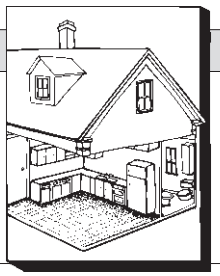

# The Window Over the Sink

by Lynn Comeskey

The kitchen is not a room you associate with a large expanse of windows; there is just too much competition for wall space from cabinets and appliances. And with one notable exception, clients seldom mention windows or other light sources when they consider this room. That exception is the classic "kitchen window" that is centered above the sink.

Even if it faces the siding of a neighbor's house ten feet away or is a source of uncomfortable heat and glare, most clients want it there. And more often than not, the client wants a projecting window — a bow, a bay, or a "greenhouse" type.

This last category sets my teeth on edge. Although it sounds a little strange coming from a remodeling contractor, I do my best to counsel clients away from "trendy" choices. Ideas come and go, but some really are better than others. My favorite example is the turquoise appliances that were promoted for a while a couple of decades ago. Although I suppose manufacturers, suppliers, and contractors made a buck on replacing those appliances after a few years, the client was the loser. I think aluminum, greenhouse windows will date houses in the same way a few years from now.

### Design Considerations

Despite the popularity of projecting kitchen windows, they have their impractical side. For instance, most homeowners imagine plants in the window. But with almost any exposure except north, there is a good chance the plants will fry. In all but the warmest climates, these windows will also suffer from a lot of condensation as steam from the sink and dishwasher fills the window cavity. Cleaning them is no treat either considering there is a couple of feet of counter between you and the edge of the unit.

It is also important to consider the space the projecting window is going to be taking up on the exterior, and whether the operation of the windows will get in the way of anything. Marvin bay windows for instance, which come in both 30-degree and 45-degree versions depending on the width of their side lights, vary from 8½ to 33½ inches in depth. Manufactured garden windows, or "box bays," project anywhere from 18 inches for a Marvin window, to 23 inches for an Andersen.

Bay windows also take up an awful lot of wall space when they are properly proportioned. Although you can buy factory-made bays that are as narrow as four feet, the center light in these units is usually the same size as the side lights, or close to it. Bays are much more appealing when the middle light is larger, like a picture window.

Finally, placement is important. Try to design at least three or four inches between the edge of the window and adjacent wall cabinets to keep discrepancies — window casing and cabinets slightly out of parallel, or unequal spacing on either side of the window — less obvious. Also make sure that the homeowners can reach the operating hardware.

### Manufactured Units

Most manufacturers make true bays in 30-degree and 45-degree models, and 90-degree box bays. I checked the prices on four national brands of wood windows in my area using a 7x4-foot, 45-degree, clad, casement bay; and a similar 90-degree box bay that measures 4x3½ feet.

| | *Bay* | *Box Bay* |
|---|---|---|
| Andersen | $ 945.00 | $ 860.00 |
| Kolbe & Kolbe | 839.00 | 904.00 |
| Marvin | 940.00 | 975.00 |
| Pella | 1,052.00 | N/A |

All of these are excellent quality, though each has slightly different sizes and features. Depending on the needs of each job, these differences could well outweigh any cost considerations. I have come to the conclusion there really is not a "best" window manufacturer. In fact, the supplier is often more important because even the best literature will leave you with questions.

Bay units are supplied with their three angled windows attached. But be aware the *head* and *seat* boards, which will fill in the top and bottom of the window, are ordered separately. These are cut precisely to fit by the manufacturer, and there really isn't any savings in trying to make these parts on the job.

Extending counter space into the unit makes good sense, but ordering the proper height window isn't as easy as it sounds. The manufacturer's catalog dimensions are often not adequate to determine whether you can line the head of the window up with the others in the room and still make the sill plane fit in with the counter. We try to locate a full-size sample to measure.

If you can't make it work, it is better to keep the window sill high and to fill in with a very short "wall" from the bottom of the window down to the countertop. When the counter surface is tiled, we screw down steel straps to minimize movement between the window and the house.

An item which is easy to overlook when you're using wide exterior trim is the sill "horns." These are projections of the sill on either side of the window which need to be as wide as the trim above them. These horns are usually two to three inches long, which matches the stucco or brick mold supplied with the windows. But if you're scheduled to trim out with 1x6, for instance, you have to order six-inch horns.

Also be aware you can order windows without the exterior trim and receive a small credit. You don't want to remove the exterior trim; it always seems to be attached with an inordinate number of staples which makes for a lot of work.

