

# Model home magic for less

Closing costs, lawyers' fees, utility setup charges; the list goes on. By the time you're done shelling out on the all the extras when buying your first home, you might not have the budget you had hoped for to decorate.

*Nicki Manley offers her tips*



**W**hen the expenses pile up, don't give up hope – there are many great ways to put your personal stamp on your new digs without breaking the bank!

Paint is by far the most inexpensive way to completely transform a space. If you already have your furniture the paint colour should come from the largest items like sofas, rugs and bedding. If you have a clean slate, use magazine clippings and personal collections or artwork for colour inspiration.

If you love a high-end paint supplier's colours but can't afford their product, check out big-box stores and hardware centres as they can often colour match your choice but use a less expensive, although not necessarily inferior, product. If you have an open mind when it comes to colour and sheen, check out the mis-tint section at a paint supplier. You can get a large can for as low as \$5. The cans are usually marked with what

mistake was made and if your colour scheme is flexible you can benefit from someone else's 'oops'.

Invest in decent painting tools and take good care of them – good brushes and rollers can last for years. Save yourself some money and time by only painting one wall in a room for a great designer impact. When choosing an area to accent with colour, consider

the dining room or a focal point like the fireplace wall. Colour blocking is a good use of trendy colours that you



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can easily and inexpensively switch when the trend has run its course. Just think how your home's character can change with an easy-on –the-pocket change of paint colour!

Dressing your windows adds colour and texture and needn't cost a fortune. Check out discount and big-box stores – they often have many pre-made draperies from valances to floor length panels and even fabric Roman blinds at all price points. Measure your windows well before you make a purchase – if the panels are too short, add a complementing fabric to the bottom for a unique look. Maybe you can sew or know someone that can help you start from scratch.

Fabric ends are often big enough to put together a valance or faux Roman, which uses half the fabric of traditional Roman blinds. You can also dress up a plain fabric panel by using fabric dye or sewing a wide satin ribbon along the top, bottom or sides of it in your accent colour. Look for







sales, discontinuations or promotions at fabric stores to save even more money. Used clothing shops are excellent resources for the creative decorator as tablecloths and long skirts can be reinvented into draperies. Head to your library and pick up a couple books with easy steps on how to make your own window treatments. Once installed, your home will feel warm, inviting and custom decorated.

Take a good look at your furniture – does it all match and flow together or are they a jumble of hand-me-down and mix-and-match? Painting your furniture all the same colour or tones can instantly connect old with new and update an eclectic mix of furniture. Refinish and stain dull wood and add a couple coats of shiny Varathane for some shine. Don't worry too much about matching stains exactly to your hardwood – it is ok to mix woods. Just think about how forests are mixed with different varieties of trees – take a cue from Mother Nature.

Timeless-shaped chairs and sofas can get a new lease on life when reupholstered. Hunt for a fabric bargain and pay to have the job done or better yet, do it yourself. Books and the Internet offer easy step-by-step tips or look into a local high school for classes and learn the useful art of upholstery. If you don't have your furniture yet and you want to reclaim something out of date, hit flea markets, garage sales and thrift shops. If you go to markets and antique shows at the end of the day, dealers are usually eager to slash prices of bulkier items so they have less to pack up after a long day. Another way to update something you already have is by switching out hardware on cabinets – this will change the whole look



immediately. I always recommend taking an old knob with you while shopping so you can be sure to get the correct size and do double count before you leave home!

A great way to give your home a millionaire's touch is by using expensive tiles in small areas as accents. You can tile your backsplash with builders' standard 4x4 or subway tiles and add a border with something splashy. Mosaics or long thin bars in natural stones mixed with glass add interest and sparkle. These sheets can cost more than \$25/sq. ft. but you might only need one sheet when it's cut into strips. You can also achieve a dramatic look by doing the same on ceramic floors. Create a criss-cross inlay pattern or a clean border around the room's perimeter for an impressive finish. Don't forget to add interest on

shower walls and floors as well. When working with these smaller tiles, doing the installation yourself is easier and you can take tiles to most flooring shops for individual cuts at around \$1 each. When selecting tiles, pick tones and finishes that you won't tire of too soon as it can be costly to remove and replace them down the road.

When flipping through home styling magazines, there are many photos of beautiful designer homes with high-end finishes to drool over. Many times, you can achieve a similar look without laying out a ton of cash. Keep an open mind and be creative – the best decorated homes are the ones that include an unexpected element like a hit of colour, a bold fabric or a repurposed piece of furniture no matter what the price tag. 🏠

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