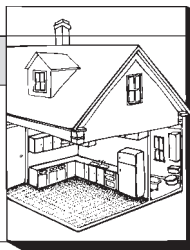


# New Age Drawers and Shelves

by Paul Turpin



Thanks to innovations in hardware, there's no excuse anymore for sticky drawers or cabinets with hard-to-reach places. When properly designed, drawers and pull-out shelves in both kitchen and bath cabinets should practically roll out to meet you.

## Stock Vs. Custom

The drawer and shelf options you offer your clients depend on where you get your cabinets. Some manufacturers now offer "semi-custom" options that can handle odd-sized spaces and custom hardware specifications. But for most factory-made cabinets, you will have to customize them yourself.

Custom cabinets offer more flexibility than most stock cabinets. I've had the most success having the casework and standard drawers fabricated by a local shop, ordering my doors and drawer fronts from fabricators who specialize in cabinet door faces, and making my own drawers and pull-outs to suit my client's needs.

## Making Drawers

To make drawers I use 1/2-inch, nine-ply birch plywood for the bottom and the sides. I like the nine-ply because the thin, all-birch plies are attractive and look good with clear finishes. The standard Douglas fir plywoods, by comparison, are splintery and rough and often have voids. I normally put all four sides on the drawer and then attach the drawer face over the plywood at the front during installation. This makes it easier to position the face and get the right spacing between the drawers.

I like cabinets without rails between the drawers. A standard drawer base usually has four drawers. Eliminating the rails lets me squeeze in a fifth. However, this makes fitting the drawer faces fussier at installation time. To keep the spacing uniform, I generally put the bottom drawer face on first, then put a shim on top of it to guide me in placing the next face, and so on.

I never use old-style rollers or center guides, and almost never use standard extension slides. For me, it's full extension slides all the way. Full access to a drawer's storage area beats 75% access every time.

## Pull-Out Shelves

The pull-out shelf is the first cousin of the drawer. It's actually a

drawer that lives behind a cabinet door. Pull-out shelves make great use of cabinet space since they provide access to the entire shelf. They can also be retrofitted into existing cabinets if you're just doing a kitchen facelift and leaving the existing cabinets.

Pull-out wire racks for special purpose storage are invaluable. Those made by Amerock Corp. (P.O. Box 7018, Rockford, IL 61125-7018; 800/435-6959) and Feeny Manufacturing Company (P.O. Box 191, Muncie, IN 47308; 317/288-8730) are ideal for customizing cabinetry and providing a spot to stash those traditionally jumbled items, like pot lids and spice bottles.

Heavy-duty slides, such as those made by Accuride (12311 Shoemaker Ave., Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670; 213/903-0200), work well with pull-outs since the shelves may be carrying heavy loads, such as cast-iron cookware or canned goods.

Two good spots to put pull-out shelving are kitchen sink-base cabinets and bathroom vanities. These areas are usually neglected and, in most homes, include a hodgepodge of cleansers, soaps, and so on.

The first step is to put a fixed shelf as close to the bottom of the trap as you can get it. This leaves enough room below for a pull-out on the floor of the cabinet (see Figure 1). The upper shelf should be flush with the back of the cabinet and about three-quarters of the cabinet's depth. If you make it deeper, it's hard to reach items at the back of the shelf.

For the pull-out shelf I use stan-

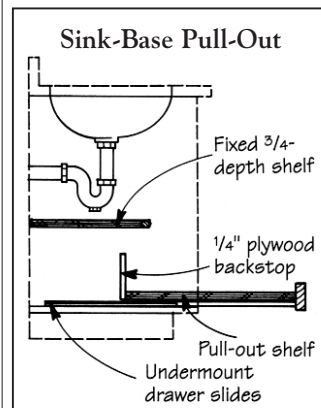


Figure 1. For increased storage in bathroom vanities and kitchen sink bases, the author installs two shelves. The upper shelf is placed as high as possible, while the bottom shelf, a pull-out, rests on the cabinet floor.

