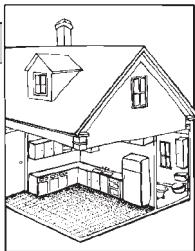


Installing Cabinets The Euro-Way

by Patrick Galvin



There are two ways to install frameless cabinets: The old way, basically the same way we install framed cabinets; and the new way that few builders know about. The new way costs a little more in materials but can save a lot on installation time.

My old friend Bob Cox outlined the traditional way in the November 1987 Kitchen & Bath issue. Bob is one of the deans of the U.S. kitchen industry, and he described installation that way because he knows very well that that is the way nearly all U.S. installers will do it. In fact, in most cases they have no choice, because Euro cabinets made in this country do not come with the new type of hardware.

But it is also true that frameless cabinets can be installed in half the time if done the Euro way, and with an accuracy that is almost guaranteed. So it is something I think our builders should know about.

To explain why, it is necessary to explain how cabinets are built in European plants.

In Europe, cabinets are built with a "systems" approach, commonly called the 32mm system (although the number itself is not important). The 32mm system was explained in a separate story in November (p. 28), so I'll discuss it only in terms of how it helps installation.

What it means is that all components of the cabinet—sides, backs, drawers, etc.—are predrilled for the hardware it will take both to assemble and to install them. Further, all of the hardware suppliers make connectors and other fittings needed both to assemble and install the cabinets and to make them straight, level and true, correcting for bumps in the wall or floor.

The Installation

To install wall cabinets the European way you don't have to hoist them into position and hold them there until you can screw them into the studs. Instead, you install a *hanging rail*, a strip of metal, usually aluminum, about 2 inches below where the tops of the cabinets will be. The rail is leveled and screwed into the studs, with a toggle bolt at the end if there is no stud.

With the rail secured, wall cabinets are hung on the rail with connectors in the upper corners of the cabinets. Screws in the connectors permit them to be moved up or down, in or out, for perfect alignment of cabinets.

Manufacturers differ, but often the side panels are notched at the back to fit over the hanging rail. The notch is only in the substrate, not in the laminate surface. This preserves the appearance of the cabinets at the ends of a run, while providing for an easy knock-out of the laminate for cabinets that go between the two ends.

At this point, our system calls for screwing the cabinets to each other. But the 32mm system provides predrilled holes, and hardware manufacturers have provided male and

female connectors that fit into the holes to fasten the cabinets together. So there is no room for a mistake.

Base cabinets are set not with their toekicks on the floor but on leveling legs. These are situated at the four corners of each base cabinet and are adjustable from roughly 3 1/2 to 7 inches high, depending on manufacturer. They can be adjusted with a screwdriver or wrench from floor level, or by reaching down from inside the cabinet. The legs adjust easily to accommodate uneven floors.

As with the wall cabinets, holes and connectors are provided to fasten base cabinets together.

There is no toekick. Instead there is a *plinth*, a panel that snaps onto the leveling legs to hide that space just as a toekick would.

A lot of shimming and sanding is eliminated and accuracy is not left to the installer.

Drawer fronts also have adjusters that provide for up-and-down and side-to-side adjustment for perfect alignment. Hinges for the doors have 6-way adjustment—in and out, up and down and side to side—which is necessary because clearance for flush doors might be 1/8 inch or less.

The Benefits

As we said, these materials cost extra money. For example, the simple door hinge we use on framed cabinets might cost as little as 50 cents, but one of these adjustable hinges can easily run \$5 or more.

But the time savings are apparent. A lot of shimming and sanding is eliminated and accuracy is not left to the installer. An added selling point for the builder is that the homeowner can make adjustments later when the house settles.

Many U.S. manufacturers have changed to the 32mm system, for both framed and frameless cabinets. But few offer the hanging rails, leg levelers, and connectors. One New England company, Capri Custom Cabinets (59 Armstrong Road, Plymouth, MA 02360; 617/746-4912) does, in its new "Advantage Collection." ■

Patrick J. Galvin is the former editor and publisher of Kitchen & Bath Business.