

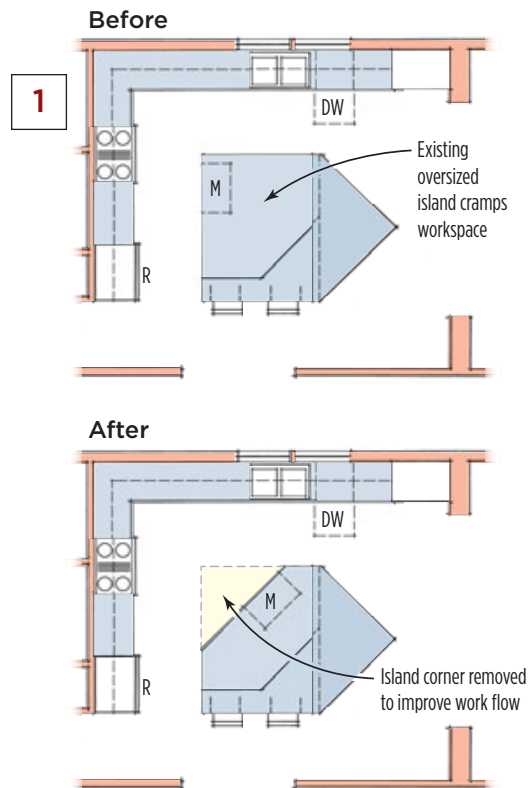
On the Job

Reworking an Island

by Chuck Kiser

Like most remodelers, I often tear out and replace old cabinets. But sometimes it makes more sense to modify the cabinets that are already there, as in the project described here. The existing kitchen had a large multilevel island that was so deep the homeowner couldn't reach parts of it. What's more, it took up so much floor space it created a bottleneck between the sink and the stove that made it hard for more than one person at a time to cook. We could have taken the island out and started from scratch, but that wasn't in the budget.

We began by drilling a few holes through the bottom of the cabinets to see what was underneath. The tile floor ran below the island, which was good, because there were



only a few tiles left over from the previous installation. After much discussion with the homeowner, we decided to make the island smaller by cutting off one of its corners (1). This meant having to move the built-in microwave, which the owner decided to leave in the reconfigured island.

We experimented with the shape of the new island, putting masking tape across the counter so the homeowner could visualize the results and we could be sure there was enough depth to reinstall the microwave (2). After determining where the new edge of the island would land, we called in a granite fabricator to remove the existing top, cut it down, and reinstall it later. This part of the job was easier than we expected because the top was not glued to the cabinets. Still, the granite slab was more than 6 feet square, and four of us were needed to remove it and load it on the truck.

With the top out of the way, we found that the lower portion of the island consisted of two standard base cabinets in an L shape with 2x4 stretchers spanning the unused space behind (3). We decided to reuse the longer cabinet and salvage the doors and drawer fronts from the smaller one.

On the Job | Reworking an Island



Unexpected Plumbing

On removing the smaller cabinet, we were surprised to find waste and supply lines coming up through the floor where tile should have been (4). Evidently, the previous island had contained a sink. Unfortunately, this area of the floor would be in plain view after we reconfigured the cabinets (5), so we were going to have to remove the pipes and replace a couple of tiles.

The kitchen was over a crawlspace, and when we went below to cap the pipes, we found a large forced-air trunk line in the way. We could see where the pipes penetrated the floor, but it was impossible

to get to them. It would be a lot of work to temporarily remove the ductwork, so we decided instead to cap the pipes from above. The floor also contained hydronic radiant heat tubes, so we had to be careful not to hit anything while chipping out the mortar setting bed around the pipes.

The PVC waste and vent lines were an easy fix — we cut them flush to the subfloor and plugged them with Oatey inset test caps (800/321-9532, oatey.com).

The copper supply lines were trickier: Even though we had enlarged the hole through the subfloor, there wasn't room to solder on end caps. Instead, we cut the pipes below floor level, deburred the ends,

and capped them with SharkBite end caps. SharkBite fittings (877/700-4242, sharkbite.com) are used to connect copper, CPVC, and PEX, and don't require glue or solder. They're too expensive to use for an entire plumbing system but are great for remodeling and repairs. Installation is a matter of pushing the pipe about an inch into the fitting; a grab ring keeps the pipe from coming out and an O-ring prevents the joint from leaking. If necessary, a simple plastic tool can be used to release the grab ring and remove the fitting.

With the plumbing repairs complete (6), we covered the hole in the subfloor, repaired the mud bed with quick-setting



8

cement, and used leftover tile to patch in the missing section (7).

Installing the Cabinets

The microwave cabinet would be reinstalled along the new edge of the island; there was still a void behind the cabinet, but it was smaller than before. We were fortunate that all the electrical runs in the island were on whips. There was enough slack in the lines that we could move cabinets without making significant electrical changes.

I built the angled cabinets in the shop, using false drawer fronts above operable doors. The doors and drawer fronts were salvaged from the smaller of the two original cabinets and trimmed to fit their new locations. The homeowner uses the new irregularly shaped cabinets for vertical storage of flat items like trays and cutting boards.



9

We weren't sure where the radiant tubing was, so to avoid puncturing it, I decided to glue rather than screw the base blocking. I fastened it to the tile with a generous amount of construction adhesive, then screwed the cabinets to the blocking. Between the adhesive and the weight of the granite, the cabinets aren't going anywhere.



10

The new parts of the cabinets were finished by fellow remodeler Tom Bader, who did an excellent job matching the existing stain and finish — going so far as to blow black dye through a screen to “spot” the surface. After the finishing work was complete, I made a countertop template out of 1/2-inch plywood (8). The template served as a temporary work surface until the modified granite top could be delivered and reinstalled. With the countertop in place, the reworked island looks original, but the kitchen bottleneck is gone (9, 10).

Chuck Kiser owns Knollwood Construction Co. in Palos Park, Ill.