



04

CASE STUDIES

Szykula Kitchen

This is an example of a kitchen in a brand-new home. The home is quite large, over 8,000 sq. ft., so space was not at a premium. The area reserved for the kitchen opened into a great room and an adjoining dining area, making it feel even larger. It was nicely anchored by a standard L-shaped layout against the back walls, but we did need to do a couple of things to help define the kitchen area. One easy strategy was to confine the travertine flooring to the kitchen only. The rest of the house featured hardwood flooring, so this created a clear visual contrast that makes for an unambiguous use of space.

To delineate the spaces further, we positioned a bar area at the edge of the kitchen. This created a transition between the areas reserved for food preparation and for hanging out. We reinforced this distinction by raising the bar area's countertop up 6". Structurally, the bar was created by placing a row of cabinets against a pony wall built by the general contractor. It was pre-wired for outlets on both the front and back sides. It provided a stable place to anchor cabinets.

It is worth mentioning that the end panel on the west side of the bar area needed to be designed differently because it had to trim out the edge of the pony wall. The back side of the bar was covered by a panel which I built as a single unit. It could have been constructed on-site out of pre-finished parts. This reflects my own preference for working in the shop where I

have a full suite of tools at my disposal, rather than on a job site, which can be a hectic environment that is not quite as conducive to efficient work. The radiused countertop had an overhang of 10" at its deepest point. This was supported by a pair of brackets as per the instructions of the countertop fabricators.

The rest of the kitchen layout was not designed around any of the standard rules of thumb (the work triangle or task zones, for example) but simply sought to provide a great deal of workspace with generous amounts of storage and all the major appliances and water within a convenient distance to each other. To this end, the sink, microwave, cooktop and dishwasher are located nearly adjacent to one another, with the refrigerator located along the east wall so that it would be equally convenient to someone simply popping into the kitchen to grab a cold drink or the like. The sink was centered below a window, which is a classic element in most kitchen layout strategies.

Aesthetically, the kitchen is basic: Alder cabinets with a dark stain and an attractive but fairly neutral granite countertop are the main visual elements. This was done to set a strong tone for the space without being overly bold and stealing attention away from one of the most attractive features of the home (a stunning view of the valley below this hilltop home). The kitchen needed to look appropriately grand for its setting but not steal the show.

As a cabinetmaker, I've been called in many times to retrofit cabinets for people who wanted or needed to install a new fridge and had problems fitting it in. In this case, we planned for a 2½" - high trim strip

below the fridge cabinet. This was done so it could be removed if extra height was needed in the future.

Another unique feature in this kitchen was the way we handled the cabinetry below the cooktop. Many kitchen designs call for a couple of large drawers below a cooktop, and this can indeed be a handy place to store pots and pans. In this case, that wasn't going to work. The homeowner didn't want the visual clutter of a hood, so the contractor needed to install a downdraft fan below the cooktop. This bulky item didn't leave any room for drawers, so a pair of cabinet doors with a false front above it were the best way to get some use of the remaining space.

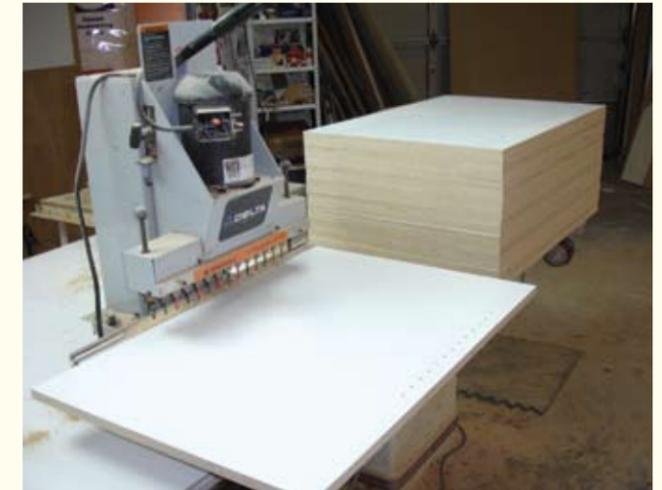
And while we're on the topic of cooktops, it pays to plan ahead and chose your cooktop before the cabinets are built. In this case, the homeowner hadn't chosen his cooktop by the time we needed to get started building the cabinets, so I designed the cabinet so it could accommodate whatever cooktop he eventually chose. Some cooktops hang past the edge of the countertop and feature a control panel that comes down as much as 4" or 5" on the cabinet, while others are inset completely into the countertop. In this case, I built a cabinet with a 7"- high panel across its top that provided a couple of options. If the owner chose a drop-down cooktop, we could cut the panel as per the manufacturer's instructions, and if he didn't, the area could be dressed up with a non-operational drawer

front that would line up with the adjacent drawer fronts with the doors below. Either way, the finished look would be fine.

