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Classic Kitchens

for less

Exclusive appliance Ratings

Most reliable brands

Ideas for every budget

**Best stores for price
& selection**

PLUS
**Countertops,
flooring & more**



The classic kitchen

Add style and function for less with our latest Ratings and best tips



THINK ENJOYMENT, not resale value. Kitchen remodeling today is all about what you need, rather than some over-the-top designer's checklist that makes slabs of fine Italian marble, a butler's pantry, and gargantuan appliances seem as necessary as a refrigerator and range. "People aren't settling for less, they're just realizing that they don't need so much excess," says Laura DuCharme Conboy, an architect in La Jolla, Calif.

We call it the return of the classic kitchen—one that's welcoming, efficient, and timeless, not glitzy or supersized. In short, a room you want to spend time in for years to come.

And now is a perfect time to get started, before remodeling activity starts to heat up later this year, as Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies predicts. You'll find plum deals on countertops and flooring, the best contractors eager for work and willing to negotiate, and stylish, less-expensive appliances with premium features—such as induction on ranges and cooktops and improved insulation on refrigerators—that boost function and efficiency. You'll also see a growing number of "green" products, such as bamboo flooring, that deliver performance and value.

How much will it all cost? We took top-performing products from our extensive tests and created three design schemes. The first is for a \$5,000, do-it-yourself makeover. The next one ups the budget to \$15,000, which is roughly the average spent on a kitchen remodel this year, according to the National Kitchen & Bath Association. The third, for \$50,000, targets a full-scale gut renovation.

Tastes vary, but the schemes will give you a sense of how far your money will go. Then use our reports for recommendations of like-priced models and materials, as well as in-depth advice for incorporating them into your design. Simply want to spruce up the kitchen you have? Check page 42 for small appliances and kitchen tools that cost \$200 or less.

No matter how much money you plan to spend, a few simple rules apply:

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Don't rush. If it's been a while since you thought about remodeling, you'll be pleasantly surprised by the wealth of innovative products that combine value, performance, and good looks. Take the time—anywhere from a few weeks to several months, depending on the scope of your project—to meet with pros, browse the Internet, and visit showrooms and home centers. Haste can also be expensive. Changing their minds after the work got started typically added about \$1,500 to the cost of a kitchen project, according to almost 3,000 readers we surveyed about the hidden costs of remodeling.

Don't get stuck on size. Bloated showpieces are out. In addition to being expensive, huge kitchens can be exhausting to work in. There should be only about 4 to 9 feet of space between the sink and the refrigerator or between the sink and the stove, according to the National Kitchen & Bath Association. Islands should be only 3 to 4 feet deep and 3 to 10 feet wide and have a 42-inch-wide aisle between the island and surrounding cabinets. Anything bigger can be hard to use and clean.

Beware of budget busters. "While we're at it..." are words that can break any budget. It's one thing to make unexpected structural repairs (in fact, you should leave a 10 to 15 percent cushion in your budget for such surprises), but it's another to add decorative flourishes just because a skilled carpenter happens to be in your kitchen. But don't settle for a cheap option, promising yourself that someday you'll replace it with what you really want. "In 30 years, I've never had a client actually come back and make the change," says Mark Karas, a Boston designer and president of the NKBA.

Get everything in writing. Whenever you hire a pro, the written contract should list each phase of the project; every product, including the model number; and copies of each contractor's license and workers compensation and liability insurance to confirm that they're still in effect. Call references and, if possible, visit them for a visual inspection.

DID YOU KNOW?

You don't have to buy all of your appliances from the same brand. But if you decide to, Kenmore and Whirlpool have been reliable across refrigerators, ranges, and dishwashers.

\$5,000: Do it yourself

If you're willing and able to do most of the work, \$5,000 can go a long way, with a couple of important caveats. First, the kitchen must be small enough—say 150 to 200 square feet—to keep material costs in check. A \$5,000 remodel also assumes you're happy with the basic layout. Knocking down walls and moving appliances around can quickly raise the budget to five figures.

Kenmore 9611[2] 30-inch electric smoothtop range \$560

Laminate countertop \$1,000*

Price Pfister Delton two-handle kitchen faucet in polished chrome \$60

Maytag MITXEMMW[W] top-freezer refrigerator \$750

Eljer topmount sink \$140

Nafco Permastone vinyl floor \$585

Painted cabinets and new hardware \$350

Kilz Casual Colors Satin paint (Walmart) \$22 per gallon

Appliances \$1,960 You can get a new range, refrigerator, and dishwasher that don't sacrifice performance or efficiency. Our refrigerator choice, for example, offers excellent cooling and the lowest operating cost (\$48 per year) of any top-freezer we tested. Unless manufacturers offer a free stainless-steel upgrade, opt for a basic white or black finish; either can be stylish. "I love the look of white appliances with white cabinets," says Pam Lamaster-Millet, an architect in Chicago. "Depending on the cabinet style, the result can be traditional, classic, or supermodern."

Countertops, floors, and walls \$1,645 The average kitchen has 56 square feet of counters. Laminate can get you a new look for \$1,000 or less. Vinyl flooring wears well and goes down easy, especially if you choose tiles or planks. Paint walls.

Cabinets \$350 If your cabinets are stable but look outdated, paint and new hardware can make them look fresh again. Consider removing some of the cabinet doors and painting their interiors a contrasting color to add some pop. (See "Can These Cabinets Be Saved?" on page 19 for details.)

