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Three upgrades sure to turn kitchen time into quality time



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(BPT) - The average American spends an hour a day in the kitchen preparing food and cleaning up afterward, according to the [American Time Use Survey](#)

(http://www.bls.gov/tus/tables/a1_2013.pdf) by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Add in the time it takes to put groceries away, load and unload dishwashers, organize cabinets and pantries or

just hang out, and you spend a whole lot of time in your kitchen.

But do you really enjoy that time? Whether cooking is your favorite activity or you would rather clean the bathroom, the livability and usability of your kitchen can directly affect how you feel about the time you spend there.

If you're considering a kitchen renovation - among the most popular and profitable of all home improvements - keep in mind the value of upgrades that will enhance the efficiency, practicality and beauty of the space. This type of improvement will not only pay off at the time of resale, but can improve the time you spend in your kitchen.

Here are three key kitchen upgrades that can elevate the appeal and usability of your kitchen:

Improved natural lighting and ventilation

The positive effects of natural lighting on mood are well documented. If your kitchen is small and dark, it can feel dingy and tired, no matter how new your appliances or shiny your granite countertops. Consider adding natural light sources such as skylights and roof windows. Not only can these natural light sources improve the feel of your kitchen, they can decrease the need for artificial lighting.

What's more, if you opt for an Energy Star-qualified, solar-powered fresh air skylight, like those made by Velux, you can improve your kitchen's ventilation as well. These skylights create a chimney effect that passively vents fumes, odor, humidity and cooking smoke from the kitchen without the need for a noisy, less efficient exhaust fan.

Adding energy efficient solar blinds can allow you to control the amount of sunlight that enters your kitchen, closing the blinds to keep the room cooler in summer and opening them to admit more warming light in winter. Operated by remote control, solar skylights and blinds, as well as the installation costs, are eligible for a 30 percent federal tax credit. Visit www.veluxusa.com (<http://www.veluxusa.com>) to learn more.

Upgraded fixtures

Sinks and faucets are functional essentials for a kitchen, but they can – and should – also make a design statement. Replacing a basic, dated faucet and swapping out an older sink can have a significant impact on the overall look and utility of a kitchen – for a fraction of the cost of grander renovations.

It's possible to find new sinks that fit virtually any design taste. Stainless steel provides a sleek, modern look while delivering outstanding durability. Apron sinks, which come in a variety of materials, blend well with a rustic design theme. Undermount and integrated sinks eliminate unsightly edges on countertops. You can also find a variety of basin styles in virtually every material, from single to double basins and prep sinks.

Whatever sink you choose, be sure to accent it with a high-tech faucet. Pull-down faucets make cleaning and filling pots a breeze, while touch-free faucets allow you to turn the flow of water off and on without ever touching the faucet itself – thereby avoiding the spread of germs. A vast array of colors, styles and handle types ensure you can find an upscale faucet that improves usability and looks great in your kitchen.

Energy-efficient appliances

Appliances are a kitchen element well worth a little extra investment. Considering how much the average American family uses their refrigerator, dishwasher, microwave and stove, improving the usability and efficiency of these appliances can both elevate your enjoyment of the kitchen and save you some money in the long run.

In the typical American home, appliances represent 13 percent of the household's total energy consumption, according to the Department of Energy. Replacing older appliances with newer, more energy-efficient models can reduce your energy costs. For example, replacing an older refrigerator with an Energy Star certified appliance could reduce your energy costs as much as \$300 over the lifetime of the refrigerator, according to the Department of Energy.

What's more, newer appliances offer many of the high-tech features that make life in the kitchen easier, from touchscreen interfaces and temperature controls on dishwashers to Wi-Fi enabled refrigerators. For more kitchen ideas visit www.houzz.com. (<http://www.houzz.com/ideabooks/Kitchens>)

Supplemental Information

Secondary Images



Quick Read

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If you're considering a kitchen renovation, keep in mind the value of upgrades that will enhance the efficiency, practicality and beauty of the space. Consider adding natural light sources such as skylights and roof windows. These natural light sources can improve the feel of your kitchen, and decrease the need for artificial lighting.

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Image Caption(s):

Caption 1

Solar powered fresh air skylights with energy efficient designer blinds in the kitchen can save valuable wall space for storage while providing natural light, passive ventilation and style. Solar powered skylights and blinds, along with installation costs, are eligible for a 30 percent federal tax credit.

Caption 2

Skylights bring not only daylighting and fresh air into the bath but provide privacy as well. Enjoy natural light and passive ventilation even when wall window coverings are closed. Solar powered fresh air skylights and blinds, along with installation costs, are eligible for a 30 percent federal tax credit.

(Captions appear only on BrandpointContent.com.)

