

# How to hide your refrigerator

**R**efrigerators loom large in kitchens, and their awkward size leads to some real dilemmas in kitchen design. While most people have accepted that their immense refrigerator will stick out like a sore thumb, I haven't. In fact, I've tried several approaches to tame the big, cold box. These examples can be scaled up or down in cost by changing materials and joinery specifications.

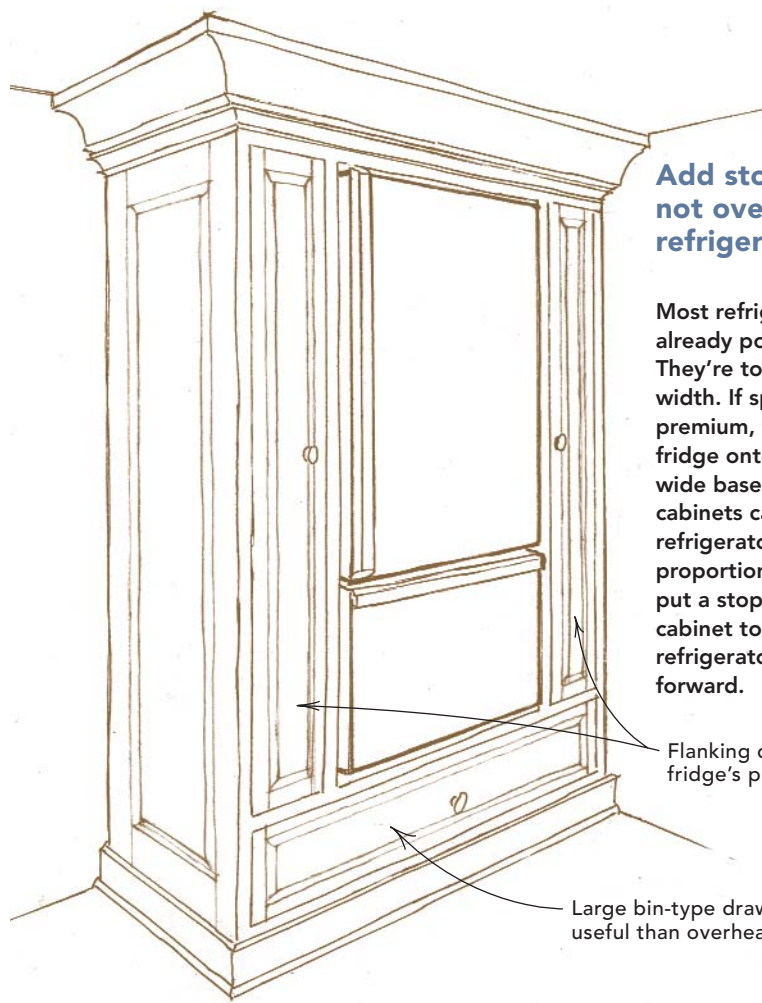
Of course, the simplest solution also is the most expensive: Buy a 24-in.-deep built-in refrigerator, such as a Sub-Zero. Or, for the price of one of those beauties, you could have a nicely crafted custom cabinet to hide a normal, freestanding refrigerator. However, typical refrigerators, even those of modest capacity, are at least 30 in. deep, which makes them hard to integrate into

24-in.-deep base cabinetry. And deeper cabinets mean harder access.

The solutions I have developed depend on the relationship of the refrigerator to nearby walls. They are (as I call them) the default, the smart-framing approach, the pass-through, and the temple. And they all fight the temptation to go too high and do too much.

## Downplay the height

Because most refrigerators are only about 6 ft. tall, there appears to be more than 2 ft. of storage space above them. However, I suggest that you don't put a cabinet up there. Why? Two reasons: First, those cabinets are almost always too high and deep to be very



**Add storage under, not over, the refrigerator**

Most refrigerators are already poorly proportioned: They're too tall for their width. If space is truly at a premium, try raising the fridge onto a drawer base. A wide base and flanking cabinets can bring the refrigerator to better proportions. But be sure to put a stop on the base cabinet to prevent the refrigerator from rolling forward.

