

## Updating a Compact Kitchen

BY ROE OSBORN

**For as long** as I'd known her, my friend, Laurie, had talked about redoing the kitchen in her tiny cottage on Cape Cod. Each time the topic came up, I looked around the minute space and just shook my head. She'd always reply, "I have a plan."

**New plan on the same basic layout.** On a recent visit to the cottage, I noticed that her tone regarding the kitchen upgrade had gotten more serious. Standing in the confines of less than 70 square feet, she gave me her wish list for the new kitchen, which included new, smaller appliances, a dishwasher (she'd always washed dishes by hand), and an added counter-top space extending along one wall, with open shelves above.

The most prominent feature—and the biggest challenge of this kitchen—was a large bay window that took up the lion's share of the biggest wall. Below the window, the existing cabinets consisted of a 36-inch Lazy Susan in one corner with a 27-inch sink base and a 15-inch drawer base next to it. A narrow door-front cabinet and an odd, unfinished, leftover space completed that wall. Wall cabinets included a stock two-door cabinet on one flanking wall and a vintage glass-front metal cabinet that Laurie had rescued from a friend's trash on the opposite wall.

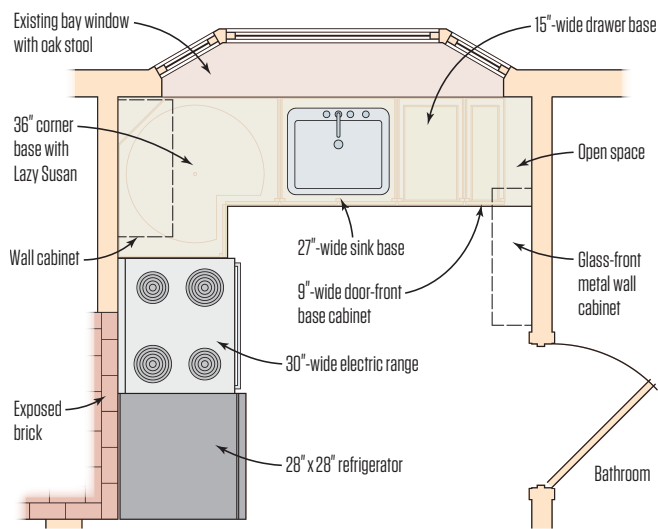
As I began to sketch out the layout for the new kitchen, I started by reducing the footprints of the full-sized appliances and replacing them with more compact versions. A 24-inch refrigerator would replace the existing 30-inch model, and the stove would shrink from 30 inches to 20 inches. I reduced the Lazy Susan to 32 inches and kept the 27-inch sink base. As a result, I gained space for a 12-inch drawer base between the stove and fridge, a narrow pullout spice rack on the other side of the stove, and an 18-inch dishwasher next to the sink. To make use of the other blind corner, I had just enough space for a 12-inch pull-out pantry cabinet. Enclosing the fridge would allow for extra storage above (see plan on page 24).

**Online cabinets.** Armed with my sketch, Laurie and I went on a cabinet quest. The budget for this kitchen was limited, so custom cabinets were out of the question. But with all the odds and ends and precise space requirements, we even had to rule out cabinet outlets and big box stores after receiving several proposals that were well out of the budget.

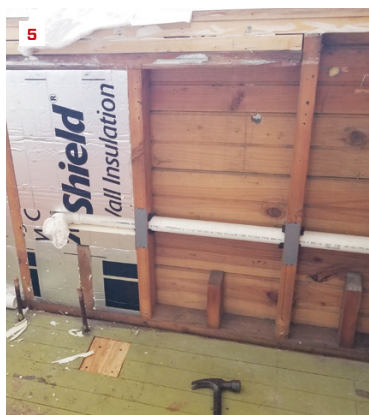
Then I remembered the *JLC* article "Ready-to-Assemble Cabinets" (Dec/16). It included a list of online companies for purchasing cabinets. I went through the list, trying to find a company that could provide exactly what we needed. We



Original Kitchen



**Before.** Last renovated in the 1990s, the existing kitchen (1) had full-size appliances, a tile countertop, and stock cabinets that left an open space on one side that was barely usable.



The existing sink was unvented, with an S-trap drain (2). The plumber installed a new P-trap drain (3), which he vented through a shared bathroom wall (4) before the open walls were insulated (5).



The vintage, glass-front metal cabinet in the original kitchen (6) was relocated and replaced with shop-built oak shelves (shown here without the edging or wall cleats installed) in the remodel (7).

settled on [cabinets.com](http://cabinets.com), which seemed to have all the different cabinets on our list. The order arrived on time with nothing missing, including all the various specialty items. Best of all, the cabinets were already assembled.

