or cantilever a room out a couple of feet. Builder Dee Erickson of Billings, Montana, has often enlarged small bedrooms by bumping closets out on exterior walls. "This allowed me to reclaim the original closet space to make the room two feet larger," she explains.

You'll also save substantially if you don't move plumbing, wiring and jacks.

LEFT: Glass tile backed with silver foil makes a dramatic statement, even when used minimally.

CENTER: A clever application of paint and molding created the illusion of more substantial, high-end trim.

RIGHT: This room's "bookcase" is actually wallpaper.



photo by John Johnson, Welcome HOME Magazine

photo courtesy of Ann Newcomer, DesignWorks

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To learn more about many of the products mentioned or shown in this article, go to [HerHome.com/resources/decor](http://HerHome.com/resources/decor)

**CHOOSE A FEW FOCAL POINTS.** Pick a few special things to give a room pizzazz. “The rest of the budget can be cut considerably if you have something beautiful to focus on,” comments Interior Designer Ann Newcomer, ASID, of DesignWorks in Lincoln, Nebraska. “Often, you can take an element that is expensive and feature it in a very limited way...surrounding it with compatible materials that are much lower in price.

“For instance, I’ve taken expensive metallic tiles and granite listellos (usually used as liner bars over backsplashes) and used small pieces mixed with basic ceramic tile to create backsplashes and range backdrops.”

In a similar vein, instead of doing all of a kitchen’s counters in the same material, designers often limit an expensive material, such as granite, to an island.

Rather than covering an entire room with high-end wallpaper, Ginny Pokorny of Ehly’s Decorating in Omaha, Nebraska, has used the paper inside wall panels she created with thin molding. “This provided a dramatic effect, while providing considerable savings,” Ginny explains.

For a stylish accent on a backsplash or range surround, consider sets of tiles that mimic the look of a hand-painted mural and coordinate with plainer tiles. You can also

find sets of decals that form murals on tiles.

Companies that produce laser images on glass, tile, stone and solid surfaces offer limitless possibilities for designing a one-of-a-kind look. Imagine, a picture of family members transferred to a piece of marble used in a fireplace surround...or a wildlife image on black granite adorning the base of a kitchen island...or a favorite piece of artwork on bathroom ceramic wall tiles.

**EMPLOY CLEVER TECHNIQUES.** Ann Newcomer shares an approach she’s used in older homes with tall ceilings. “Many of these homes have cove molding at the ceiling line, but they can benefit from a heavier looking treatment. So I have added very simple, smaller moldings a couple of inches in on the ceiling and a couple of inches down on the wall. And then I’ve painted the three strips of molding and the surface in between a single accent color. As a result, it appears to be one large molding.”

Ann also suggests adding special details, such as molding, brackets and carved pieces to a stock line of cabinetry to make it look like higher-end or custom cabinetry.

**SHOP AROUND.** Ask around to locate builder surplus stores, builder discard areas in local home improvement stores and discount stores which sell carpet seconds that often have imperceptible flaws. You may be able to

find the perfect flooring remnant or a ready-made countertop that someone mismeasured. Chances are, you'll also come across handles and knobs for cabinets at a fraction of the regular cost. (If replacement handles don't quite line up with the holes in your existing cabinets, a back plate can often be added under the handle.)

By comparing cabinetry costs, you may discover a local shop may offer a better price than stock cabinets, particularly if you are willing to wait so they can be built during the slow season. Because the mixed look is popular in kitchens, shop at flea markets and garage sales for a used armoire, hutch or bookcase (which can work like a pantry cabinet). An interesting table can also become a charming island.

If you're doing a large scale project, you may be able to obtain special "roll pricing" if you use the same carpet throughout your home.

**USE ALTERNATE MATERIALS.** If you love the look of real stone, but a granite countertop would crush your budget, consider a counter or backsplash made of granite tile (which is much cheaper than a slab). Or you may want to look into laminated countertops with thin slabs of actual granite bonded to a mesh and then glued to a wood base. Yet another possibility is one of the new inexpensive laminates which look like granite. When mounted to a 45-pound density board with routed edges, installers can produce a beveled edge – without the tell-tale brown seams. Edges can also be trimmed with wood for a decorative look. But that's not all. Today's laminates do a great job of replicating a variety of stones, stained concrete, metal and solid surfaces as well.

There is also a wealth of look-alikes to choose from when it comes to flooring. There are laminates that look like oak, cherry, maple, cork and several stones. Also available, are vinyls that look like brick, wood and stone. The look of stone can be found in ceramic tiles, or even tiles made from a composite of vinyl and limestone.

Wallpapering offers still more ways to create a deceptively expensive look. Jen Jacobson of Ehly's Decorating in Omaha comments, "Wallpaper murals are much more affordable than actual murals and there are murals that replicate fireplaces, bookshelves, columns, library paneling and windows with views. Wallpapering that

resembles a brick or stone wall can be very attractive as a backsplash in the kitchen. We even carry a three-dimensional paper that looks like a cedar log house, which works well in a rustic family room."

Other products that look expensive include "liquid wallpaper" – a paint with multicolored specks which provides a sponge painting appearance (without the costly labor), rub-on stencils and paintable, textured wallpaper.

**REFURBISH INSTEAD OF REPLACE.**

Rather than replacing cabinets, consider painting them, doing a wash over the existing finish, or replacing the doors and door fronts and having the bases resurfaced with a veneer. Ann Newcomer feels refacing cabinets is particularly viable for homeowners who do not have children, but isn't sure "it would hold up well under the heavy use common with active families." A different look can also be achieved by replacing door panels with glass or fabric.

If the color of your appliances is dated, you may want to purchase wood or stainless steel panels to cover them or to have them painted by an appliance refinishing company or even an automobile paint shop.

For worn tubs and sinks, look under "Bathroom Remodeling" in the Yellow Pages for companies that resurface tubs and sinks. Be sure to ask about warranties.

**DO PROJECTS IN STAGES WHEN POSSIBLE.** Some things are relatively easy to do later to minimize initial expense, such as upgrading faucets, adding molding or putting roll-out shelves or spice racks in cabinets. Other projects, like installing ceramic flooring or thicker wood flooring, may create problems when lining up woodwork or cabinets.

With careful research, planning and choices, your purse and your dreams can coexist peacefully! ■

TOP AND BOTTOM: Blonder Home Accents offers a variety of wallcovering products to create architectural detailing and panoramic vistas.

CENTER: Wilsonart's Mesa Desert laminate mimics granite, with a special bullnose edge.



photo courtesy of Blonder Home Accents



photo courtesy of Wilsonart



photo courtesy of Blonder Home Accents

In addition to writing on home-building topics, Joyce Vollmer Brown is the author of several inspirational books. To learn more, go to [HerHome.com/resources/products](http://HerHome.com/resources/products)

