

Kitchen & Bath

Adding Style With Stock Cabinets

by Kelly Morisseau

Ever experience the frustration of having to design a kitchen for clients with champagne tastes and a soda pop budget? You keep a lid on costs by specifying a decent, inexpensive stock cabinet line. The layout is realistic and functional, and you feel pretty good about the package. Now, if only the clients were as happy as you. "Can't you make it more like this one?" they complain, waving a magazine clipping of a high-end kitchen remodel in your face. Well, don't grit your teeth: There are ways that you can infuse some sizzle into your existing design without upgrading the cabinets or detonating the budget.

Window Seat

A window seat is a popular amenity because it adds a functional, custom detail to a conventional kitchen plan.

It doesn't require a lot of space; it only has to be large enough to allow at least one person to sit comfortably. Many kitchen spaces have undersized or underused nook areas, perfect for this type of application. And cabinets under the seat provide excellent storage for items like puzzles, children's games, and table linens.

The average person can sit comfortably in a 24-inch-wide space. A window seat for two people would therefore need to be 48 inches wide. You can create a seat that size by using a pair of 24-inch-wide wall cabinets, 12 inches high and 24 inches deep. Why not just use a 48-inch-wide cabinet? There's not enough support in the center of the cabinet to handle the weight of one person, let alone two. Sure, you could add a center stile and bracing, but it's stronger and faster to join two cabinets.

A standard seat is about 18 inches deep, or 6 inches less than stock cabinet depth. So if the cabinet construction allows simple modification, you can cut it down. If the window seat is installed in a line of cabinets, the resulting recessed faceline enhances the "cozy nook" look of the seat. Otherwise, thick back cushions and throw pillows can fill in the stock 24-inch depth (see Figure 1).

Standard seat height above the floor is also about 18 inches. A 12-inch cabinet on a 4-inch kick, topped by a 4- to 6-inch-thick cushion, brings the total finished height to between 20 and 22 inches. That's still fine for most users; in fact, it'll boost a toddler's chin off the tabletop. On the other hand, a 5-foot-3-inch-tall adult may lose circulation in the legs at that height, so check all dimensions against your client's. If a lower, more conventional height is

Window Seat

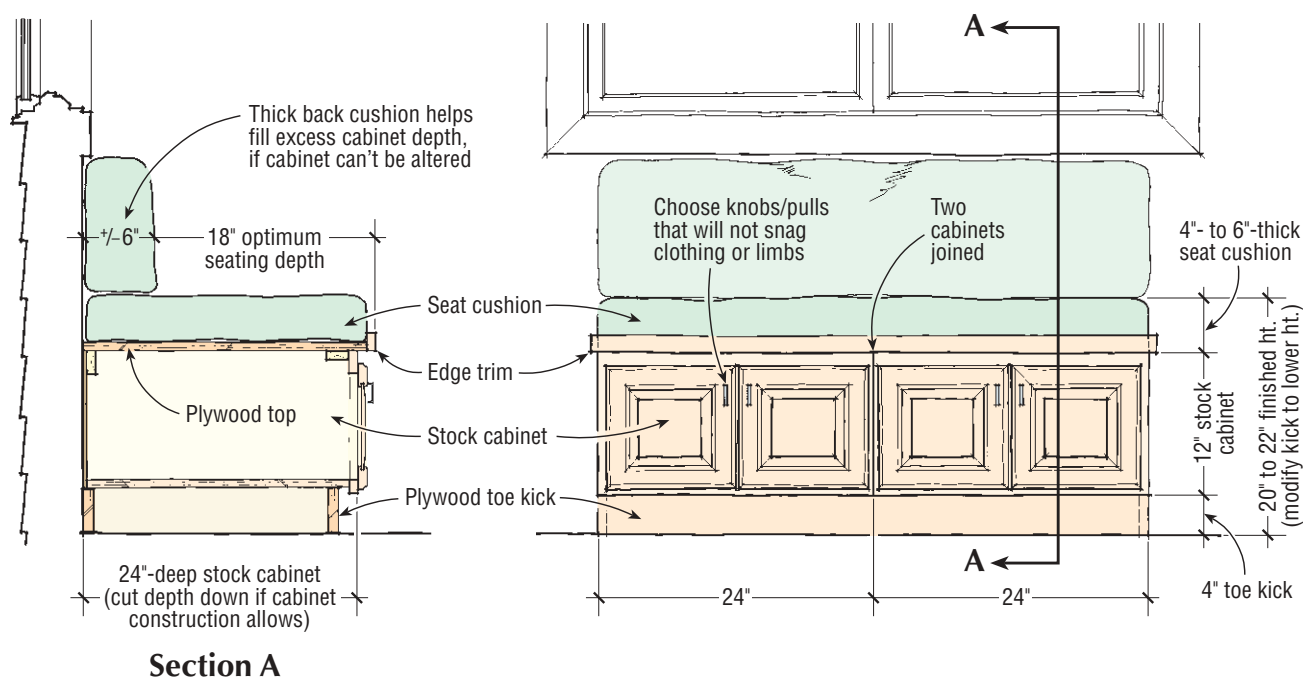


Figure 1. A pair of 24-inch wall cabinets, mounted on a site-built toe kick, provide the foundation for a built-in window seat.

