Short-Cut Kitchen Design

by Jim Krengel

I often wonder how many hours kitchen planners, designers, and contractors spend every year drawing and detailing kitchen plans that their clients don't like or can't afford.

You've drawn the walls and doors in precise location, each cabinet is detailed — it's your finest drawing to date — but when you sit back and study your final work, you discover that it really would have worked better had the refrigerator been on the right end, not the left. You also see that you've drawn a kitchen that will be much more expensive than your customer will even consider. You've committed a great deal of time and expertise in vain.

Had you been using the "quick sketch" method, you could have tried placing the refrigerator both ways and made a calculated decision as to the best location. You could have also contemplated the rough costs for each of these designs to deter-

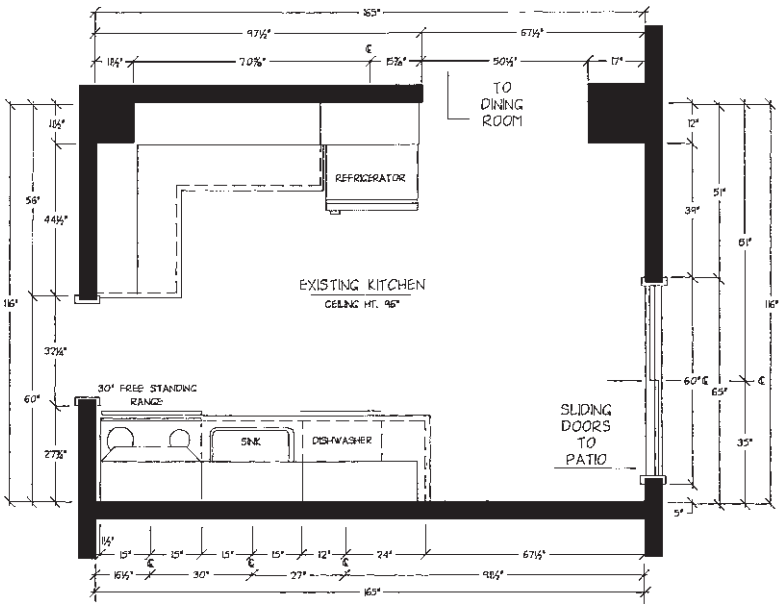


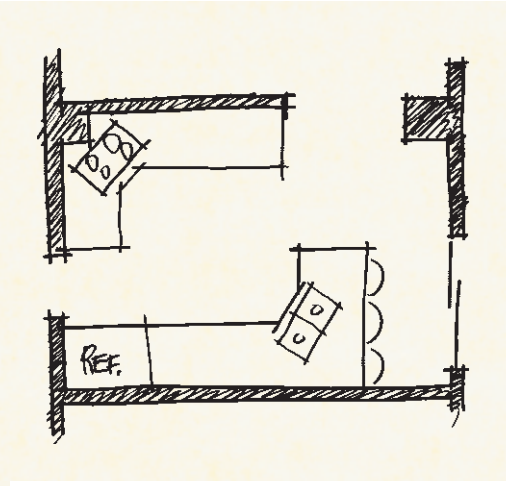
Figure 1. Kitchen design begins with an accurate, 1/2-inch-scale drawing of the space, showing all walls, openings, and structural features. Existing cabinet layout doesn't need to be represented.

mine the best direction before committing more time.

In this article, I'll show you the quickest and easiest method yet to design a kitchen or bath. It will save you lots of time and aggravation and should prevent you from spinning your wheels on projects that may not go anywhere.

Throw Away Your Scale

There are several approaches to quick sketch drawing. This is the one I use most often: Using a takeoff from the building plan, or dimensions taken at the job site, draw the floor plan to 1/2-inch scale, the most common scale used for kitchen and bath planning and sufficient for drawing in more detail than the typical 1/4-inch scale used for framing plans (see Figure 1, previous page). This takeoff will be the foundation for all further work. Next, print a dozen or so copies of the floor plan to sketch on, or do what I do — purchase rolls of tracing paper. It's inexpensive and comes in 12-, 18-, and 24-inch rolls. I tear off a piece and use a felt-tip pen or Sharpie to quickly trace the outline of the room. If it takes longer than 30 seconds, you're being too careful. The lines don't have to be perfectly straight because, at this point, you're only using the room outline as the perimeter to help you find a workable solution to the space.



