

# Raising the Dishwasher

by Rick Miner

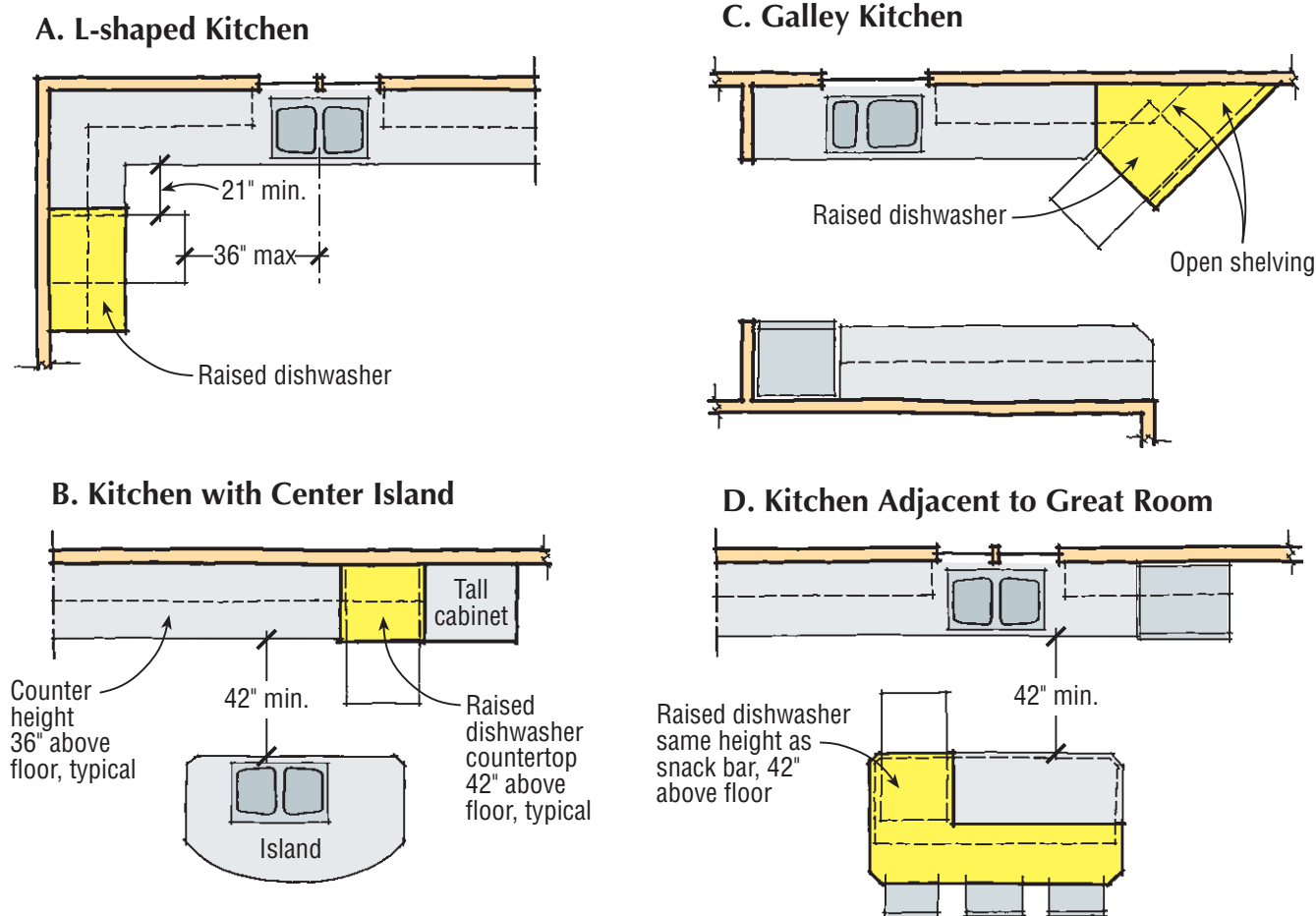
Clients are usually skeptical when I recommend raising a dishwasher to a comfortable working height. But with meal preparation, cleanup, stacking of dishes, and all the other activity that happens in and around the kitchen sink, why not free up some space around it by moving the dishwasher out? And while we're at it, why not install it at a height that's more comfortable for use? Raising the dishwasher 6 inches places its bottom shelf at about

