

Home Improvement Projects That Pay

by
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In these times of looming foreclosures many people are asking themselves what **THEY** can do to improve the value of **THEIR** homes. And if you are one of **THEM**, then **YOU** have come to the right place. What follows is a list of carefully compiled do it yourself projects that nearly anyone can do and which are virtually guaranteed to increase the value and selling price of your home.

Cleaning Up The Dump: We -- that is to say, I -- started this little experiment by inviting a real estate broker over to evaluate our -- which is to say, my -- house. He immediately saw the potential of the place, but noted that it needed a few small improvements. I believe his exact words were, "You'll never sell this place looking like this. Clean it up! Get rid of the motorcycle blocking the front door," and so on. Wacky advice to be sure, but desperate times call for desperate measures. Anyhow, I wasn't really attached to the bike -- it had come with the house -- but I still sort of found it useful sitting in the entry hall as it was, all taken apart and dripping oil on the tile. I noticed that I didn't have to talk to my neighbors as often as long as the bike was there. It cut down on the cost of sugar and what not... or at least it would have, if I ever had that problem. Whatever, I won't bore you with the details, the bikes, the gutted cars, and the newspapers piled to the rafters: I got rid of them all. I even got \$50 for the bike. The guy said something about it being an old pan head or something.

Anyhow, I got rid of the stuff, called the real estate guy back. And when he wouldn't come out again, I called another one. Once again without boring you with the details, after much hand wringing the guy said, I might maybe get a quarter mill for the place, maybe more if I spruced it up. So what are we looking at? The house originally valued at \$0 was suddenly worth \$250,000 after a little general clean up. That's a net increase \$250,000 +\$50 for the Harley. Not bad for a day's work.

Washing the Windows: I know what you're thinking here, I don't have any windows. Yeah, that's what I thought too, but the real estate guy pointed them out to me. He said, "These are windows and if you clean them, you'll be able to see right out of them." What do you know, he was right. A hose, a bucket of water, and three hours later, and I discovered that my house has sixteen windows. Now, they let the light in, so you may want to think this over before you actually pull the trigger and take any action, but if you do, they tell me a new window can cost up to \$1,000. So sixteen windows at \$1000 yields a net increase in value of \$16,000. Ka-ching! I'm minting money.

Dusting: This really wasn't so lucrative. It's sort of easy though, so I figured I'd keep it on the list. Cobwebs, dust bunnies, and grime on the walls: it's not a selling point and some folks actually care. Anyway, I figured after I spent the weekend dusting and washing the walls it saved me the hassle of repainting the place. Call it \$5,000 for a remodeled interior. I'd break out the outside of the house for another line item, but honestly I was too lazy then, and I'm too lazy now. I ended up paying a guy \$250 to power-wash my house. About an hour later he said that it was as "good as new." I figure he knew what he was talking about. And since siding would have cost a good \$25-50,000, I say let's split the different and call it \$45,000. With the interior that comes to an even \$50,000 and my little fixer-up project is starting to turn into quite the money maker. I probably could have sold the house just as it was, but to be honest at \$316,000, I wasn't exactly what you would a "motivated" seller -- not yet.

Vacuuming: This one might seem self evident, and sticklers for categories might want to lump it in with the dusting, but I actually went out and bought a vacuum cleaner (and at \$300, those suckers are expensive), so I'm going to give vacuuming its own section. Besides, after a few quick pass-byes, I suddenly realized I'd I no longer have to replace the carpet. At 1,500sq' at \$20/sq' that little \$300 investment ended up netting me \$29,700, which we'll just call \$30,000 cause I've got no intention of taking that vacuum cleaner with me and hobbling me for the rest of my life. Truthfully, I never knew owning a house would be so much work. In the end, I'm sort of glad it took me 20 years to find out.

Washing the Dishes: If you're like me, when you first move into a new place, you resolve that this time its going to be different and that you're going to get on a steady routine and wash those dishes every night -- or every other night; because really being a bachelor and all, there's not really much to wash after the first night -- but then, even this limited resolve disappears and you end up washing the dishes once a week, once a month, or -- if you're anything like me -- you start treating it like underwear and decide it's simply easier to buy a new package of skivvies whenever the old pair gets to be so grungy that even I won't wear it. Now obviously with the plates, I went to paper pretty darn fast. But under the bags of refuse there's some china. And no, I didn't actually wash them. I just threw the lot out when it came time to clean up and just went down to Wal-Mart and got me a cheap ole' set to put in the pantry. But here's the thing, from now on, I'm sticking to takeout; and without grouting a sink or retiling a thing, I got myself a kitchen that's as good as new. A typically kitchen remodel costs upwards of \$75,000, so cleaning those dishes is like money in the bank.

Cleaning the Bathroom: Look, you don't want to know the details on this one. I don't want to know the details on this one. I cut a deal with the neighbor's kid, gave him a disc sander, a weed whacker, and a bottle of bleach and told him I'd give him a \$100 bucks if he got the place so clean his mother would come over for

a bath. She really wasn't that keen on the idea. And after much yelling, and frequent threats to call the cops, we decided \$250 was a fair price for the kids labor; and no, she wasn't getting naked anywhere near me. My what a feisty woman! I think I'm in love. Anyhow, complete bathroom makeover, call it \$30,000. Getting to stare at the neighborhood hottie for a half hour as she turns beat red, threatens to call the cops, and nearly goes ballistic... priceless.

Cutting the Lawn: By the time I got to this item, I knew I was almost done, but I could still sense that there was still something different about my house, something that differentiated it from every other house on the block. I mean, my neighbors are an anal retentive lot with their manicured lawns and well groomed hedges, whereas I was obviously going for the freeform jungle look. After 20 years of neglect, actually doing anything about it sort of seeming like it would be extremely hard work, I figured I'd take my chances and hire the hottie's kid again. But just to make sure I didn't get on her bad side, I paid her to put in a flower garden along with everything else. \$1,000!!! Give a girl a blank check and they walk all over you. I think she got carried away. Who spends \$1,000 on a flower garden? Well, after I calmed down, did a little research, and learned that adding some decent landscaping can add 0% to the total value of your house, I felt a little better. But still, \$1000 on flowers. Buying a hooker would have been cheaper. Eh, but then I was virtually rolling in the moolah. I figured my house was now easily worth a cool half million. You do the math. $\$451,000 + 10\%$ equals a half mill from where I'm sitting.

Anyhow, there it is in a nutshell. A few easy weekends, a case or two of beer, and a thousand bucks for you know who, and my house went from, "You'll never sell this dump," to something like \$496,100. That's an increase of like... well, like lots, and if you're mathematically inclined you could figure it as a percentage, but it would be, like, off the charts, I'm sure. I mean, you'd never get that type of return in the stock market -- not these days.

Of course, now that I've gotten to know my neighbors and their sunbathing habits (those windows aren't such a bad thing, after all), I don't think that I want to sell. Leastwise, not as long as Miss. Hottie, "Just call be Abby," is bringing me out a glass of lemonade whenever I trim the hedges. But I think you get the picture.

Next week I'm going to try shaving, washing my clothes, and making the bed. I don't really know how any of that relates to housing values, but Abby seems to think they would be a "Big Improvement," and I just sort of like the way she smiles when she says that.