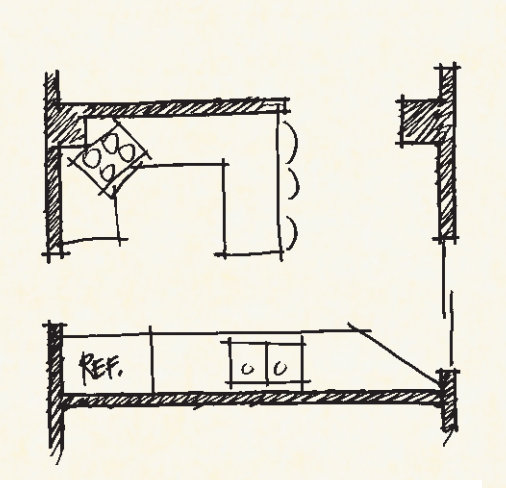
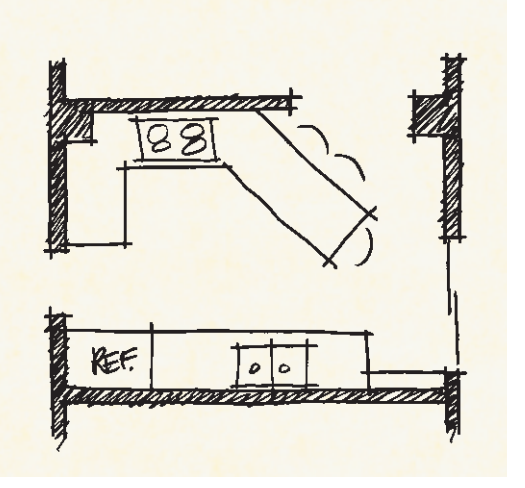
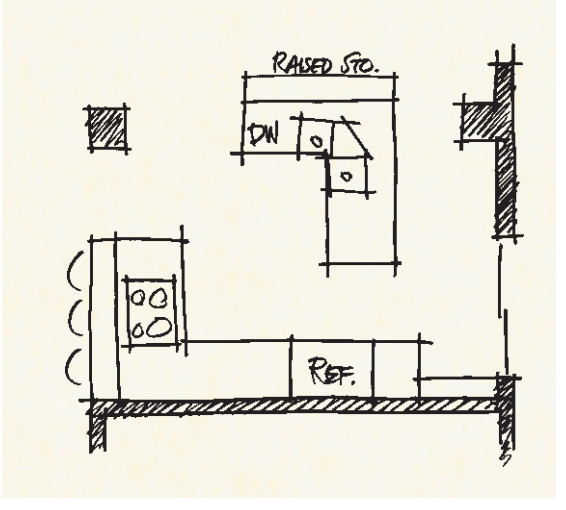
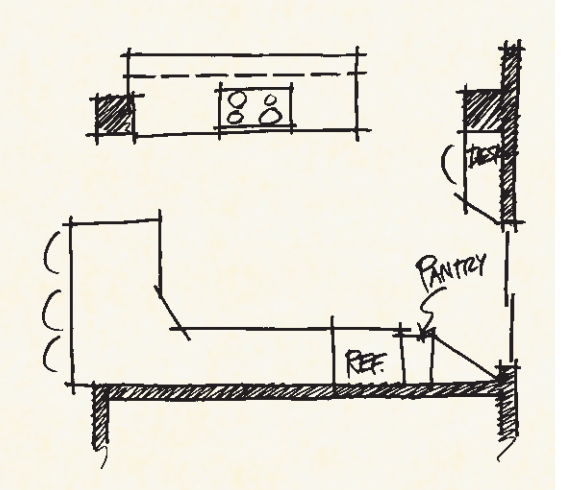


Figure 2. After drawing the floor plan at 1/2-inch scale, all you need is a roll of tracing paper to explore various design possibilities.



