



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE VALLE GROUP  
Exterior view of antique home belonging to interior designer Cathy Kert

# Home Improvements

## Getting The Best Return On Your Investment

BY CHRISTOPHER KAZARIAN

**N***o matter how long you've owned your home, renovations are a constant. Whether it's a small project or a larger one, they can improve the comfort, safety and enjoyment of your house.*

Not all repairs are created equal. Some are extensive—in cost, time and interruptions to your daily routines—while others are less so. Each has its tradeoffs, which is why it takes time to determine which to do this year and which to put off until next year (or the year after).

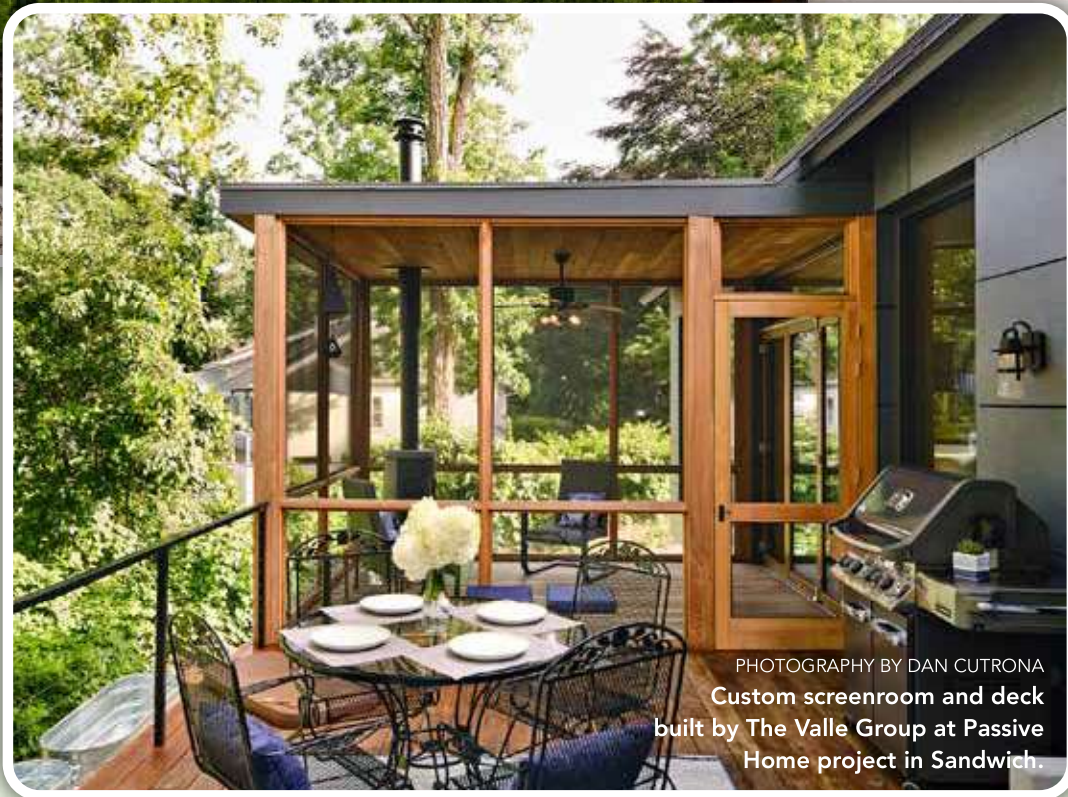
Todd Duffany, vice president of M. Duffany Builders in Falmouth, said the important piece for homeowners to remember is “to try to maintain your house.”

“If you spend a little each year, it will go far in the long run. If you let things go, you will have major issues,”

he said.

When it comes to home renovations, which ones should you focus on first? And which ones give you the best return on investment? Below is a list based on recommendations of local realtors and construction companies on the Cape.





