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Adding Up the Small Things

Creating an eco-friendly space on a low budget isn't as hard as you think

For a couple of frequent travelers, coming home to a dated city apartment felt like a letdown. The space, set in a valuable location in New York City, needed a low-budget redesign to increase its value and create a retreat for the client – best-selling author Heidi Durrow – and her husband.

"With all the airplane germs they face on their travels, it was important that they didn't come into a toxic place at home," explained Robin Wilson, founder and CEO of New York-based Robin Wilson Home, a health- and eco-focused design firm. "The client also is writing her second book, so she wanted a sanctuary where she can write."

Safe and Clean

To immediately brighten the dark and plain kitchen space, Wilson replaced the countertops with light bacteriostatic quartz countertops that resemble marble. Along with a more luxurious appeal, the counters boast

stain, acid, scratch and impact resistance. The material continues up the wall as the backsplash.

The undermount kitchen sink also keeps the space cleaner. When a sink has a lip, bacteria can grow and flourish underneath it, while an undermount sink allows the user to push the germs down the drain. A water-efficient faucet adds an eco-friendly touch.

More with Touchless

To save water and to preserve cleanliness, high-tech faucets and toilets were installed in the master bath and powder room.

"We did what I think everyone should do in a bathroom – we did touchless everything," said Wilson. "I love that technology has progressed to the point that you're not passing along germs, and I think you and your guests feel more comfortable when you have a touchless feature."



Solar shades on the windows keep the apartment from getting too hot or cold.



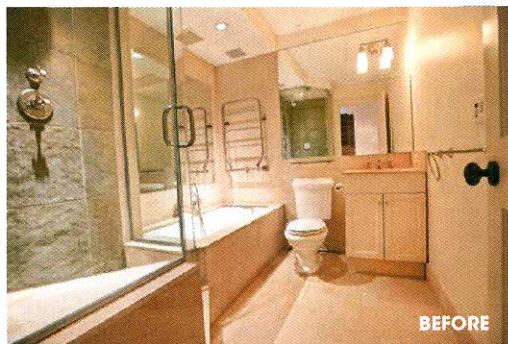
LEFT & BELOW: A light countertop, an inexpensive steel backsplash behind the range and a new sink and faucet brighten and update the kitchen.



SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

A high-tech toilet, along with a touchless faucet and quartz surrounds, takes advantage of the small space with eco-friendly effects.

The previous bath felt uncomfortable for the clients simply because of the low toilet seat.



Along with its touchless faucets and undermount sink, the master bath has a touchless toilet with a bidet seat option. The clients splurged on this one amenity because of its safety and eco-friendly features: complete with a remote control and a heated seat, the toilet allows for a water-efficient comfort many mistakenly forget.

"If you can't do much else in a bathroom, replace the toilet and get a comfort-height version," said Wilson. "That's something a lot of people don't do, and they wonder why they don't like the bathroom."

Light Rules

Along with disobeying the rules of comfort, a bad reflection can also make a client dislike a bathroom space.

"In the bathroom there are three levels of light: a ceiling light, a wall sconce at eye level or on either side of the mirror and a specific light for your shower or above your tub that will make things easier to see," said Wilson.

She has a similar rule for kitchens and recommends three lighting sources, beginning with both undermount and overmount lights. She also suggests using LED lights, particularly for the undermount choices, because they don't heat up the counter and are more economical. The pendants in this kitchen are set close to eye level.

"You don't want to look like you have shadows under your eyes when you have guests over," she explained.

All in the Details

Even without replacing the cabinetry, installing a few new details can go a long way in making a good impression. Pullout drawers and a lazy Susan use space in the kitchen more efficiently, and new hardware helps bring the space up to date.

"A place for everything is important," said Wilson. "If you have a client who travels a lot, think about a hotel room. What's easy about a hotel room? Convenience."

Reflecting this idea, the toilet paper roll in the master bath is in reach

with a replacement roll nearby behind the magazine rack. The room's heated towel rack and side rack for clothes make a busy morning more organized. The towel rack, made with stainless steel, updates the space and is simple to maintain.

An integrated seat in the steam shower, which is made of a similar, eco-friendly quartz material as in the kitchen, enhances the bathing experience. The sandstone look of the quartz surrounds the tub, as well as the wall cladding and ceiling cladding above the shower.

"One color makes the space seem bigger, so we used the same material for the counter surface for the vanity," she said. "It just all pulls together."

Simple Advice

When creating an eco-friendly project on such a low budget, Wilson recommends sticking with five main changes in the bathroom:

- Replace the toilet with a comfort-height toilet.
- Replace or paint the vanity.
- Get a fresh color in the bathroom (always use low-VOC paints).
- Change the lights to LEDs.
- Update or install a towel rack.

For the kitchen, she suggests focusing on changing the countertops, hardware, faucet, sink and the backsplash/range.

"If those are the only things you can do plus lighting – that's the bonus – you've got a fresh space without costing a fortune," she said. ■

— By Erinn Waldo

SOURCES

Designer: Robin Wilson, Robin Wilson Home; **Contractor:** James Baker, Baker Interiors; **Photographer:** Vanessa Lenz

Kitchen Countertop: Silestone Mediterranean/Oceanic; **Kitchen Faucet and Sink:** Kohler; **Master Bath Floor:** Dekton Danar; **Paint:** Benjamin Moore; **Toilet:** Kohler; **Towel Bar and Robe Hook:** Kohler; **Vanity Top:** Silestone Vortium; **Wall; Clad/Tub Surround:** Silestone Vortium