

Keeping your costs down with a few ingenious ideas

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home, while helping to save money on your heating bills at the same time.

The same logic applies to windows - but you may want to do one or two windows at a time - depending on your budget.

It's a good idea to choose vinyl-clad or aluminum replacements so you don't have to worry about painting them. If your budget doesn't permit this, consider the magnetic storm windows that you attach from the inside of your home.

And keep in mind that lawns can be coaxed back into shape with a little grooming, fertilizer and grass seed. You may even want to put in some replacement strips of sod. Landscaping can be greatly enhanced with the addition of just a few properly positioned bushes and plants - or the pruning or removal of some ungainly ones. When planting new trees, keep future growth potential in mind; you don't want large roots too close to your foundation.

A new mailbox and new outdoor light fixtures can also do wonders to spruce up your home, along with a handsome doorknocker.

Inside

A great deal can also be done to the inside of your home to give it a quick fix-up. A fresh coat of paint or wallpaper can work wonders. If, for example, your kitchen has dingy, outdated cupboards, you can give them a quick coat of melamine paint to provide a durable, yet attractive finish until you're in a financial position to replace them altogether.

Outdated linoleum flooring can be replaced with new resilient floor tiles. You can buy these in a box and affix them to your existing floor.

(However, when doing this, make sure you carefully read and follow the manufacturer's directions.)

If your bathtub is a mess, consider having it reglazed instead of replacing it altogether. This process, when applied by professionals, can add years of life to your tub at a fraction of the cost of installing a brand new one.

New sinks and toilets can usually be replaced at a reasonable cost.

You may also want to consider replacing your faucets if they are particularly old, stained, encrusted with mildew or scratched. You may want to tackle this job yourself, but if you have any qualms, it's best to hire a professional.

If the carpeting you've acquired looks like it's seen better days, consider having it

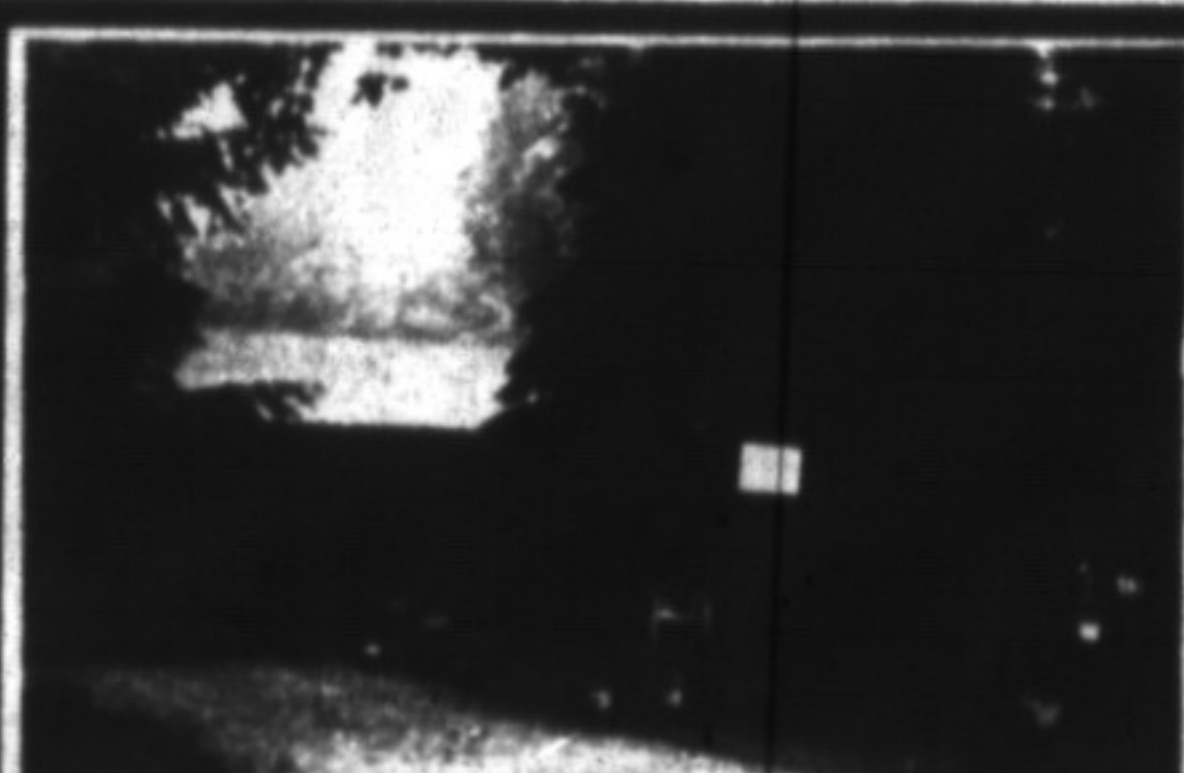
steam cleaned by professionals, or rent a special unit and do it yourself. A deep, thorough cleaning can bring carpets back to life and help them last until you are able to purchase new ones. Or rip up the existing carpeting to expose your wooden floors.

Wooden floors can also be sanded and revarnished to bring back their original gloss. You can rent a machine and do this yourself or hire a professional.

Whatever quick fixes you decide to try, remember to build flexibility into your plans so that you'll still be able to accommodate major changes a few years down the road.

■ This article is provided by local realtors and the Ontario Real Estate Association (OREA) for the benefit of consumers in the real estate market.

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