### Get Outdoors

“The biggest project percentage-wise, bang-for-your-buck, is your lawn. Everyone knows about curb appeal,” said realtor Katie Clancy, owner of The Cape House at William Raveis in Yarmouth. “Buyers are aspirational, and when they

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are in buying mode, even the most logical people are engaged at an emotional level. The more the buyer can feel like they are close to their ideal, the more engaged they are and more excited they are about the property. Where does it start? It starts online when they see pictures, but when they drive by your house, if the yard looks

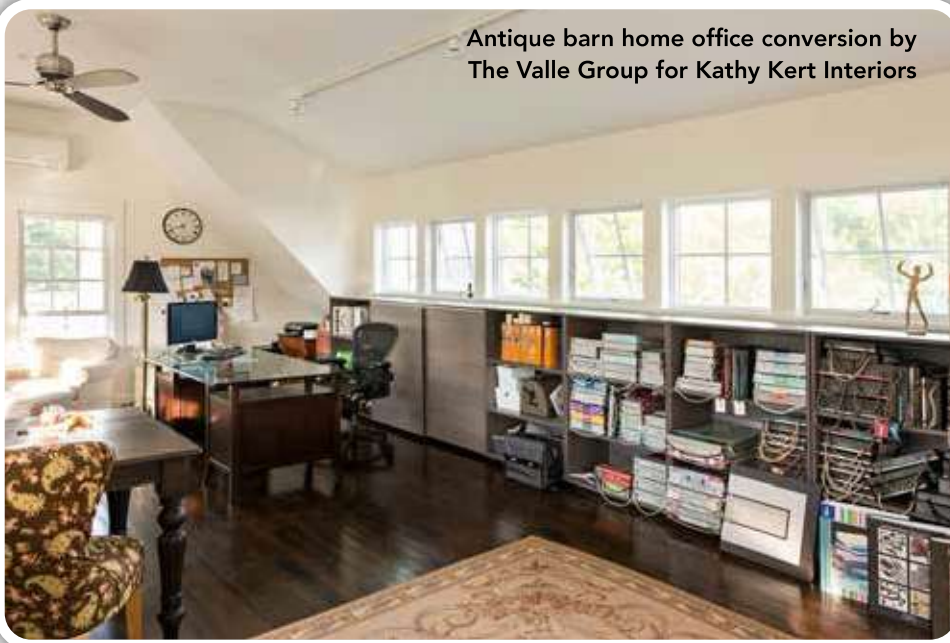
great, it will get them in the door.”

While most homeowners can undertake simple yardwork themselves, Ms. Clancy recommended hiring a landscaper, especially because the investment is minimal.

The outdoors also includes the front door. The best colors for selling a house



Antique barn home office conversion by  
The Valle Group for Kathy Kert Interiors



are black and red, the second of which “has a history,” Ms. Clancy said. “It used to be you’d paint your door red, it might have been in England, when you paid off your mortgage.”

#### Fresh Coat Of Paint

Painting the interior of your house is another low-cost, high-return project. “Paint in the can is \$20,” Ms. Clancy said. “Paint on the wall is \$20,000.”

In terms of choice, she said, “Paint colors are trending neutral. Right now, it’s still in a grayish phase, and there are a lot

of people who still love white.”

The one color to avoid? Pink, Ms. Clancy said. “It is the color of death in real estate, unless it’s rose gold and carefully designed and really intentional.”

#### Don’t Forget The Floors

Another section of the house that Ms. Clancy said has broad universal impact is the floors.

Realtor Annie Hart Cool of Sotheby’s International Realty in Falmouth agreed that the aesthetics of a home are important, especially when it comes to flooring. “I think I closed 56 homes last year, so I sell a lot of houses, and I’m going to say the number-one thing people do right away are the floors,” she said.

Especially if a home has carpets, she said, new homeowners tend to want to pull them up immediately, “which makes sense with all of the allergens in our



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society. They are putting in hardwood or laminate floors.”

### Tackle The Small Projects

While our hearts may want to renovate the big, important spaces like the kitchen, bathrooms and living rooms, Ms. Hart Cool suggested going small first.

“I would not touch a kitchen,” especially if you’re preparing to sell a home, she said. “I might replace dated appliances.”

She also recommended homeowners looking to sell should focus on items that will show up on an inspection, like a chimney cleaning, repairing garage door openers that might be faulty or having the entire house professionally cleaned.

“These are things we may have forgiven over time, like a light switch that doesn’t work, but the buyers may come in and go, ‘Oh my gosh, look at this,’” she



Additional view of Valle Group home office conversion.


said.