I prefer to trace the floor plan from my scale drawing rather than work from copies. If I use copies of the floor plan, I can't easily take out walls or doors or move things around. And preestablished lines make it difficult to think outside of the





box. Instead, my sketch can begin with the room floor plan, but I'll leave out a wall that I want to move, or line through a removable opening.

The first and most difficult part of this design technique is to throw away your scale and straightedge. These items, as important as they are in the final draft, do nothing but slow you down in the early stages. You'll be surprised how quickly you can learn to draw to scale without using a scale.

Fast, not final. The next step is to sketch in a kitchen or bath. You probably won't spend more than a minute or two on these early sketches. It isn't necessary at this stage to decide where a drawer base or specialty item will go. For now, we're just looking for conceptual ideas. Don't use an eraser with this method — draw over what you don't like or just chuck the whole idea. Your time commitment is small; spend two minutes with a plan, and if you don't like it, it's history (Figure 2, previous page).

Check to see how close to scale you're sketching and fine-tune your ability in this area until you can draw so close to 1/2-inch scale that you can actually tell the difference between a 15-inch and an 18-inch base cabinet. This is an acquired skill but, with practice, is much easier than it may seem.

What ifs. Repeat the process again, sketching as many ideas as you can. They don't necessarily have to be great ideas, just ideas, period. The point is to commit to paper as many ideas as possible in as short a time as possible. You can fine-tune some of them later.

I might sketch a dozen plans for a kitchen project in 15 to 30 minutes. Sometimes I'll do a quick perspective sketch of an idea to see how I like it (Figure 3, next page). Once I have all of these drawings to choose from, I usually select three favorites and draw them up for the customer to see. Having more than one plan for my client to select from increases my chance of selling the project, since most of my competitors will provide only one plan. When you give clients choices, it decreases their need to see what someone else might do.

If the customer asks, "Why didn't you do a plan with the refrigerator on the left end?" you simply get out your tracings to show that you tried placing it there, but it didn't work as well as what you're presenting. In short, you have a documented history of your design process to guide the discussion. And customers love to see the working drawings as well as the finished plan.

The quick sketch method also works for designing in front of the customer; if you don't mind, the customer can even help. The beauty of this is that you can get an instant response to your ideas. Customers either like them or they don't. A design either fits their budget or it doesn't. Their reaction usually helps create another new direction for you to try.

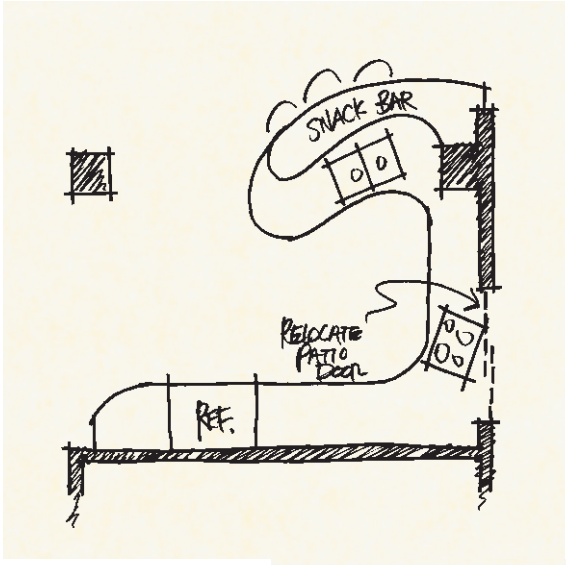


Figure 3. The tracing technique allows you to eliminate walls and doors at will, helping you to think outside the prescribed box. Taking a quick elevation from a trial sketch can help you determine if the concept will fly.

Computer design. There's a good reason for not starting on the computer. As a friend of mine once said, "Nothing slows down creativity as much as a computer," and I agree. When I'm designing on the computer and ideas are flowing like water, I simply can't get them down as fast as I want. With the quick sketch method, I can put ideas down as fast as I can think of them and not have to fight a design program that doesn't want me to place an appliance at an odd angle in an island.

The quick sketch method can conserve your time, enhance your creativity, offer your customers more possibilities, and increase your sales.

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