



# From bleak to chic

## 10 ways to improve your kitchen

Experienced interior designer and founder of Lavender & Sage, Mayke Hogestijn provides helpful hints and tips on how to give a tired kitchen a face-lift in 10 easy steps without starting from scratch

**W**e've all been there, haven't we? Faced with a kitchen that looks exactly what it is: old, well-used, outdated, grubby... Look at all the property programmes on the television and hear everybody repeating the same mantra: 'That kitchen will have to go.' But most of the time my reaction is 'Why?' In many (or even most) cases a complete replacement is not necessary at all. It's certainly not an option if you haven't got that kind of money to spare and can be a waste of money even if you do. If you have a kitchen that you feel needs updating, these 10 tips to transform your kitchen from bleak to chic might be helpful.

### 1. KITCHEN CUPBOARDS

The cupboards represent a huge chunk of your budget when it comes to redoing a kitchen, so have a careful look at them before deciding to consign them to the skip. In most cases you will find that although the carcasses may be a little frayed at the edges, they are still solid, in perfect working order and only need a good scrub to give them a new lease of life.

If the doors are irreparable, or too dated to be salvaged by a cosmetic job such as a lick of paint, then you'll need new doors and doorknobs. Nowadays there are lots of companies who only sell kitchen cupboard doors, in MDF or wood, painted, unpainted, traditional and modern, the choice is endless. A salvage centre is always a good place to pick up interesting period pieces or if you have a DIY store that will saw to measure, you can easily have panels sawn to the correct sizes to make

your own. Intrepid DIY-ers can even make them from scratch, in which case the sky is well and truly the limit. You might also consider alternatives to the traditional cupboard door, such as removing doors and replacing them with a curtain. Or you could even replace a drawer with a pullout basket for a rustic country look. Friends of mine have just revamped their French kitchen by making frames of rough-sawn timber, stapling chicken wire to the back and setting a nice fabric against it. Simple ideas like this can make a real impact without needing to strip your kitchen bare and start all over again.

### 2. WORKTOPS

If your worktop still looks OK, leave it right where it is. In many cases the back of the worktop will be fixed behind the lower splashback tiles and taking it out may necessitate re-tiling. However, if you do need to change the worktop, the choice is again limitless; wood, glass, concrete, granite, laminate, acrylic, tiles, whatever takes your fancy. Of course, if you can find the funds to buy tops in natural materials such as wood or granite, so much the better. If cared for properly, they will represent a once-in-a-lifetime investment. Cheaper surfaces like laminate will inevitably fray and have to be replaced again and again, which is a waste of money and energy.

### 3. SINK & TAPS

Replacing a sink is a bit of an undertaking, and in reality is usually only feasible if you're also replacing the worktop. If you can, go for a double bowl sink. Even if you yourself might not need >>

Left: Old cupboards can be vamped up by adding wooden panels. Alternatively, take the doors off and replace with gauze or chicken wire. Above: The details can make all the difference



it, when it comes to selling your house, a roomy sink will score points on the potential buyers' wish lists. And remember, even if your sink is nothing special, just replacing the lime scale-covered, rickety old taps can do wonders for the overall look. Taps vary from cheap to super-expensive, but a good quality, great looking model really need not break the bank.

#### 4. TILES

It's amazing how tiles can make or break a look. It's also amazing how unbelievably personal they are. Remember that when you decide to replace the tiles in your kitchen, or anywhere else in your home for that matter. If you think you're going to live in your house for the rest of your life, then go for it, do whatever you like. However, if selling is a possibility for the future, it is best to stay on the boring side of cautious. Nobody is going to object to a stretch of simple cream-coloured tiles, are they? Apart from thinking 'it's a bit boring, but hey, at least we can put our own stamp on it'. If you quickly want to hide ghastly tiles, as a stop-gap measure you can of course paint them. However, it's the cheap option and

will certainly be no good from the point of view of selling your house. If you don't want to go to all the trouble of removing the tiles and putting up new ones, then why not make the old ones disappear from view? Cover them with tongue-and-groove panelling, stainless steel sheeting, glass, Perspex, whatever you like. Just make sure to take extra care around the sink and cooker areas.

#### 5. APPLIANCES

Appliances are obviously where another huge chunk of the budget goes. Especially since, when buying new ones, you should really only buy A-rated ones. Yes, they're more expensive as an initial outlay but if you do your homework and buy smartly, you'll find good discounts that will take quite a lot of the financial edge off. After that they will continue to repay you by costing a lot less to run and serving you for a very long time. All of this in addition to having a clearer conscience vis-à-vis the environment! If the appliances you've got are still fine, but just showing a little age, then nowadays any DIY store has special paints available for them and you can just give them a bit of a face-lift. Or hide them behind a curtain.