18 inches above the floor, compared with the 12-inch clearance of a standard installation. The 18-inch height is convenient for Mom's little helpers, those with bad backs or bending restrictions, and also wheelchair users. Even for people without any physical limitations, the raised installation height makes the appliance considerably easier to use.

Admittedly, there are several obstacles to overcome when the decision is made to raise the dishwasher. I never recom-

mend raising the dishwasher just to jazz up the design. It must make sense both in terms of a well-executed floor plan and my customer's needs. Because it breaks up the flat plane of the countertop, the dishwasher has to be installed well clear of the sink in order to maintain usable counter space to the left and right of the sink rim. Kitchen industry standards recommend at least 24 inches of countertop on either side. I try my best to exceed that.

## Raised Dishwasher Location



**Figure 1.** A raised dishwasher is easier to fill and unload, but the elevated countertop above it must be located where it won't interfere with regular countertop use. Good locations include the end of a run of cabinets, or next to a tall cabinet or refrigerator surround.

## Dishwasher Placement

Obviously, a raised section of countertop breaks the continuity of the surface, so appropriate placement is of critical concern. The best place to locate a raised dishwasher depends on the kitchen layout. For example, in an L-shaped cabinet configuration, assume that the sink location is in the center of the main leg of the countertop. I'd locate the dishwasher around the corner on the short leg of the ell, approximately 21 to 24 inches from the adjacent counter edge to allow for standing room.

For ease of use, I try not to locate the open door of the dishwasher more than 36 inches away from the sink. If the sink is located in a center island, I'll place the dishwasher opposite, in the main run of cabinets, keeping it off to the left or right of the sink's center. In a galley kitchen, raising the dishwasher at the end of a cabinet run works well, provided it's still within easy reach of the sink. If the galley space allows, I'll place the dishwasher at a 45 degree angle to the wall, which further improves movement between the sink and the dishwasher (see Figure 1).

The popular open-space "great room" kitchen design usually incorporates an island counter with snack bar seating on one side. This island is an ideal location for a raised dishwasher. The raised back can become part of the structure supporting a 42-inch-high snack bar countertop; dirty dishes can go right over the top, into the dishwasher, instead of making a trip to the sink. The raised height also helps to screen the view of kitchen functions from the family space. A raised dishwasher placed at the entrance to a galley cabinet run can perform a similar function. The space remains open, but is visually divided.

## The Raised Enclosure

To raise the dishwasher, I build a floor panel using  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-thick plywood, resting on simple wood cleats screwed into the adjacent cabinets. To conceal the unfinished side of the appliance when it's installed at the open end of a run of cabinets, I order a special side panel, 40 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches high. With a stan-

**Figure 2.** At a 42-inch height, the raised countertop becomes an ideal location for a microwave oven or an appliance garage.



dard 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-thick countertop, the resulting finished countertop height is 42 inches above the floor. This happens to be an ideal height for a built-in microwave oven or an appliance garage (Figure 2).

**Height transitions.** One method of terminating the raised section of countertop is to install an abutting tall cabinet, fitted with rollout shelves (and rubber mats to keep the dishes from shifting about). This creates convenient point-of-use dish storage. If a tall cabinet doesn't work in the layout, standard base cabinets, with built-in rollout storage, complement the overall ergonomic design. Placing the dishwasher next to a standard base cabinet requires an additional side panel to conceal the portion of the appliance that projects above the adjacent countertop. You could get away with using only one side panel when the dishwasher is installed next to a tall cabinet or end wall, but I prefer to frame the dishwasher on both sides. I order two 40 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-high side panels, and stand them left and right of the dishwasher. The side panels give the installation a more custom look, and provide ready support for the countertop. I screw the countertop to the panels and the panels to the floor, using 1-inch L-brackets to make the connections.

