

Hard-Working

A few years back, I began to put an old idea to work to help my clients balance usability, practicality, and cost in designing contemporary kitchens. My solution is simple: a full walk-in pantry close to the kitchen. Not to be confused with the high-style butler-type pantries currently in vogue or mere closets lined with shelves, these spaces are honest, spare, painted-wood pantries with open shelves that you can stuff with all those mundane day-to-day kitchen items. And with the close of a door, the pantry and all its contents disappear from view.

With the pantry doing a lot of surplus kitchen duties, the kitchen proper can be smaller and more efficient. And a smaller, tighter kitchen not only costs less to build, but it is also easier to work in and to keep clean.

Outfit a pantry for the price of a cabinet

An out-of-sight pantry has few rules, which allows for more creativity and fun. To begin with, no floor plan or configuration is right or wrong. Most pantries I build are created from space that I can steal from the kitchen and the surrounding area. I usually can outfit an entire pantry for the cost of one of those expensive roll-out pantry cabinets. Although there is no official minimum dimension, the most successful pantries I've built are at least 6 ft. wide (photo facing page), which allows for ample shelves on both sides and a 3-ft. corridor. Most of my customers end up wishing I'd made their pantries larger. For this article, I've included three different pantries of different sizes and configurations.

Design the pantry in place

Because the average client is not trained in reading construction drawings, I found out pretty quickly that designing pantries on paper is a waste of time. Instead, I wait until the

space is drywalled (having made sure to include some electrical outlets for over the counters as well as provisions for built-ins such as sinks or laundry); then I meet with the clients to discuss the particulars of how they plan to use their pantry.

The most typical use is storage for food and bulk supplies. Many clients also request space for recycling bins; occasional-use appliances such as freezers, mixers, bread makers, battery chargers, can openers, coffee urns, pasta makers, and toaster ovens; and large, seldom-used items such as serving platters, bread boxes, and roasting pans. Other requests have included storage space and hangers for central-vacuum hoses and accessories, space for broom-closet items, wine racks, and auxiliary refrigerators. Again, there are no hard-and-fast rules about what things must be included in a pantry.

Once I've established the clients' wants and wishes, I sketch shelving and cabinet configurations on the wall with a pencil. I indicate the heights and depths of the shelves as well as the location of adjustable shelves. After tightening the design a little, I snap chalklines on the walls and identify anything I can pre-cut in the shop to save time.

To simplify shelf layout, I eliminate the bottom shelf altogether or put it at about 20 in., which is high enough to accommodate full cardboard boxes, laundry baskets, milk crates, or oversize pails for birdseed and pet food with room for storage above. I also try to use basic kitchen-cabinet heights and depths to keep things simple in the pantry. I do my best to talk clients out of cabinet doors. Remember, the entire pantry acts like one big cabinet, so no doors are required.

Modest materials, assembled in place

I keep pantry-shelf materials simple and straightforward (drawing p. 88). For the

A small room with open shelves and simple cabinetry can reduce kitchen costs and keep stored goods behind a closed door

BY HANK FOTTER



Pantries

No-frills pantry

Dimensions

6 ft. by 8 ft.

Shelf capacity

108 lin. ft., including floor storage

Functions

Storage of dry goods, nonrefrigerated vegetables, large pans

Features

Recycling bins, broom closet, bulletin board, cookbook shelves, pull-out baskets

This compact pantry overflows with storage. Shelves on three walls maximize the storage potential in this pantry, which is only 6 ft. wide. Even the space above the door was fitted with a storage shelf (photo facing page).

Extra-duty pantry

Dimensions

7 ft. by 7½ ft.

Shelf capacity

69 lin. ft., including floors;
7½ ft. of countertop space

Functions

Storage of dry goods,
bulk paper goods, cases
of soda, wine rack

Features

Laminate countertop,
microwave-oven station



frames, I rip #2 pine into 2-in.-wide strips. I also rip 1-in. strips for the shelf nosing. The shelves and countertops are usually just ¾-in. birch plywood. For simplicity, everything is air-nailed or screwed, not glued. Most pantries take less than a day to build, and everything is sprayed in primer and paint.