Flanking cabinets improve fridge's proportions.

Large bin-type drawer is more useful than overhead cabinet.

useful. And second, they give the refrigerator awkward, unattractive proportions.

Using golden-ratio dimensions as a guide, a refrigerator cabinet that's 3 ft. wide should be closer to 5 ft. tall than to 7 ft. While you can't make the refrigerator shorter, you can at least keep its height under control by not installing a cabinet above it.

In some kitchens, however, storage needs are vital, and an over-the-refrigerator cabinet seems necessary. But a cabinet under the fridge with a large bin-type drawer can be a more effective storage solution (drawing

above). Indeed, many people find that they prefer the ergonomics of a refrigerator that's well off the floor. In situations where there's no adjacent cabinetry, the pedestal/base cabinet can be a lot wider than the refrigerator cabinet, which helps to tame the overall height.

## De-emphasize bulk with stepped cabinets

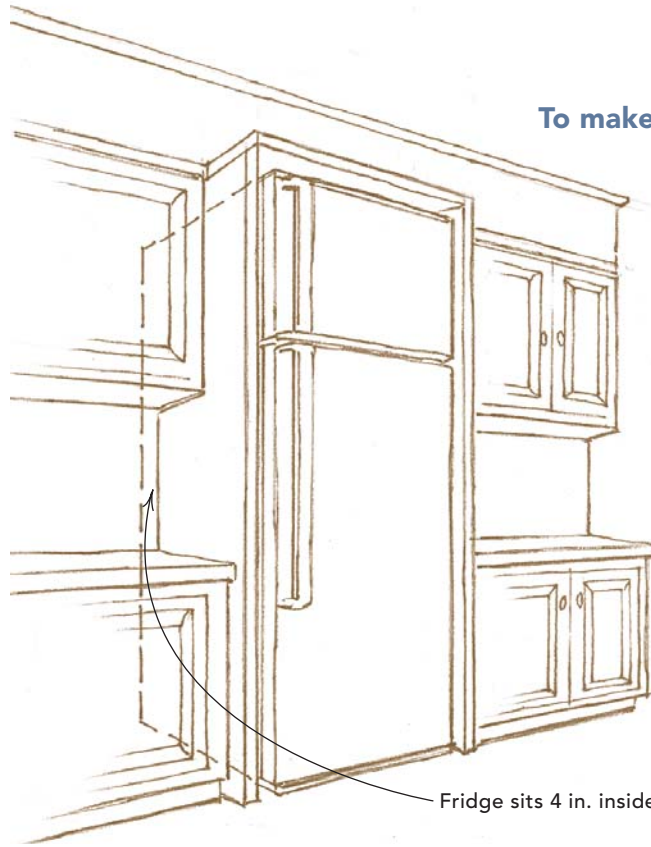
Sometimes there is no choice but to stick the refrigerator against a wall—the default option. In these cases, I like to build up to

the refrigerator's bulk with a series of cabinets that increase in depth and height. By anchoring the refrigerator in this way, I can reduce its overwhelming effect. This type of tiering approach also can incorporate unusual cabinet-front geometries, such as curves, to soften the transition to the bulky refrigerator.

### Recess the fridge into the studs

What I call the smart-framing approach recesses the refrigerator as much as possible into the wall without disturbing the back side of the wall. You can lose 4 in. to 6 in. of a refrigerator's depth this way, cutting its apparent depth down to 24 in. to 26 in. This integrates the appliance more effectively into its surrounding cabinetry (drawing right). Little more than high-grade plywood and crown molding are needed to dress it up.

Because the recessed area hides the ugly back of the refrigerator, you can go even more minimalist by painting the fridge and installing stock cabinets around it. Regard-



**To make the fridge small, just slip it into a wall**

In a non-load-bearing wall, you can remove a stud or two and slide the refrigerator into the 4-in. pocket. If the wall happens to be a 6-in. plumbing wall, recessing into it brings the face of the refrigerator nearly flush with the base cabinets.