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preferred, simply reduce the height of the toe kick accordingly.

Make the toe kick from plywood or particleboard, with a center brace to carry the center support through to the floor. Add a plywood top trimmed with an edge molding. I install the strip with its bottom edge flush with the plywood panel to create a lip that prevents the cushion from slipping forward.

The price of this window seat, using a good stock cabinet line (I work with KraftMaid, Schrock, and Hertco) should come to about \$550 to \$700 in materials, mostly depending on the door style. A final note: Choose cabinet knobs or pulls that won't snag clothing or limbs.

Baking Table

Function is the key when planning this unit. Case in point: A client who loves to make pies rolls out the dough to at least 12 to 14 inches and will need two to three times that width to function comfortably. Add mixing bowls, rolling pins, and various cutlery and you're looking at a minimum 36-inch-wide table. To fill the bill, you'll need a 30- to 36-inch-wide desk drawer unit, the kind that allows for knee space underneath. If the stock line includes a vanity drawer depth (21 inches deep), so much the better, as the countertop can then terminate neatly, with no projection, against standard, 24-inch-deep base cabinets on either side (Figure 2).

Traditional, turned-wood posts, preferably 3 inches in diameter by 32 inches high, make nice supports. If the cabinet line doesn't include posts, substitute square-end stair balusters or newel posts. (The square end makes it easier to attach the posts to the drawer box.) Trim the balusters to length and paint or stain them to match or complement the cabinets.

The drawer unit will be sandwiched at its front edge between the two posts. Install the posts $\frac{3}{4}$ inch proud of the

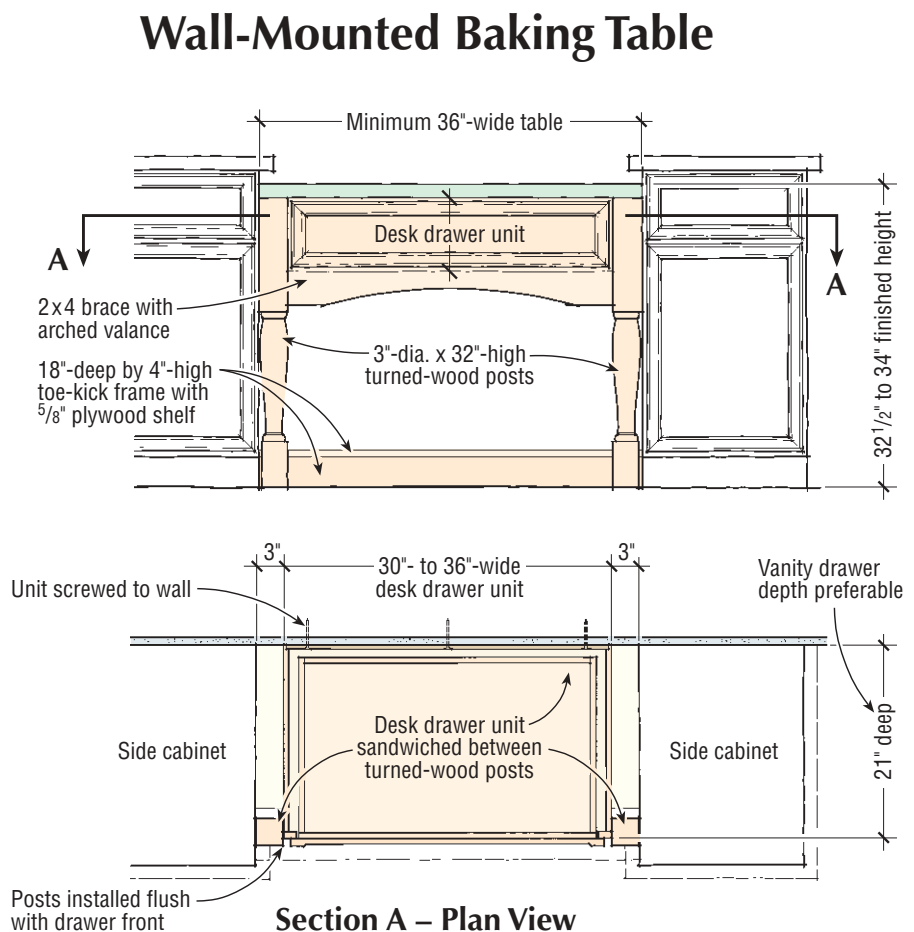


Figure 2. If the cabinet line doesn't offer a table leg option, use balusters or newels to elevate a desk drawer box to baking table status.

cabinet frame, or flush with the drawer front, so they won't project beyond the overhang of the countertop. Attach the posts to the drawer unit before you screw it to the wall, so the legs support the front of the unit during installation. You may wish to install the legs loosely initially, using oversized pilot holes in the drawer carcass, to allow for small adjustments to variations in floor height.