For pantry lighting, I again keep it simple with ceiling-mounted fluorescent fixtures. Undershelf task lighting is a good idea if food will be prepared in the pantry. Inexpensive commercial-grade tile is my material of choice for the floor, but vinyl is OK if tile is not in the budget.

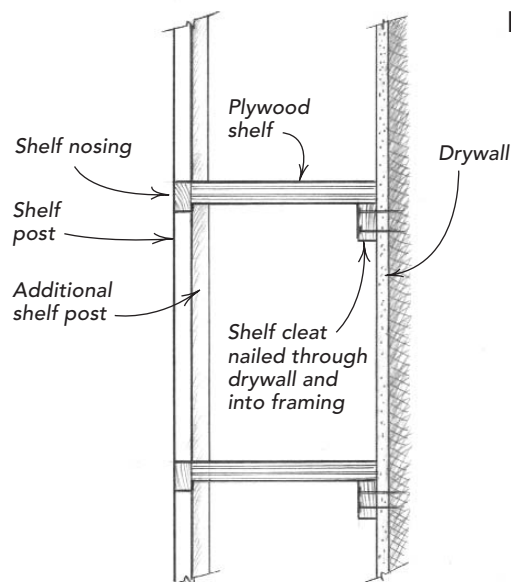
A pantry that does heavier lifting

Although I've tried to set a standard for low cost and informality in the pantries that I build, some clients use their pantries as food-preparation areas as well as places to store food they've prepared in advance. The pantry countertop is a great place to set warming trays for big gatherings. These

WALL SHELVES FOR A PANTRY:

Minimal design, inexpensive materials

To control costs, pantry shelves are kept as simple as possible. After the shelf spacing is set, 1x2 cleats are attached to the wall framing. The shelves are made of ¾-in. birch plywood supported by 1x2 shelf posts. Shelf nosing is made of 1x stock, and an additional 1x2 between the nosings reinforces the posts. After assembly, the shelves are primed and painted.



pantries then become a second, or back, kitchen (photo below).

If the budget allows, I suggest the inclusion of a sink in these extra-duty pantries. Large, deep sinks seem to make the most sense. But again, nothing more elaborate than stainless steel is needed. If the pantry is to take on a more active role as a food-preparation area, I urge clients to upgrade to a laminate countertop. A solid-surface material such as Corian is fancier than I'd recommend for a working pantry.

If there's room, a pantry also can be a great place for a clothes washer and dryer. Front loaders that fit under the counter work well. Stacked washer/dryer units also work well if

the layout allows for it. In well-appointed pantries, I've also included linen storage, even with hanging tablecloth racks.

Most of my clients are as proud of their pantries as they are of their kitchens, even those skeptics who were reluctant at the start. For those holdouts, I offer this simple test: Would you pound in a nail or screw in a hook to hang an apron in your new kitchen? If the idea scares or repulses you, chances are that a working pantry would make your life a whole lot easier. □

Hank Fotter owns Barn Hill Inc., a custom-home building firm in Litchfield, Conn. Photos by Roe A. Osborn.

Deluxe pantry

Dimensions

10 ft. by 11½ ft.

Shelf capacity

112 lin. ft., including floors; 23 ft. of countertop space

Functions

Storage of dry goods, bulk paper goods, serving platters, wineglasses, large cooking vessels, multiple small appliances

Features

Freezer, washer and dryer, deep sink for food prep, table-linen closet, broom closet, pet-feeding station



With this pantry, you may never want to be in the kitchen. Largest of the three, this pantry not only works for storage, but it also boasts a laundry, a freezer, a food-prep sink, and a place to hang table linens (photo above). A short folding ladder makes the top-shelf items easily accessible (photo left).