Fridge sits 4 in. inside wall framing.

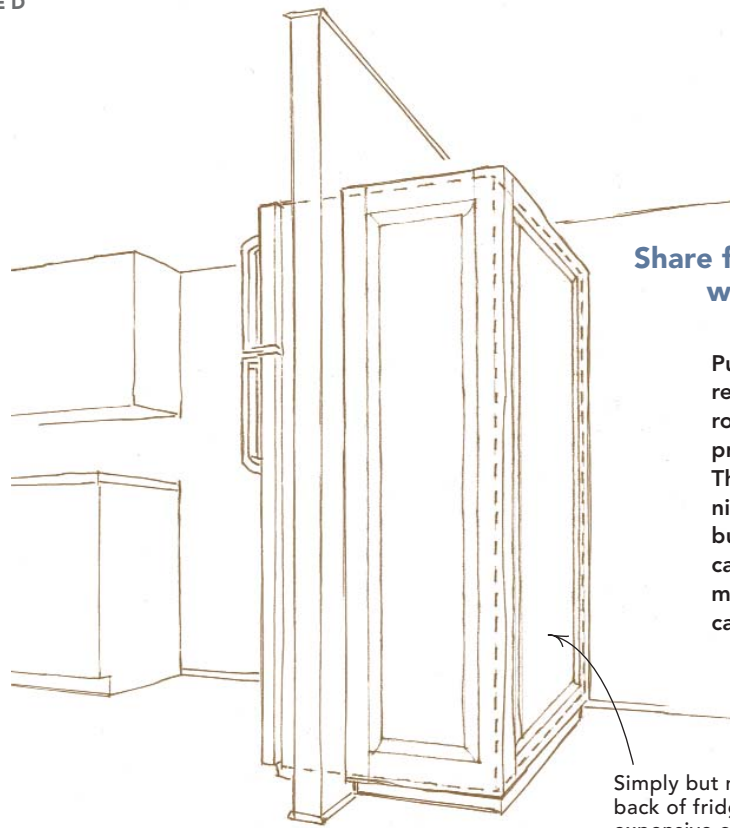
less of the particular cabinet design, the dimensions are much friendlier than those of a refrigerator placed against a wall.

### Borrow space from another room

A less obvious but excellent way of hiding a refrigerator is the pass-through approach. The idea is to design an interesting and functional cabinet in an adjoining room while keeping an interesting and functional treatment for the kitchen. An inexpensive way to do this is with a dummy back side for the refrigerator that's nicely trimmed out (drawing right). If it's designed well, the bump-out doesn't seem out of place in the second room. A more practical treatment camouflages the cabinet's primary function (hiding the fridge) with shallow shelves, a bulletin board, or an art display.

### Let the fridge be a focal point

My favorite approach is one I think of as the purloined-letter strategy: hiding the re-



frigerator in plain view, or the temple. Setting the refrigerator away from the wall, yet within a cabinet with other storage options, can help to define kitchen boundaries and create traffic patterns in an open floor plan. It also can be an important focal point (drawing right).

The obvious concern here is cost. But the cabinet can be as simple as 2x4 framing laminated with plywood. The framing and plywood edges can be concealed with 1x stock or medium-density fiberboard (MDF), and the top can have crown molding. Another option is to upgrade to high-quality veneered plywood with solid stock finished to match the veneer.

While the cabinet is designed to hide the refrigerator and create storage for books, art, or pantry items, it also can conceal mechanical or structural systems.

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### Hide the fridge in plain view with a stand-alone cabinet

The cabinet can have more pleasing proportions with added storage and display areas, but plenty of floor space is needed. You also can conceal mechanical or structural systems within the cabinet.

Plumbing, electrical, or structural systems can be hidden within the cabinet.

Display case adds storage.