This project also illustrates a useful tip related to designing center islands. The island was constructed using a number of modular cabinets that were fastened to each other. I find this approach makes for a unit that is much easier to work with — instead of having to worry about getting 6 people together on moving day and fretting about having adequate doorway clearances and the like. It's easy to carry in a half dozen smaller cabinets and screw them together to create a strong and attractive assembly. I used a row of three cabinets side-by-side and another row behind them which faced the opposite direction. I covered the ends with panels that I attached from inside the cabinet with screws. To ensure that the parts would go together smoothly on site, I took the time to pre-fit them in the shop. It's nice to walk onto a job-site with confidence rather than trepidation. Eliminating any unforeseen snags goes a long way to easing the workload on installation day. To anchor the whole thing to the floor, I usually fasten a couple of 2x4s to the sub-floor and screw the island to them, but in this case, I secured a large angle bracket to the floor in each corner of the island and screwed the brackets to the cabinets. The result was an island that looked great and wouldn't budge.



My first visit to the job site was early on — it wasn't even closed in yet — as evidenced by the puddle on the floor. It was neat to see the project take shape before our eyes, and being there helped me envision the best layout for the space



I use a multiple-spindle boring machine to drill the peg holes in the cabinet sides.



The sides of the base cabinets had to be notched at the bottom to form the toe kicks. I used a 4½" x 3" block as a template.



The sides must be fabricated with right and left sides.



I used a right-angle clamp to keep the parts aligned while I fastening them together. I also use the 4½" template as a guide block so I know where to place the nails and screws that hold the cabinets together.



The backs are glued and nailed in place. I use a melamine-specific adhesive to ensure a strong bond.



Here are the base cabinets, lined up like a row of soldiers going into battle.



Delivery day! We had to cope with some snow, but the driveway served as a reasonable staging area nonetheless.

The full-extension soft-close slides are a must for a high-end kitchen like this.



To position the drawer slides, I clamp a template into place. This is faster than measuring, and it doesn't require me to lay the cabinet on its side.



I like to mock-up each kitchen in my shop so I can foresee any problems that might arise during the installation.



I had two assistants for this installations (we also had four bathrooms and a laundry room on this project), and many hands did indeed make for light work.

The early part of the installation moved quickly. The cabinets are set into their approximate positions. The consequent fine-tuning can take a while.



This cabinet base had to be notched to allow a cluster of cables to be run. You can see the gas valve, to which we'll need to provide access by cutting a hole in a cabinet bottom.



The upper cabinets went in quickly thanks to a pair of adjustable cabinet jacks.



The tile-setters didn't need to run the tiles all the way to the back wall because cabinets were going to be placed there. This saved them a bit of time and effort.



The bar area was created by setting a row of base cabinets against a pony wall provided by the contractor. The wall was wired for electrical outlets on the front and back.



Outlets and switches can be located in the sides of cabinets. However, our building code doesn't allow us to leave exposed cables loose inside a cabinet, so we needed to box in this small portion of the cabinet interior.

Inside corners are areas where two runs of cabinetry intersect at a right angle. They need to be planned to make sure that doors and drawers have room to operate properly. In this case, a pair of filler strips were used to create the necessary clearance.



Getting the appliances installed goes a long way towards helping the kitchen to feel finished.

Two steps forward, one step back. The cabinets were in, but the rest of the house was still messy and this spilled over into the kitchen. Progress doesn't always look like progress.



Getting the microwave and the oven installed was a rather time-consuming but straightforward job.



To anchor the center island to the floor, I secured a large angle bracket in each corner. This required drilling a hole in the cabinet bottom, but this was easy to cover up later.



Drilling the hole provided a way to access the hammer-set masonry anchor and establish a rock-solid connection.



The overhanging countertop needed to be supported at its deepest point, so I made a pair of brackets.



Done!