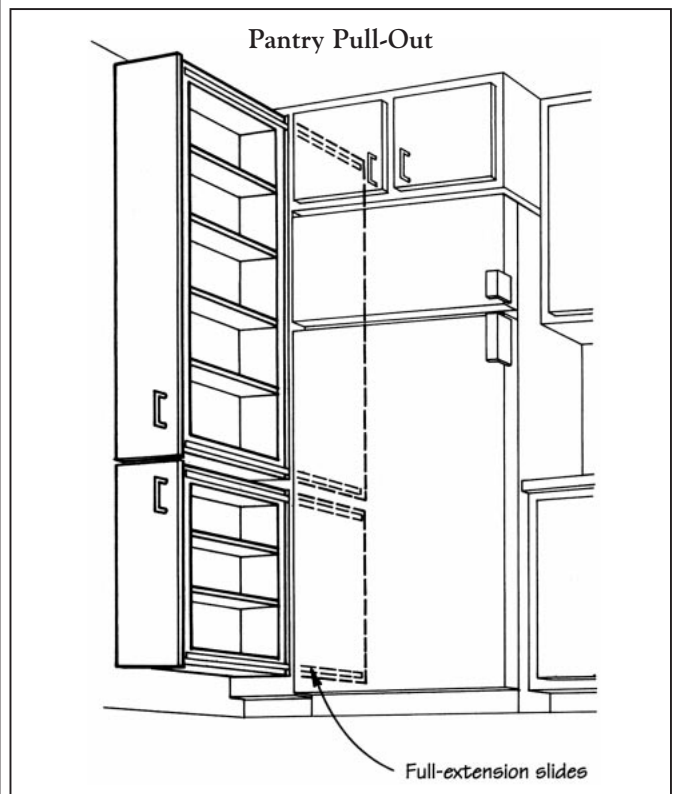


Figure 2. A pull-out pantry looks like a small bookcase turned sideways, mounted on heavy-duty, full-extension drawer slides, and slid end-first into a narrow cabinet. The pantry pulls out like a drawer, and gives shelf access from one side.

standard, three-quarter-extension undermount slides. When it's fully extended, the rear of the pullout will line up with the front of the fixed shelf above. To keep things from toppling off when you pull the shelf out, I screw a piece of 1/4-inch plywood to the back edge. Since the pull-out is often narrower than the cabinet (in order to clear the door and the hinges), I also use a filler block fixed to the side of the cabinet. A strip of wood at the front covers the edge of the plywood, hides the hardware beneath, and gives the user something to grab when pulling the shelf out.

## Pantry Pull-Outs

One of the most unusual and useful applications of drawer slides is to support a whole set of shelves that can be pulled out of a cabinet as a unit. Picture a small bookcase, mounted on drawer slides, and slid end-first into a narrow cabinet. This arrangement slides out like a drawer, and gives shelf access from one side (Figure 2).

Good places for pantry pull-outs are those hard-to-reach cupboards above refrigerators, ovens, and cooktops. But they are also a good way to sneak in some extra cabinet space that might otherwise be taken up by filler strips. For example, a conventional kitchen layout might have one run of cabinets that calls for a 42-inch base cabinet and 3 1/2 inches of filler. By changing the 42-inch cabinet to a 36-inch unit and

eliminating the filler, you have enough room for a 9 1/2-inch pantry cabinet. If your pantry is in the right spot in the kitchen, next to a wall or the refrigerator for example, you can extend it from the floor to the ceiling, giving your clients all sorts of extra storage space.

There are tricks to making these units. I use full-extension drawer slides that are capable of supporting up to 150 pounds. Tall units may need slides on both the top and the bottom to carry the load or even three or four pairs for heavy loads. A group of smaller units, however, will be lighter and easier to operate.

Between 3 1/2 and 4 inches of the unit's width are devoted to the casework and hardware. The casework is made from 3/4-inch plywood. For the shelving, I sheath the front and back of a shelf unit with 1/2-inch, nine-ply birch plywood. Then I rout out an opening on one side of the box where I want access, leaving 2 inches around the perimeter to keep the box rigid and about 4 inches where my drawer slides will mount, as shown in Figure 2. You can also achieve the necessary stiffness by using a face frame with an extra large rail for the drawer slide. Alternatively, you can make a shelf unit face framed on both sides to make the shelves accessible from either side when open. ■

Paul Turpin is a Los Angeles remodeling contractor who specializes in kitchen and bath design.