Simple projects, such as placing new handles on your kitchen and bathroom cabinets or replacing lights, she said, can go a long way toward improving the look and feel of a home without breaking the bank.

### The Necessities



While often not high on a homeowner’s wish list of renovations, there are projects that should not be put off if issues arise.

“A furnace and a roof are two of the



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Outdoor shower renovation by The Valle Group.



biggest structural things that should be taken care of,” Ms. Hart Cool said. “Those should usually be done right away.”

Septic systems, she said, should be tested by homeowners who might be planning on selling their home.

“The certification test lasts two years. Even if you’re not planning to sell, you want to know whether your septic needs to be replaced or not,” she said. “You won’t want to be surprised by that high-ticket item.”

A failed septic, she said, can reduce a

buyer pool for your house because many banks often won’t finance a loan with one.

### Home Office

Because of the pandemic, more people have the flexibility to work from home.

“It’s changed the whole dynamic for how people work,” said Christian Valle, president of The Valle Group in Falmouth. “People who aren’t driving into the office every day now have home offices.”

These days, the construction firm is seeing more requests from customers seeking to turn a spare room into a functional workspace. The investment might not pay dividends when selling a home, but it can offer peace of mind and serve a practical use for homeowners who need a place where they can get work done and be productive.



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### Energy Efficiency

When it comes to home projects, Michael Duffany, owner and founder of M. Duffany Builders, said, “One of the biggest returns on investment is insulation. Upgrading the insulation in a home offers great savings, especially foam insulation.”

This is just the start of several upgrades a homeowner can make to enhance the energy efficiency of the home while reducing utility costs.

Mr. Valle said additional energy-related projects can include installing new windows, air-sealing a home and upgrading to LED lightbulbs. It’s work that his company is doing more of, recently renovating a 1950s home into one that is net zero, generating as much energy as it uses.

“People these days want to have smart



Custom Gazebo addition  
built by The Valle Group.  
Architect: Adam Moring/  
AAM Architecture & Design

thermostats, highly efficient mechanical systems and homes that have a small carbon footprint,” he said.

### Kitchen (And Bathrooms)

When most homeowners purchase a home, the first projects they want to tackle are the kitchen and the bathrooms. The recommendations from local experts were to hold off on making those

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Front of antique barn home office conversion by  
The Valle Group. Client Kathy Kert Interiors



upgrades until you have lived in the home for at least a year.

"The best advice for people who want to renovate right away is to live in it for a summer or a year to figure out what you really want," said Timothy Duffany, the chief financial officer at M. Duffany Builders.

"You have to experience it first," Todd Duffany added, noting the additional time can help answer questions like, "Do I want a peninsula or an island in my kitchen?"

The kitchen, Ms. Hart Cool said, is often at the top of people's to-do list.

"And it should be; it's where we all end up," she explained. "People like to entertain, and it is the heart of the home. But it's a big project. For people doing their kitchen over, this is when it's kind of important to live with the house so you figure out what you want to do and if you need a pantry or need to blow out a wall."

### **Bedrooms, Basements And Garages**

Ms. Clancy said the final areas of a home that one should focus on are the bedrooms, basements and garages. "The last thing you want to look at is a basement or a garage," she said, noting that these two rooms are often where storage goes. "Everyone's got to have a mess somewhere."

Still, renovating a basement or a garage and turning it into a livable space "can add a great deal of value," said Joseph Valle, chief executive officer of The Valle Group. These are places that can offer privacy and serve as areas where people can make time for their hobbies, whether it's sewing, playing music or working on a puzzle.

### **Porches, Decks And Three-Season Rooms**

Mr. Valle encouraged homeowners who want to enhance the enjoyment of

their home to consider extending it to the outdoors with a porch, deck or three-season room.

These projects, he said, can include clearing up overgrown sections of the backyard to "create much more outdoor living space."

"I think, for not a lot of money, it adds value to the house and the perception that you have much more space," he said.

Whatever project you decide to undertake this year or the next, Ms. Clancy said, it should not only be measured by the money you could make when selling the home but also "in the moments you get to enjoy it."

"If you redo a kitchen because you are thinking you're going to sell it in two years, you're also going to have two years of Christmases and birthday parties and really pleasant moments of sipping coffee. You should be measuring more than just the cost you put into it," she said.