Sink, faucet, and lighting \$320 Our tests have found that sink and faucet prices have little to do with performance. Stay on budget with a top-mount, single-bowl sink in stain-resistant enamel-on-steel and a two-handle faucet in a chrome finish, which proved fairly durable, though a heavy-duty scouring pad can scratch it. Undercabinet lighting illuminates counters. Figure on one corded 12-inch strip light for every 4 feet of counter.

Unexpected expenses: \$725

*Includes installation

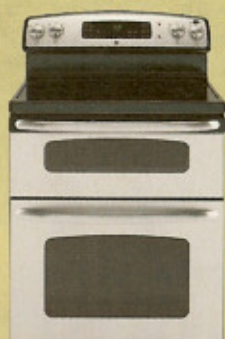
\$15,000: Some assembly required

To make this budget work, you'll need to hire the various contractors and manage the project yourself and stay within the existing footprint. You may be able afford a kitchen designer, many of whom work on retainer, but forget about hiring an architect or general contractor to change the layout. Our budget

leaves room for one small-scale construction project, say, removing a non-load-bearing wall to open the kitchen up to an adjacent space (about \$1,000), adding a built-in island (\$1,000 and up), putting in a pantry (\$500), or framing out a new window (\$1,000).



Refaced cabinets, new hardware, and storage systems
\$3,100



GE JB850DP(WW) 30-inch smoothtop double oven
\$1,000



Whirlpool Gold GS5VHAXW(Q) side-by-side refrigerator
\$1,800



Ceramic tile backsplash \$345*
(\$10 per sq. ft.)



Armstrong Marmorette linoleum floor
\$1,300*



Moen Arbor classic stainless one-handle high-arc pull-down kitchen faucet
\$230



Elkay stainless-steel, universal-mount double sink
\$250



Solid-surfacing countertop
\$3,100*

Appliances \$3,450 This budget guarantees you the option of stainless steel. Since it looks similar from manufacturer to manufacturer, you can mix and match brands to find the best deals. Moving up in price lets you take advantage of some of the latest appliance features. For example, the range we chose has a second oven, which allows you to prepare two dishes at the same time at different temperatures.

Countertops, backsplash, and floors \$4,745 Stepping up to solid surfacing gives you a stain- and heat-resistant material,

and the warm, welcoming colors go all the way through the material. Seams between pieces and the sink (if you use a sink made of solid surfacing) are invisible. You'll need to hire a pro to do the installation. Linoleum's all-natural makeup is worth the premium over vinyl if you're going for a green kitchen.

Cabinets \$3,100 If your cabinets are too far gone to repaint or refinish but you can't afford new ones, refacing is a good middle ground. Accessorizing the base units with pull-out shelves, lazy Susans, and a retractable trash can improves storage.

Sink, faucet, and lighting \$720 Though it can cost more, an undermount sink offers a cleaner look. And you can wipe countertop spills directly into the sink. A pull-out faucet with an integrated sprayer helps with the dishes. We chose one with a PVD (physical vapor deposition) finish that resists scratches. As for lighting, a \$15,000 budget should let you hire an electrician to install hardwired undercabinet fixtures, which are more discreet than corded fixtures.

Labor: \$1,000
Unexpected expenses: \$1,985

\$50,000: Let the pros do it

Now you're into a major remodel. Given the costs and complexities, you definitely need a general contractor to oversee the operation. In the old days, GCs could command a hefty markup for their oversight and expertise, but those days are gone. Still, even if you save a few grand on the project

management, you'll still have to make some smart decisions. "Being flexible with the design can help," says Michael Frederick, an architect in Charleston, S.C. "For example, instead of choosing a specific stone countertop, we'll see what our suppliers have the best deal on."



New cabinets
\$9,100



Jenn-Air JFC2290VE[S]
cabinet-depth, French-
door, bottom-freezer
refrigerator \$2,800



Delta Pilar
Waterfall faucet
with Touch2O
Technology
\$440



GE Café
CS980SN[SS]
\$2,800



Glass tile backsplash
\$1,380* (\$40 per sq. ft.)



Quartz
countertop
\$4,200*



American Standard
Culinaire undermount
double sink \$675



EcoTimber Woven
Honey WBH061
bamboo flooring
\$1,900*

Appliances \$6,450 No need to drop \$20,000 on commercial-grade appliances, which are often repair-prone and more expensive to fix than mainstream models, according to our surveys. What's more, our tests have found that faux-pro styles can deliver better or comparable performance for about half as much as their commercial counterparts.

Countertops, backsplash, and floors \$7,480 Stone countertops and wood floors are still the default options for high-end kitchens. But quartz is giving granite a run for the money. "A lot of people prefer the consistency and low maintenance of

quartz," says Alan Zielinski, a certified kitchen designer in Niles, Ill. Our tests have found that factory-finished floors are more durable—and less messy—than those finished on-site; plus the finish is covered by the manufacturer's warranty. But it may be harder to exactly match existing wood floors.

Cabinets \$9,100 New cabinets are usually the priciest part of a remodel. You could easily blow your entire budget on custom units. Our budget assumes semi-custom cabinets, which our tests have found to be as durable as custom units. (See sidebar on facing page for choosing materials.)

Sinks, faucet, and lighting \$2,115 A double-bowl sink lets you rinse and soak at the same time. We opted for the convenience of a hands-free faucet, which more manufacturers are bringing to market. We haven't tested the above model from Delta, but it has the no-drip, no-stain warranty we recommend for all faucets. More designers are specifying energy-efficient, long-lasting LED fixtures (priced at \$100 to \$150) for kitchens that are being rewired.

Labor: \$17,355
Unexpected expenses: \$7,500