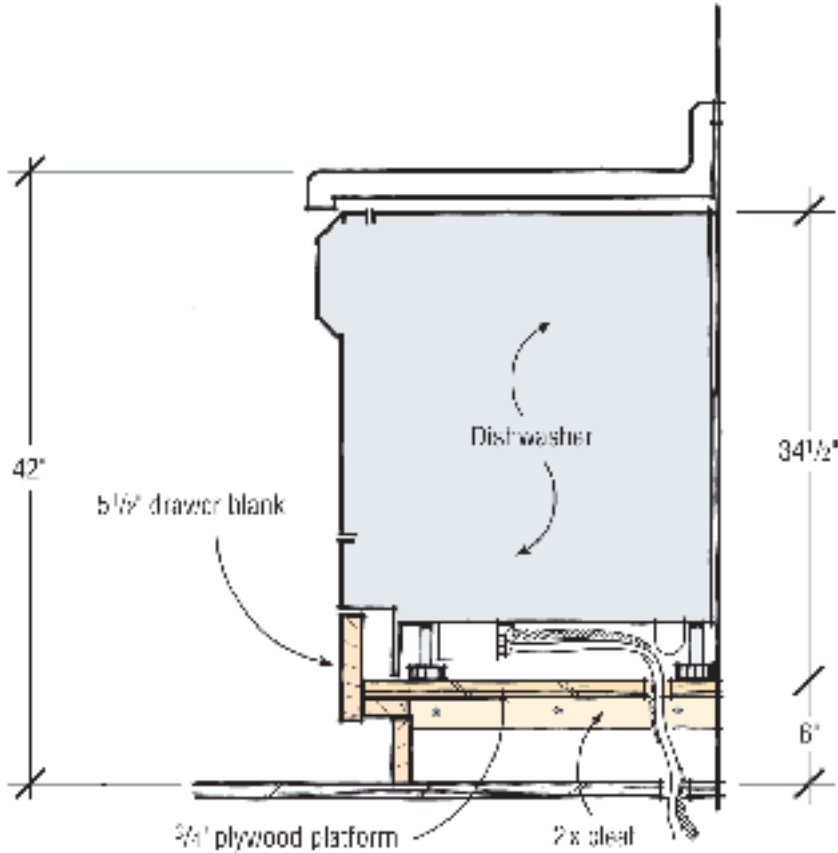
## Mechanical Space

Another reason why the 42-inch counter height works so well is that a standard 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ x24-inch drawer face blank installed at the bottom of the dishwasher conceals the dishwasher's access panel and platform construction. When accompanied by a matching dishwasher face panel, the effect is a custom "fitted" look. To make servicing easier, I hold the panel in place with a couple of inexpensive, magnetic catches. When the homeowners get to thinking about that newly found space at the bottom of the dishwasher, they're inevitably seized by the desire to use it for storage. I've learned to resist that urge. In the past, I've succumbed and furnished a built-in drawer at the bottom. However, the electrical and plumbing connections typically feed in through the floor at the base of the dishwasher (Figure 3) so my subs have not looked too kindly on on the drawer-below concept.

Finally, the pumping capacity of the dishwasher drain needs to be increased with the added distance from the sink; 6 to 8 feet should be well within the range of most current models. Of course, it doesn't hurt to check your dishwasher specs.

Every time I've done a raised dishwasher installation, the homeowner's

## Raised Dishwasher Platform



**Figure 3.** A 3/4-inch-thick plywood platform resting on cleats forms an elevated base for the appliance. The author's electrician and plumber frowned on using a custom drawer base, due to the conflict of plumbing and wiring. Instead, a drawer-front dead panel combined with a matching face panel on the dishwasher creates a fitted look.

reaction has been enthusiastic. It has even generated future work for my company, because when friends and neighbors see it, they want a raised dishwasher designed into their project, too.

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