

So You Bought a Fixer-Upper to Save Money—Here Are the Projects to Prioritize

If you're embarking on renovations on a tight budget, it can be hard to decide what to do first. We asked experts to identify the best projects for your wallet and your home.

The vast majority of people who purchase fixer-upper homes do so for financial reasons—because they generally can't afford a turn-key property. A recent report from [Buildworld](#), a UK company that connects buyers with building materials, reveals that 73% of people who buy fixer-uppers do so because of money issues. This financial reality, however, can present a perplexing challenge when moving into a home that's in need of a little (or a lot) of TLC. Which renovation projects should you focus on first if your budget is tight? And why?

According to Buildworld, the average spend on "necessary repairs" is about \$13,000, and "practical upgrades" cost about \$6,000. We asked experts to help identify the fixer-upper projects that make the most sense right out of the gate as well as those that will give you the most bang for your buck. Here's what the industry insiders had to say, along with a few tips on how to get organized as you [embark on your fixer-upper facelift](#).



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Before You Start Remodeling

First things first: It's essential to understand what work should be done for safety reasons and to prevent costly challenges down the road. The best way to do this is to have a professional assess your newly purchased home and use that insight to develop a game plan.

"Create a priority list and start with what must be fixed," says Robbie Maynard, San Diego-based interior designer and owner of [Robbie Interiors](#). "Hire an inspector to look for potential issues or hazards with electrical, plumbing, and the roof. It's a good idea to start with the structure and take care of items like electrical, which can be a potential fire hazard, as well as plumbing issues so that you don't end up with major problems or damage in the future. You will not see a great transformation, but it brings peace of mind."

Hiring an expert to create a cost estimate for your renovations can give you a realistic assessment of how much money you'll need to accomplish each item on the list and help you decide [what you can afford to do first](#). And remember, while safety repairs are likely to be among the most expensive, they're critical to laying the proper groundwork for subsequent projects.

"Upgrading plumbing and electrical is always expensive," says AmyLynn Schwartzbard, owner of New York City-based [Life Designs Group](#). "A two-bedroom, two-bath home could run \$25,000-plus for all new electrical wiring and outlets. Plumbing could run \$15,000-plus. But the additional work isn't worth doing if the inner runnings of the home are in disarray."

Better Homes & Gardens



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1. Refresh Rooms with Paint

Once you've addressed safety matters, you can turn your attention to aesthetic renovation projects and upgrades. Adding a new coat of paint throughout your home can make a big difference without a big investment, says Stephanie Lindsey, principal designer with Texas-based Etch Design Group.

"A fresh coat of paint on walls goes a long way for our mental health," says Lindsey. "We feel rejuvenated and like we have a clean slate to start a new chapter. You can paint walls, cabinets, or even your front door for a fresh new look."

The best part: a paint project can cost as little as \$50, depending on the scope. Maynard also notes that paint almost always needs a refresh anyway when a home transitions from one owner to the next. "New paint is the first thing that makes a huge impact," says Maynard. "The great thing is you can paint yourself and save on this one."

For an added style boost, consider painting an accent or focal wall, which is generally the wall you first see when entering a room. It might also be the wall where your sofa or your bed is located. "Dark gray or smoky green or blue are all popular colors," says Maynard.