“A BRIGHT, SUNNY KITCHEN IS IDEAL. NOTHING BEATS EATING IN THE KITCHEN, HAVING COFFEE, READING THE PAPER, A GLASS OF WINE, A CHAT. THE KITCHEN IS THE HEART OF THE HOME”

#### 6. FLOORS

May I just get this over with: carpets are an absolute no-no in kitchen, toilet or bathroom. A kitchen floor needs to be properly cleaned and so the surface needs to be hard. A round-up of all the usual suspects gives anything from 'cold' floors like tiles and stone to 'warm' floors like lino and varnished wood. As to the look: the least successful effect in my book is when the colour and/or material of your floors and cupboards are too similar. For example, if you have natural wood cupboard doors and a natural wooden floor, or 'wood-effect' lino, be careful that the two don't clash in their similarity.

#### 7. WINDOW TREATMENT

A bright, sunny kitchen is ideal, so take care with your window treatment. Unless your kitchen faces dead south, avoid covering up your windows with part-pulled blinds or thickly draped curtains. Avoid heavy fabrics that you would normally use in a sitting room and remember that kitchen curtains need washing regularly, so go for an easily washable material. Another alternative would be to have nothing at all: instead dress your window sill with pots of herbs and plants, for instance.

#### 8. LIGHTING

The first thing I tend to do in any house is to rip out the ceiling lights. I hate the type of light most of them give. I'm a strictly mood and task lighting kind of person and this applies to the kitchen too. When cooking, ceiling lights don't effectively light the task at hand and if you're sitting down to a meal, you want mood lighting to accompany it. Nowadays you can buy all sorts of under-cupboard lights with which you can light your entire worktop. Extractor fans come complete with a light, so that's your cooker sorted out. Go for spots, or any type of directional lighting where necessary, but avoid the cold soul-less glare that some of them give. And I don't know where it says in the rulebook that you can't have table lamps in your kitchen. I have three of them in mine. Just make sure they're not too close to sink or cooker.

#### 9. KITCHEN TABLE & CHAIRS

A favourite subject of mine. I grew up with a big kitchen, where we had all our meals, and where a large chunk of our lives happened. Nothing beats eating in the kitchen, having coffee in the kitchen, reading your paper there, having a glass of wine, a chat. The kitchen is the heart of the home. So even if you can only fit a little table for two in there, or a breakfast bar with a couple of comfy stools, do it. As a rule, go for the biggest table you can without obstructing the through-traffic too much. »



Above: Invest in accessories such as plants, wicker baskets and china pieces for a budget update; Facing page: Replace old taps with shiny new ones to give your sink a new lease of life



“CONCENTRATE ON A BEAUTIFUL BOWL OF FRUIT, LITTLE POTS WITH HERBS... A NICE TEA SET, CHEERFUL TEA TOWELS; PLEASING THINGS THAT WILL MAKE THE ROOM MORE APPEALING”

A kitchen table can never be too big. And if you have room for more furniture, then by all means see if you can fit in a sofa or some comfy chairs too.

#### 10. ACCESSORIES

We're talking accessories, not clutter. A pleasant lived-in look doesn't mean overflowing cupboards and messy worktops. It's not a very appetising look, and it makes you question the standard of hygiene. Find space in your cupboard for the cereal boxes, the cat food and the crackers and instead concentrate on a beautiful bowl of fruit, little pots with herbs, a kettle, toaster, a nice tea set, cheerful tea towels; pleasing things that will make the room more appealing and less cluttered.

It doesn't cost a lot of money to make your kitchen a joy to be in. All it takes is a little time and a little imagination. A revamped kitchen, in my view, can be much, much nicer than a brand spanking new one. So, unless your kitchen is truly a goner, give it a go. You'll have such a lot of fun, and just think how proud you will be at the end of it all. [fm](#)

Above: Fresh fruit and vegetables on display will brighten up a tired kitchen; Right: Strip furniture to expose wooden features.

Modern metal surfaces give a good contrast in texture and style

*Lavender & Sage offers traditional, stylish French inspired accessories and furniture for all areas of the home and garden. Visit [www.lavenderandsage.com](http://www.lavenderandsage.com) for more details.*

