

Going From Keeping Up with the Joneses to Keeping Up with Home Improvement Television

What Every Homeowner and Seller Needs to Know

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Home improvement television, including Home and Garden Television (HGTV), Do It Yourself (DIY), The Learning Channel (TLC) and several other networks have emerged since the late 90's to affect how we view others and our own homes. In fact, in 2016, HGTV was the fifth highest ranked cable television network during a time when many cable networks were on the decline.

Before I entered the business of real estate, I could not get enough of two home improvement shows. *Trading Spaces*, which aired from 2000 – 2008 on TLC, featured two sets of neighbors challenged with redecorating one room in each home over three days with a \$2,000 budget and the services of a designer. *Trading Spaces* is one of the shows credited for launching nationwide interest in home improvement television. A little known fact is that Ty Pennington, who later hosted *Extreme Makeover Home Edition*, got his start as a carpenter on *Trading Spaces*. What captivated me about this show was the debate about how to best spend the \$2,000 budget and how often the neighbors doing the redecorating focused on their own tastes, which ultimately ended poorly. Last month, TLC announced that a revived show would be produced for the 2017-18 season.

My other favorite show, *Designed to Sell* which aired from 2004 – 2011, featured a designer and contractor given a \$2,000 budget and charged to help homeowners fix up a home that is about to go on the market or that has been on the market but has not attracted buyers. Of course the \$2,000 does not take into account the sweat equity required by the homeowners. I was truly amazed at how much

changing just a few things can alter the first impression a home makes. The show really engrained in me the importance of appealing to the largest number of potential buyers and not giving in to the temptation to decorate to my taste. I also learned the importance of staging, which the host often likened to trying on an outfit for an important event - you wouldn't walk into a store and buy an outfit without trying it on and seeing how it looks all together, right? Once the makeovers were complete, the host would hold an open house and interview buyers as they walked through. Of course the refreshed homes sold quickly and for more money than the homeowners had hoped. I'm not sure if that was true 100 percent of the time, but it was fun to watch regardless.

Now that I own my own real estate brokerage, I cannot help but think of those home improvement shows, plus the slew of new ones breaking records such as *Fixer Upper*, *House Hunters*, and *Property Brothers*. The challenge for Realtors and especially for contractors is that the rest of the world thinks you can buy a home for \$100,000 and completely remodel it for another \$80,000, since that's what they see on television. Don't want to get off on the wrong foot with a designer or contractor? Avoid mentioning *Fixer Upper* or HGTV in general. Several contractors have told me they now have to be the bad guys and explain to homeowners that things in California, especially on the Central Coast, cost more than in Texas. Homes here are worth (on average) 8-12 times more than homes in Texas.

So how has home improvement television shaped how I help clients and even how I approach design in my own home? I start by accepting the fact that most people are watch-



Before

ing these shows, browsing on Pinterest and stalking Zillow.com. Then, I use what I've learned to help my clients prepare their homes to make the best first impression. You do not have to spend a fortune to make a dramatic difference. Remember, most home buyers head out to look at open houses or search online right after they have just watched their favorite home improvement shows. What does this mean? They have expectations, and they have access to far more information than you think they do about your home, down to what you paid for it and when.

So, why not exceed their expectations?

Whether you are getting ready to sell your home or just want to refresh one or more of its dated features, I challenge you to see what a little creativity can do. In my experience, there is one common but dated feature of homes built or remodeled in the 1970's and 80's that buyers unequivocally do not want to see: recessed fluorescent light tubes covered with opaque plastic panels and framed with oak-stained wood trim. Even though you may have grown up with either of these styles in your kitchen, buyers today probably do not share your affinity and will deduct from their mental budget as they are walking through your home.

Changing a dated feature may seem like an expensive task suited only for professionals. With the exception of the electrical work, I will go out on a limb and say a novice DIY'er could tackle this project in a weekend with a little help. First, go online and search "kitchen ceilings" or "recessed fluorescent light makeover ideas" to see what you can find and then recreate it within your budget. I always start with Houzz.com and Pinterest, which I'll admit, can be a little overwhelming. If you have a white kitchen, try adding "white" to your search terms. If you are going for an old world style, try adding "old world." While browsing, decide if you want to install two or three pendant lights, one chandelier, or a number of recessed lights for your light source. Keep in mind that the biggest reason for the popularity of fluorescent light fixtures is because of the amount of light they provide. To complete your project, follow the next steps:

1. Grab your cell phone and take a few "before" photos. You'll love looking at these when all is said and done!
2. Be sure the electrical breaker that is supplying electricity to the kitchen is off and add drop cloths to the floor and over any appliances.
3. Remove the plastic panels, the wood trim, the fluorescent light tubes and fixtures.
4. Add or have your electrician add the junctions for your new light fixtures.
5. Use butcher paper to create a template to trace where your light fixtures will be located and predrill your new holes into

the paneling piece. You can install one board if it's easier for you to handle that way. I selected a 4' x 8' wood-grain panel prefinished to look like the flooring. Each panel costs only \$19.98 at Home Depot. You can always select a gray/driftwood finish, go with the classic white bead board, or even venture out for a stone or brick hardboard! The standard size for most recessed ceilings is 6' x 8' so you will likely need two panels. (I used the extra panel piece as the backing for the new basket shelves I installed after removing the good old trash compactor.)

6. Spackle and sand any holes and be sure the surface you're affixing the paneling piece to is smooth.
7. Dry fit your panels to be sure you have correctly cut holes for your light fixture(s). I chose a 'Fixer Upper meets Pottery Barn-style' chandelier that includes seven vintage light bulbs that I found on Costco.com. Because the kitchen has an island in the center, a chandelier works well and helps fill the visual space. And because the chandelier is not quite enough light to replace an entire ceiling of fluorescent light bulbs, I also added four recessed lights along the perimeter of the kitchen.
8. Affix your panels with both a liquid adhesive and nails to be sure they attach securely.

9. Install your light fixture(s).
10. Prime and paint trim. Add an outside cornering molding trim around the edges to hide any irregularities to create a finished look. Touch up trim with paint if needed.
11. Grab your cell phone for "after" photos to send to family and friends, bragging about your new DIY'er status!

Total cost for supplies including all light fixtures was \$360.00.

Want to take it a step further without completely gutting and remodeling your kitchen? Consider painting your cabinetry (Kelly Moore China White is my favorite for cabinets), adding new hardware, or adding new appliances. White appliances feel light and bright and stand out from the common stainless steel. Unless you have a paint sprayer and professional experience, painting cabinets should probably be hired out.

If you do not consider yourself handy or you prefer to supervise, research a good handyman or contractor to help you. When I need a recommendation I can trust, I always start with the NextDoor app, which allows me to ask people in my own neighborhood for their recommendations. It's much more personal than Yelp and seems to have an added degree of pressure to be open and honest. After all, these are your neighbors that you see every day!

Happy home improving! **CG**



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