### Installation

Framing the opening for a projecting window is no different than for a regular window. Just use the manufacturer's rough-in dimensions. You do have to consider how the areas above and below the window are to be framed. The window is either supported by a footing, cantilevered floor joists the shape of the projecting window, or by a 45-degree bracket. The area over the projecting window is either a framed roof, or the framing is extended vertically to the existing roof overhang. In the latter case, this becomes a new exterior wall.

Installing a projecting window isn't tricky as long as you have enough manpower to lift it into place. The amount of trim work to finish out all the joints varies significantly from manufacturer to manufacturer. Look at a window before you bid to determine how much work and material will be necessary.

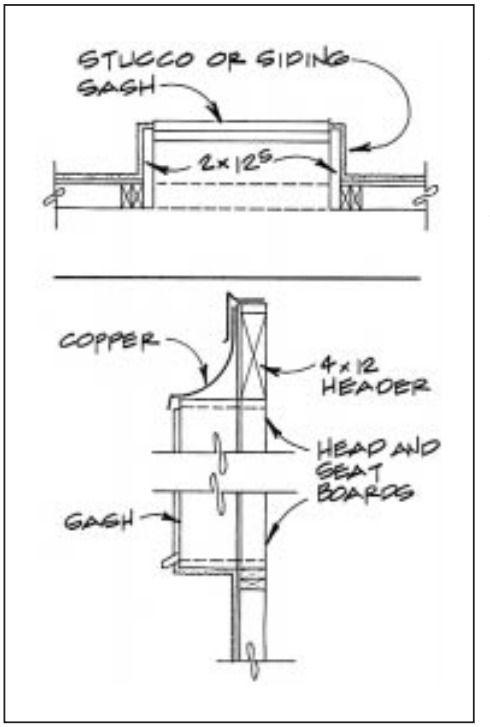


**Figure 1.** *This site-made "box bay" is framed with 2x12s and uses either fixed glass or manufactured sash in casement or double-hung styles. The roof can be covered with copper or the existing roofing material, or the framing can be butted up under the eaves.*

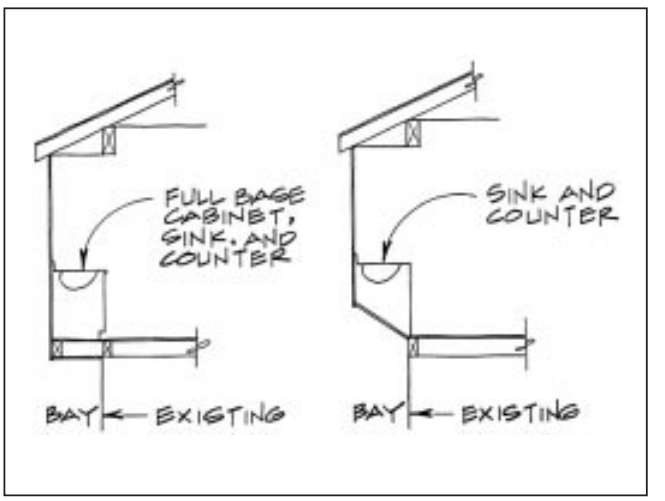


**Figure 2.** *A tall bay can be used in a small bath or kitchen where that couple of extra feet of floor space is critical. You'll need a full-height to accommodate a base cabinet, but a cut-off version will house a sink and countertop.*

### Site-Built Alternatives

We have developed our own box (90-degree) bay which works quite well (see Figure 1). We use it where the homeowner wants a deeper counter but doesn't need sidelights. We use 2x12s or plywood for the sides, top, and bottom; the solid wood holds nails better. We have used both aluminum and wood sash in the opening for casement, fixed, or double-hung styles.

On the exterior, the top of the window can extend vertically to the roof overhang, or you can frame a small shed roof. This roof can either be covered with copper — we have a local fabricator who makes these up — or the existing roofing material. We usually don't have to use brackets underneath the flat, 2x12 bottom — the sides carry the weight. After flashing the unit, we apply siding. This homemade box bay saves us approximately $500 compared to a factory-made, three-window bay.

We have also used projecting windows in small kitchens and baths to pick up an additional foot or two by incorporating wall cabinet, counter, and sink in them (see Figure 2). The impact on the room is dramatic, and the procedure is not as expensive as it sounds. In the case of a small bath, you can substitute a mirror for the center window.

The projection can come just low enough to allow for the sink without a disposal, or it can run to the floor to include an entire base cabinet. In this latter case, we use cantilevered floor joists to support the bay instead of having to excavate and pour a footing. ■

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