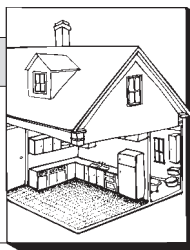


Working The Corners

by Paul B. Turpin



My first job in construction was working for a general contractor who designed and built kitchens with beautiful hardwood cabinets. Ever since, kitchens and cabinetry have been my first love. Although I now subcontract most of the fabrication, I still design the cabinets and usually handle the tricky parts myself.

One of those tricky spots is how to get the most efficient storage where the cabinets turn the corner. I have two solutions to offer: revolving shelves — lazy Susans — for L-shaped, base or wall cabinets; and pull-out shelves for blind-corner, base cabinets. Both of these are useful for storing large items such as pots, pans, large bowls, platters, and woks.

Efficient Lazy Susans

I'm a cook as well as a contractor, and for me, efficient storage means being able to get what I need easily. The corner lazy Susan is one of the most convenient forms of storage you can build into cabinets if it is handled properly.

The lazy Susans I make are basic three-quarter circles with pie-cut wedges removed. I try to keep the pivot point as close to the front corner of the L cabinet as possible. This provides for maximum swing of the shelf out of the casework. The more the shelf swings out of the cabinet, the easier it is to use. There's also a storage bonus: the lowest revolving shelf has a few inches of space beneath it. In a base cabinet, that's a good place to store trays and cookie sheets.

I make the radius of the shelf as large as possible. The limiting factor is the distance from the pivot point to the back walls of the cabinet. But you're not limited to a symmetrical three-quarter circle; asymmetrical pie cuts work fine. The largest one I've done was in a kitchen where one leg

of the L was 24 inches deep and the other was 30 inches. I figured the largest possible circle that would fit in the corner, and then cut out just enough of it to let the doors close.

I normally buy pivot hardware (Rev-A-Shelf Inc., AX6120-04, P.O. Box 99585, Louisville, KY 40269; 502/499-5835) and make my own shelves. I use 3/4-inch hardwood plywood for base cabinets, usually birch, with a plastic T-molding edge. These are both durable and replaceable.

I use the same pivot hardware for base and wall cabinets, although I've had problems with 42-inch wall cabinets since the standard package is made for 36-inch base units. When I looked for an extension for the center shaft, I got the typical "can't be done" from my hardware supplier. But I eventually found some steel tubing the right diameter through a machine shop.

A wrinkle to this setup that you can try in both base and wall cabinets is to extend the case (the legs of the L) for extra storage. You can add vertical tray storage in base cabinets or fill these areas with fixed shelves that are scribed and cut on the curve to accommodate the lazy Susan shelves.

The finishing touch on these corner cabinets is the configuration of the doors. I dislike doors that are "inset" — attached to the lazy Susan shelves so they swing into the cabinet as the shelf swings out. The main problem with this setup is that the doors usually don't match the others in the kitchen, particularly when overlay doors are used.

I prefer to hinge one door to the other at the inside corner of the L with a continuous hinge. That way, the first motion swings the first door open, and then a little pull opens the second door. The action is similar to free-hung (no track) bi-fold doors (see Figure 1). These paired doors are

more susceptible to damage — young children like to swing on them — but I make it clear to my clients that there are limits to the warranty.

There are some other prices to pay, of course, for doing things this way. A large L-shaped base cabinet takes longer to make than a conventional one, and is a bear to haul around. To give the case some rigidity, I usually make one of the two "backs" from the same 3/4-inch plywood as the top, bottom, and sides. Particularly in large, corner wall cabinets this helps prevent racking.

Installing large base shelves is really a pain. The shelf diameter is larger than the opening, so you need to worm them into the cabinet by tilting them and taking advantage of the "pie-cut." Then you have to thread the center shaft through the shelves, and slide them up into final position. This is made all the more awkward by the fact you're working in a corner on your knees, which also makes a helper more trouble than he's worth.

