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Cook's corner

Attention to detail revitalizes kitchen

Vinyl floor coverings, such as country quilt design from Mannington Resilient Floor's "Opus" Collection, can lend to the overall warmth of a kitchen.

THE KITCHEN is likely the most complicated room in the house. It's the center of activity — meals are prepared there, friends and families gather there, even laundry is sorted there.

Most home owners can name their kitchen's imperfections at the drop of a hat. But the remedies — remodeling or rebuilding — are often too costly, too devastating and too time-consuming to consider.

Surprisingly, decorators say many problem kitchens need only make-overs, not plastic surgery. And the work involved won't send the family out on the restaurant circuit for more than six months.

Space usually isn't considered a problem in a kitchen — lack of it is. If your kitchen is barely big enough to turn around in, start thinking smaller. Make your kitchenware do double duty — buy cookware that can go from the oven onto the table.

Many small families could get by with the smaller versions of major appliances, like compact washers and dryers and mini-microwaves. Many appliances can be attached under the cabinets where there's loads of unused space.

IF A SMALL TABLE or bar busily accommodates the family, try using larger plates that easily contain meals, eliminating the need for extra dishes, according to an article in *Glamour* magazine.

See walls and doors as potential storage spaces. Try hanging steel mesh racks on the walls or ceilings for utensils and pans. A collapsible shelf could be mounted on a closet door for instant serving space. You can also add temporary counter space with put-up-take-down tables.

Light walls, such as yellow or beige, will make a space seem larger.

Maybe your kitchen just needs a shot of excitement. If the floor looks drab and lacks luster and shine even after cleaning, you might want to replace it with carpet, firm or resilient flooring. The floor can be the focal point of the room and serve as a unifying element.

"The most popular patterns are light in color and very simple in design," says Albin J. Milwid, vice president and director of styling for Mannington Resilient Floors. "They will remain compatible with color and design changes that may occur over the years in a room. Keep the floor design simple and be adventurous when choosing wall decorations and window treatments."

Terence Conran, contemporary designer and owner of Conran and Habitat stores, recommends plastic laminates since they are simple to cut to size, easy to maintain and usually heat resistant. But a good chopping board is required since most laminates scratch.

"Color, of course, is the easiest element to change. But before you pick up the brush, consider the amount of natural light in the room. Blue tend to be cold and work best in a room with natural light. Bright colors, such as yellows, are sunny and cheerful, good choices for rooms with less light."

In the "Better Homes and Gardens New Decorating Book" (Meredith, 1981), its editors suggest painting everything in a drab kitchen white: walls, cabinets, woodwork, ceilings, the floor, the works. Sprinkle color with posters, prints, dish towels and colorful kitchen accessories. Ceramic tile can also add sparkle.

A dark kitchen with wooden cabinets can be remedied by painting cabinetry with bright high-gloss enamel, woodwork in a contrasting hue or white. Try adding new cabinet pulls, too.

ONCE YOU'VE made your kitchen space more attractive and space efficient, why not make it energy efficient as well? A lower heat bill may just mean more money to fund the repairs.

Self-cleaning ovens consume large amounts of energy, so clean them by hand.

- Defrost foods before cooking.
- Try baking several things at once instead of one single item.
- Do not peek into the oven while it's on. Each peek drops the temperature by 25 to 50 degrees.
- Use toaster ovens, portable appliances or microwave ovens to cook small quantities of food.
- Try heating a ceramic tile while baking. Use the tile, rather than the oven, to keep foods hot.
- Run the dishwasher for full loads only.
- Turn off your ice maker in the refrigerator when not in use.
- Cool hot foods before refrigerating.

By starting with the premise that the kitchen is your work space and your family's favorite room, you'll make the most intelligent improvements and your kitchen will suit the life you lead.

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