Be aware of the height of your client. The final height of this table will be 32½ to 34 inches above the finished floor, depending on the thickness of the countertop — a good height for people from 5 foot 2 inches to 5 foot 7 inches, but a literal pain in the neck for anyone taller. If your client tops 5

foot 7, don't drop the baking table at all — stick with a standard, 36-inch-high working surface.

The baking table installs between common base cabinets, so remember to specify finished end panels for the two flanking cabinets. I build an 18-inch-deep-by-4-inch-high toe-kick frame in the opening before installing the table, and top it with a full-width 5/8-inch-by-18-inches-deep plywood or particleboard shelf. A bead or rope molding on the front edge adds a nice extra touch.

Thirty-six inches is a long span, especially if the drawer unit is of frameless construction. To prevent deflection, reinforce the front edge with a 1-by rail — or a 2x4 if you antic-

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ipate heavy kneading. Recess the 2x4 slightly and conceal it with an arched valance.

If you use a 24-inch-deep drawer unit, keep the doors of adjacent base cabinets in mind, because the low, projecting top of the baking table may check their swing. Either reverse the doors to swing away from the table, or specify top drawers for these abutting units. In any case, you'll want to chamfer the countertop corners to prevent hip bangs.

The price for this unit may surprise you. All materials, including the cabinet, turned legs, shelf material, and valance, cost \$75 to \$125 less than a standard, drawer-and-door base cabinet.

End Display Shelves

Custom cabinet installations often feature some variation of an open-shelf display unit at island, peninsula, and base cabinet ends. The good news is that stock cabinet lines typically include at least one version of this idea. The bad news is that they're almost never what the client wants. Here are a couple of easy ways to solve that problem. Once again, I use two wall cabinets, of varying styles, 24 inches wide, 12 inches deep, and 15 inches high, or any height combination that totals 30 to 31 inches, so that, when stacked and mounted on a toe kick, they'll match the height of the other base cabinets. The wall cabinets should have both ends finished.

KraftMaid, for example, offers the following 24x15x12-inch wall cabinet modules: a bookcase with a finished interior and valance; a standard, closed cabinet; a plate rack; and a wine rack. Used in various combinations, these four units give you plenty of possibilities to work with (Figure 3).

Again, build a 4-inch toe-kick frame to support the stacked and joined cabinets. You can apply a flat decorative molding to hide the front seam between units and dress up the cabinet

End Display Shelves

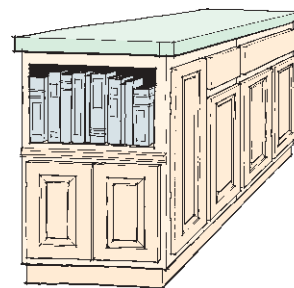
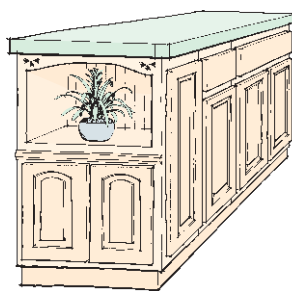
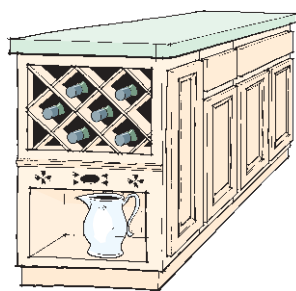


Figure 3. Mix-and-matchable wall cabinets provide plenty of options for terminating an island or peninsula cabinet. Use door blanks to finish the ends.

sides by applying false door panels, 12 inches wide by 30 or 31 inches high.

Avoid stacking two frameless door units without a spacer, or buildup, between them, so that top and bottom doors don't hit. The same goes for the upper door clearance under a drop-edge countertop. If the countertop doesn't have a built-up edge, it may overlap the front of the cabinet by $\frac{3}{4}$ inch, effectively ensuring that no one will ever open the upper doors.

Display cabinets are costlier than other units, ranging in price anywhere from \$900 to \$1,500, depending on door style, type of units used, and whether you apply false door panels.

What your clients want is some kind of a twist that makes their kitchen stand out. So use your imagination and see if they don't end up saying, "That's what we're looking for!" 

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