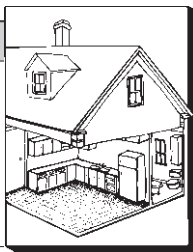


Installation: It's the Little Details That Count

by Geoffrey Taylor



The kitchen is often the only room in a house that the builder truly decorates. It leaves a lasting impression on the homeowner, either good or bad, so it's in your best interest to make it good.

Both your planning and workmanship will determine the quality of the product. Invest the time needed at the beginning to determine the clients' needs and wishes. And make sure the cabinetry is installed with due care. For a poor installation will ruin an otherwise well-designed kitchen.

Careful attention is even more important with the current influx of sophisticated European-style products. The new cabinet types and countertop materials demand that you review your current installation methods and keep up to date on the newest techniques. Furthermore, as the product quality improves—and prices increase—customers are coming to view kitchen cabinets more as furniture than as mere functional storage.

With these newer products, attention to the "little details" is essential for a successful installation. Here are some pointers to help improve your kitchen installations:

First, don't use cedar shingles to shim your base cabinets. This practice is quite common, but cedar is a soft wood that compresses easily from the weight of the cabinet and countertop above. This will often result in the cabinets sinking out of level soon after installation—throwing both the doors and drawers out of alignment. When the base cabinets are covered with tile or granite countertop the result can be immediate and dramatic.

I have seen many cabinets sink enough to crack the tops or break granite. At \$60 and up per square foot for granite countertop, this is an expensive mistake to correct. To avoid this, shim the base cabinets with flat hardwood or plastic shims. Install the cabinets after laying the floor. Although this will require additional care not to damage the floor, you will avoid unsightly seams, cut tiles, and big grout lines where the base cabinets meet the floor. In addition, the floor installation will be simpler and look better.

If you don't want your work to look like cheap furniture, don't use the same cheap materials. Know your wood species and plywood grades, and

avoid rotary veneer when making visible side or back panels. Rotary veneer looks very different from solid lumber and when stained will show its characteristic wild grain pattern quite starkly. It looks better to finish cabinet ends with the same species and veneer grade as the face material. In most instances, plain-sliced veneer will suffice to give you a good match and quality look. And forget about staining one species of wood to match another; you will not succeed. Peel-and-stick veneer sheets work well for finished ends on wall cabinets. But these are difficult to apply over wider areas and should not be used if the panel will be exposed to excessive heat or moisture.

Avoid molding and learn to scribe. Scribing takes more time—but what a difference it makes! Moldings serve several useful and decorative functions, but covering up poor workmanship is not one of them. Clean joints where cabinets meet the wall or countertop add much to the final look, while costing little in additional time.

Don't crowd the windows with wall cabinets. It is best to leave 2 to 3 inches between the cabinet and window trim. If this is not possible, choose an oversized molding and then trim to fit tightly to the cabinets. A 3/8-inch gap here is like missing the fourth down by fractions: The coach is going to yell.

Put enough under-cabinet lighting into your design. This task lighting is absolutely necessary and too often ignored by the electrician. Also consider track or recess ceiling lighting controlled by dimmers. These will supply good localized lighting while maintaining maximum flexibility.

Plan, secure, and stabilize your countertop joints. Plan your joints to minimize their number and to locate them where they will be least noticed. Always support, spline, and glue any open joint in addition to using any factory-supplied joint connectors. This will ensure that both sections of counter remain at the same level. (Think about how many times you stood on top of the kitchen counter when you were young, then ask yourself if your joint will hold.)

Finally, clean up the site every day. A dirty site implies a disregard for the furniture you're installing and encourages the client to suspect and look for hidden damage. Treating it as your own impresses clients and helps to reduce callbacks and warranty claims. And when it's all installed, make it shine. Clean out all the cabinets and drawers, wash the fronts, and remove all dirt from the countertops. It will assure that both you and the kitchen look great to your customer. ■



It's important to keep the site clean. This gives your client the message that you really care about the "furniture" you are installing.

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