**Adding a sink vent.** Just after ordering the cabinets, we brought in a plumber. The first thing he pointed out was an S-trap with an air admittance valve on the kitchen sink drain. Adding a dishwasher would require a new, properly vented sink drain. But with the window in place, the drain would have to travel below the window and into an adjacent wall shared by a bathroom in order to be vented properly.

After stripping the window wall and the bathroom wall back to the framing, the plumber was able to run the drain through the floor, and the vent up into the attic. I took care of drilling the hole in the roof and installing the boot and final length of vent pipe.

**Cooking with gas.** Part of Laurie's wish list was converting the stove from electric to gas (propane). So the next item on the plumber's list was adding gas lines. This time, his inspection revealed that the existing piping for the cottage's propane heaters was undersized. All of the piping would need to be replaced before the new stove could be installed. Luckily, none of that work impeded the cabinet installation.

Electrical work in the kitchen was minimal. The two sets of GFCI-protected outlets from the original kitchen remained in place. The electrician removed the 220-volt stove circuit, which was no longer necessary, and added a 110-volt receptacle that was required for the new gas stove, as well as a receptacle under the sink for the dishwasher.

After insulating and replacing the drywall on the two walls, the cabinet installation proceeded quickly and easily. I first installed the Lazy Susan and the sink base. Then I assembled and installed the cabinet and side panels for the refrigerator, also part of the cabinet package. The fridge backed onto an existing brick chimney, so I had to anchor cleats to the brick to attach the panels. At the other corner, I set the 12-inch pull-out cabinet in place and then built legs to support the new countertop section that would be installed.

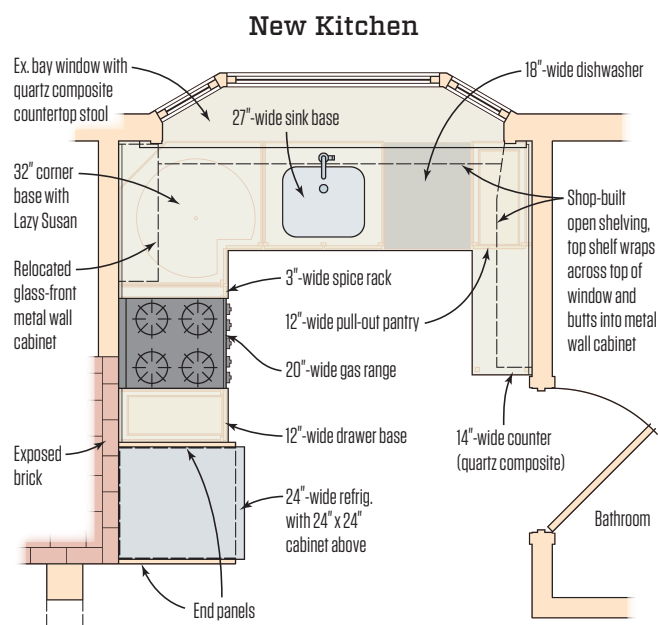
**Repurposed wall cabinet and built-in shelves.**

Laurie insisted that her quirky glass-front metal cabinet be part of the new kitchen. As it turned out, its shallow depth was nearly perfect for the wall above the Lazy Susan. The space next to the opposite side of the window wasn't nearly as wide. The shelves Laurie wanted would need to be custom made to blend in with the window trim. After reviewing several mock-ups, we settled on a detail in which the ends of the shelves tapered back to the window.





Smaller appliances free up valuable cabinet and countertop space, while the relocated glass-front cabinet fits snugly in the corner adjacent to the window (8). Adding a dishwasher frees up the counter space that had been used for dish draining, and extending the quartz countertop creates a mini workstation above a pull-out pantry (9).



**After.** The plan of the kitchen stayed basically the same, but smarter-size appliances and a better cabinet selection made room for a dishwasher and more usable work space.

I fabricated the shelves and brackets in my shop, ripping the shelves from stain-grade white-oak plywood and strengthening them with 1-inch-by-3/4-inch solid oak edging. I used a jigsaw to cut the arched brackets from white oak 1-by stock. The top shelf wraps across the top of the window and butts into the metal cabinet.

Laurie chose a blue-green quartz-composite countertop for the kitchen—perhaps the single biggest extravagance but also the most visible part of the project. This being the last kitchen renovation in her lifetime, I urged her to make a choice that she'd be totally satisfied with. According to plan, the countertop wraps up the backsplash and into the bay window sill; the countertop installers had to work a bit of magic to scribe the quartz around the housing for the casement window cranks.

Despite the similar layout, visually the updated kitchen could not be more different. Visitors now swear that the new kitchen is bigger than the old. And Laurie reports that with the added countertop space, two people can actually work quite comfortably in the tiny kitchen at the same time.

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