All of these things add up to a lot more time and trouble than buying a standard unit and plugging it in. To sell the extra cost of this to prospective customers, I ask them to look at a kitchen where I've installed a custom lazy Susan. Typically, they either love it or don't particularly care, and that makes the decision easy.

Blind-corner Bases

Another corner problem is the blind-corner base cabinet. The very best storage answer for this situation are shelves that swing out for maximum use of the back corner of the case, and then pull out to let you see and use the entire shelf (see Figure 2).

There is a variety of prefabricated, swing-and-pull hardware of European heritage available. Amerock Corp. (P.O. Box. 7018, Rockford, IL 61125-7018; 815/963-9631) manufactures a good one in large sizes, but you can also put it together yourself as I do. This method also works to retrofit existing cabinets.

I start with two, 3/4-inch plywood half circles for each shelf. The first becomes the *pivoting* shelf. Feeney Mfg. Co (P.O. Box 191, Muncie, IN 47308; 317/288-8730) makes a nice

pivoting bracket, although I just used a carriage bolt on the first one I did. The second half-circle mounts above the first with standard under-mount drawer slides and becomes the pull-out, or finished shelf. I use Accuride model 1029 drawer slides. (Accuride, 12311 Shoemaker Ave., Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670; 213/903-0200).

The key is supporting the outer edge of the pivoting half circle. While the Feeney pivot will work by itself for small shelves, I add a small fixed shelf out on the perimeter (or use the cabinet bottom in the case of the lowest shelf) for supporting large, heavy-load shelves. Nylon drawer rollers attached to the fixed supporting shelf in a radial pattern and spaced about 6 inches support the underside of the pivoting shelf and provide smooth-rolling support on this perimeter.

When the shelf is fully swung out — just short of 90 degrees — there is still the problem of tipping since only half the shelf is supported. The solution I've found by trial and error is to mount a single nylon drawer roller *above* the shelf (facing down rather than up), pinning it between the upper roller and the ones below. This counterbalance effect makes the pivoting shelf a stable platform for the slide-out shelf attached to it.

You need to do your geometry carefully to get a smooth-working, maximum swing-out shelf, but the results are worth it. Some vertical space is sacrificed to the assembly itself (supporting shelf plus rollers plus pivoting shelf plus under-mount slides plus pull-out shelf), but this is more than offset by the tremendous convenience of a shelf that fully extends. The unit in my kitchen holds my large cast-iron pots and pans, with negligible deflection.

Working the corners takes some trouble and attention to detail, but I find that the results rival the best of cabinet storage conveniences, and can make a world of difference in a small L or U-shaped kitchen. ■

Paul B. Turpin is a Los Angeles contractor who specializes in kitchen and bath remodeling and does all of his own design work.



Figure 1. Free-hung, bi-fold doors often work well with a lazy Susan in an L-shaped cabinet. The more typical doors which attach to the shelves, look out of place in kitchens with overlay doors on the rest of the cabinets.

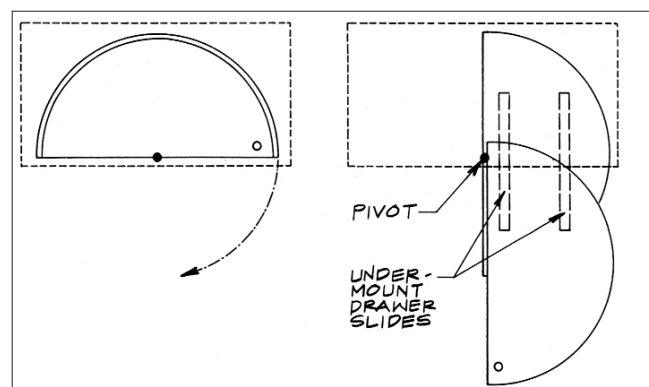


Figure 2. Shelves that swing out and pull out make the best use of space in a blind-corner, base cabinet. This shelf setup is made of two 3/4-inch plywood half circles and standard drawer slides.