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Cabinet Upgrades

by Lis Silliman

Good ideas are frequently left unexplored and unexploited in a typical kitchen installation, whether in a new home or a remodel. Even if the workmanship is technically flawless, the new kitchen is often less than it could and should be, in both form and function. As a kitchen design professional, it's my job to provide clients with creative and practical options that maximize the room's potential.

Much of every kitchen's working potential lies in the cabinet doors and drawers. Efficiently planned cabinet interiors can do wonders for a small space and even eliminate redundant or unnecessary cabinetry.

Visual Interest

While some upgrades do cost extra (but justifiable) money, there are several that can make tremendous improvements in the overall look and function of a kitchen without necessarily adding to the expense.

Because they're at eye level, wall cabinets are more important visually than base cabinets, so plan accordingly. Wall cabinets don't always have to match the base cabinets width for width. It's better to consider how the wall cabinets will be

used and allow form to follow function (A). Stagger the heights of cabinets symmetrically on either side of a range hood or window, or center a taller, deeper upper cabinet between shorter adjacent ones to create a focal point.

Mix colors and tones. Consider ordering wall cabinets in a different stain color from the base cabinets (see *Kitchen & Bath*, 2/02). Adding a second tone to the cabinet color scheme is a great way to add visual interest without affecting the budget. For example, base cabinets could be several shades darker than the wall cabinets, and the wall cabinets could be finished with a crown molding that matches the tone of the base cabinets, uniting the overall color scheme.

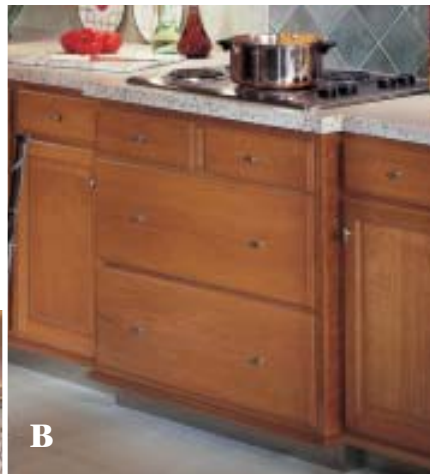
Deeper base cabinets at the sink or range help define work areas and orient the eye, accentuating the plan (B).

Cabinet companies may modify the depth of a standard cabinet box for a small upcharge, or you can build a standard base out from the wall and cover the gap with the countertop. I like to use angled fillers on either side of the cabinet to return the face line to the standard 24-inch depth. Added benefits of the extra inches include ease of installing some of the pro-style range tops, especially if there's also a pop-up downdraft behind, and elimination of that tight, hard-to-clean space behind the sink controls.

Eye-catching knobs and pulls. Sleek, upscale hardware can lift the look of a stock cabinet a couple of notches. Choose a style and finish that reflect the theme of the kitchen design, like polished brass on dark wood for a formal traditional look, or ceramic in a farmhouse kitchen. Brushed nickel or steel is currently a popular finish for appliances, plumbing fixtures, and cabinet hardware. Mix styles; for example, use decorative pulls on glass-front cabinets and plain pulls on others (C).

Open shelves help lighten the visual monotony of a long march of cabinet doors and optimize storage where door swing may be a problem, as in a narrow aisle or a tight corner adjacent to a doorway or window (D).

Appliance panels. Disguising appliances to look like the cabinets is a



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strong design trend. Most new appliance trim kits accept a 1/4-inch-thick wood-veneer panel, a common cabinet line accessory (E).

Bring on the wine. A wine rack incorporated into a cabinet run is a stylish and relatively inexpensive addition (F). Racks can measure as little as 6 inches wide and make a nice alternative to a wide vertical filler. Wider racks serve the



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same visual function as open shelf units, breaking the monotony of a long cabinet run. For clients who prefer not to advertise their good taste, give the bottles a dedicated deep drawer (G).

Turning corners. Curved or angled cabinet fronts and countertop overhangs can be effective in defining and accenting the space, but they definitely add to the cost of the cabinet package (H). A radiused countertop over a rectangular box can achieve much of the same visual impact without the cost of curved doors (I). Bendable plywood, covered with wood veneer, plastic laminate, sheet metal, or tile, is a great material for creating a curved wall on site at the back of an island or peninsula. Angled cabinets or fillers are useful transition pieces to bring the cabinet face line to a shallower depth (J). An angled cabinet also provides a neat way to

widen a narrow room entry or soften the corners of an island.

Framed inserts. Yet another way to add visual spark is to order doors "framed for glass" and substitute an unusual panel material like perforated or polished metal, wire mesh, chalkboard, plastic laminate, or art glass (K). Soft materials like rice paper or fabric are also good but may require backing material to make them lie flat.

Beadboard panel or matching flat



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J

panels on the back of an island or peninsula can add substance and an upscale look to a cabinet installation (L). Door blanks also make great cabinet back and end panels. Door costs vary but are certainly competitive with most site-built solutions.

Interior Details

Even though planning each cabinet's function can enhance the overall function of the kitchen, it is possible to over plan and lose flexibility. It's best to have a few cabinets with specific purposes such as the following and leave the majority to general service.

Roll-out shelves are very convenient, if not a must, particularly in a 24-inch-deep pantry cabinet. Small appliances and attachments, mixing bowls, stock pots, and lids all store nicely on roll-out shelves.

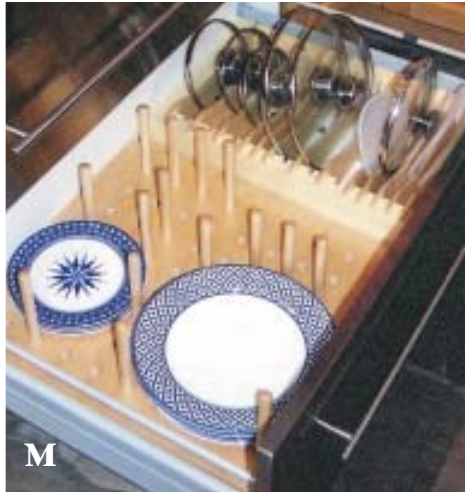
Deep drawers for pots and pans are frequently requested by clients. There are lots of inserts available for storing other things in deep drawers: peg boards for stacking plates and bowls; pot lid racks; bins for storing bread, flour, sugar, rice, pasta, or pet food (M). Food storage bins can be custom built of acrylic sheet by a local shop.

Shallow drawer inserts include spice bottle racks in plastic or wood, as well as utensil trays (N). Some inserts are available from the cabinet manufacturer; others come in universal sizes



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K



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M



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L



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N



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O




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P

and are cut to fit.

Pull-out trash bins are available as single or multiple units, depending on the width of the cabinet (O), but weight can become a problem with some roll-out units. My favorite solution is to set the bins in a drawer box on heavy-duty single extension guides, concealed behind an attached door front.

A pull-out towel rack is a simple, inexpensive convenience under a sink. A more elaborate version attaches inside a roll-out filler cabinet (P). 

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