

# Faux Fridge Front

With a little custom metalwork and an extra cabinet door, you can make your refrigerator look like a million bucks (or at least a \$5,000 Sub-Zero)

BY MIKE GUERTIN

**F**rom the outset, our kitchen plans included a refrigerator that looked like part of the cabinetry (photo facing page). After looking at the price tags on several models designed to accommodate cabinet-matching door panels and built-in dimensions, I had to find a better way.

Solving the depth problem was easy because I was building the cabinets myself; I just framed the refrigerator cabinet deeper to accommodate a standard refrigerator. I avoided, however, thinking about the panel-mounting problem until the last minute. My wife vetoed the idea of screwing or gluing

the panels to the refrigerator doors. Defacing a brand-new appliance just wasn't an option. Then, in a moment of frustration and desperation, came a little inspiration.

## The wood doors hang on aluminum channels

My plan involved metal channels shaped like a J. The channels are screwed to the backs of the wood panels and wrap around the refrigerator door (drawing facing page).

I started with some leftover flat aluminum 0.032-in. gutter stock finished black. I figured the dark color would tend to draw less

visual attention to the edges of the refrigerator door than a lighter color. I own a brake for bending aluminum, but for those who don't, finding someone to fabricate the channel shouldn't be a problem.

First, I measured the distance from the gasket to the edge of the door and subtracted  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. so that the aluminum wouldn't interfere with the gasket. That was my first bend (drawing facing page).

I made my second bend at  $2\frac{1}{2}$  in. ( $\frac{1}{4}$  in. more than the thickness of the door) to wrap around the door. The extra width makes it easier to slide the channels over the doors.



**Aluminum channel is the key.** Bent into a J-shape, aluminum channel is screwed to the back of the cabinet panel. A gap in the top channel accommodates the refrigerator-door hinge.

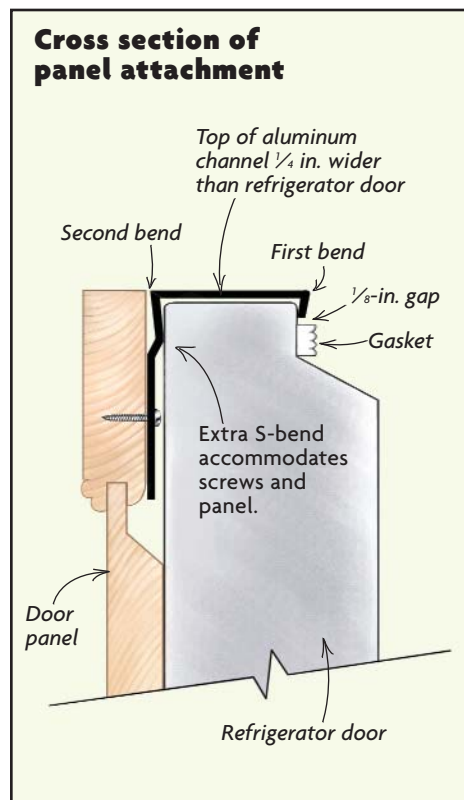


**Held in place by gravity and friction.** With the door removed, the panel slides easily over the door.

On the leg that attached to the panel, I added a gentle S-bend. That bend accommodates the screws and the raised panel.

After testing one channel on the edge of the refrigerator door, I decided to overbend each 90° angle by 1° or 2° for a snug fit. I cut three legs for each door, one for each side and the top. The top channels are 2 in. short to avoid the refrigerator-door hinges (photo left, facing page). Because the side channels extend to the bottom of each panel, I didn't put a channel on the underside of the doors.

When I had the wood panels made, I oversized them ¼ in. in both directions. When I



Drawing: Paul Perreault



**Find the fridge.** At a glance, it's tough to tell where the cabinets end and the refrigerator begins, except when you're hungry.

screwed the channels to each door panel, the side channels ended up a little farther apart than the actual width of the doors. That extra space kept me from having to force the panels over the doors.

### Remove the door for easy installation

Before I could install the panels, I had to remove the doors from the refrigerator. Otherwise the hinge brackets were in the way. With the doors removed, the wood panels slid easily over the refrigerator doors (photo right, facing page).

I rehung the doors on their hinges, adjusted them in the opening and pushed the refrigerator back into its cabinet. It only took

about 20 minutes to remove the refrigerator and freezer doors, slip the panels on and rehang them, not even long enough to worry about melting my Ben & Jerry's.

The only drawback to the system was that the hinges weren't meant to accommodate the extra thickness of the clad door, so we keep the fridge sticking out slightly into the room to let the doors open fully. Friction and gravity keep the door panels in place. If my wife ever decides to redecorate the kitchen, I can easily slip the wood panels off and give the refrigerator a fresh white look. □

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