

Off-the-Shelf Kitchen Storage

A buyer's guide to what to put **into** your cabinets to get the most **out** of them

BY DEBRA JUDGE SILBER

If I could've squeezed just one more cabinet into my kitchen when we remodeled, believe me, I would've done it. But a kitchen isn't terribly useful if you don't leave enough room between countertops to enter and exit, and not terribly pleasant if you obstruct every view with a plywood box, no matter how important it is to have every saucepan at your fingertips.

Fortunately, it's not the number of cabinets but what they hold that counts. That's good news not just for me and for my small kitchen, but also for anyone who needs to wring the most functionality out of a kitchen whose storage capacity is about equal to that of the average linen closet.

Unless you're a carpenter with time to spare (or someone who knows a carpenter with time to spare), maximizing kitchen

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Hinged helper. The front baskets of Häfele's Magic Corner II pull out and swivel to a 90° open position. The back baskets—which take advantage of the storage space in a blind corner recess—simultaneously move into the cabinet opening, then pull forward for easy access. The unit is used with a hinged door and mounts on two walls of the cabinet (frame only, \$678; four baskets, \$350).

Solutions

Coping with corner cabinets

Austin designer J. Patrick Sutton hates kitchen corners so much that he goes out of his way to design floor plans that don't have them. But that's little consolation if the kitchen you're cooking in has one or more. Storage options for corners are dictated by the cabinets used to create the corner. Open corner cabinets are dominated by lazy-susan arrangements, most of which must be installed before the countertop goes in, though some can be retrofitted (photo below right). A blind corner, created when one base cabinet is installed against a wall with another abutting it at a 90° angle, offers deep space, but that space is tricky to access. That may be why there has been such a parade of inventions to mine the storage potential of the blind corner.



Petal pullout. Häfele's LeMans corner pullout shelves are shaped like wavy flower petals. The shelves slide and then swing out of the blind corner opening. They have a nonslip surface and can hold up to 65 lb. (\$806).



Curving around a corner. Rev-A-Shelf's Half Moon Shelves pivot and pull out of a blind corner. The 5/8-in.-thick multi-ply wood trays come sized for door openings as small as 12 in. and can be used in framed or frameless cabinets (\$305-\$403).



Not-so-lazy susan. Open corner cabinets are typically equipped with lazy susans, which are difficult if not impossible to install after the fact. The Susan Drawer System from Knappe & Vogt, however, can be retrofitted into an existing cabinet (although the manufacturer suggests you get a professional to do it). It features two slide-out center shelves to simplify access and is available as a full-round for an angled door or kidney-shaped (pictured above) for a 90° double-hinged door (\$398).

Smart solutions for problem spaces

UN-SINKABLE

Undersink storage solutions are designed to maneuver around plumbing and to help you corral the clutter of cleaning supplies. Spills are inevitable in this area, so baskets that un hinge and remove easily, allowing access to the floor of the cabinet for cleaning (and retrieval of small items), are a plus.



Space for sponges. Forgotten space in front of the sink bowl can be used with a tilt-down sink tray attached to the front plate. Rev-A-Shelf's 6551 series trays are made of extruded polymer and can be trimmed to fit cabinets up to 36 in. wide (\$17).

Right for a tight space. There are many variations of sliding baskets for undersink storage. One is Whitney Design's Glidez Under Sink Sliding Organizer (C26512). The commercial-grade chrome organizer comes with full-extension ball-bearing slides already attached; the offset second tier can be mounted to either side of the 12-in.-wide bottom shelf so that it can adapt to either side of the cabinet (\$54).



UP AND AWAY

One of the most challenging storage spaces in our kitchens is of our own making. The banishment of kitchen soffits has yielded lots of useful space—most of it completely out of reach. "We've gone up, but the average height of the consumer hasn't changed," says Alan Zielinski, a second-generation designer and owner of Better Kitchens in Niles, Ill. Zielinski is one of a slew of designers whose first choice in dealing with out-of-reach areas is not to bring high cabinet shelves down to the cook, but to bring the cook up to them—specifically, with a tiny folding step stool made by Häfele. Pull-down or motorized shelves are another option, but they take up so much room that designers recommend you think hard before installing them.

The next step. Only 4 in. by 18 in. when folded, this step stool by Häfele fits under a toe kick or inside a cabinet door. It gives you an additional 18 in. in height to reach upper cabinets. Consider the cost of a carpenter if you want a neat installation under the toe kick (silver stool, \$188; mounting bracket, \$17).



Come on down. Rev-A-Shelf's 5PD series chrome wall-shelf system brings the contents of 24-in. and 36-in. wall shelves 10 in. closer. The system uses a gas-assisted lowering mechanism and mounts to the side or bottom of the cabinet (\$223-\$233).

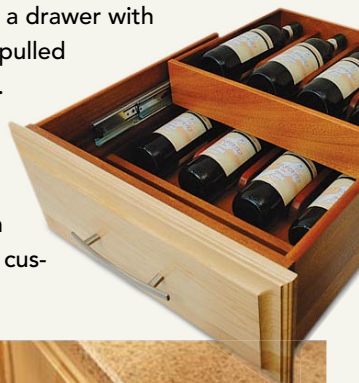
Base cabinets made better

Base cabinets aren't usually considered hard-to-reach storage areas. But by maximizing storage capacity and accessibility in whatever base cabinets you have, you can reserve out-of-the-way shelves for rarely used or decorative items.

TRADE DOORS FOR DRAWERS

Citing "one-motion" accessibility, designers have been arguing for some time that cabinets outfitted with drawers are more functional than those with shelves behind doors. "I almost never put doors on base cabinets anymore," designer J. Patrick Sutton says. Part of the credit goes to improved hardware: Heavy-duty, full-extension slides make it possible to fill a drawer with heavy items, such as plates, and access them from the top with the drawer pulled out. Soft-close mechanisms minimize the jarring that might topple contents.

With drawers' popularity has come a plethora of inserts—dividers, trays, and pegboards—made of wood or plastic that can be trimmed to fit any drawer and secure a variety of contents. With pegboards, once the base is fitted to the drawer, the dividers or posts can be adjusted at will. "It's much more practicable than what I had done 10 years ago, which is design highly customized systems," Sutton says.



Wooden posts hold plates in place. Rev-A-Shelf's Large Drawer Peg System consists of a 39-in. by 21-in. board and 16 pegs (\$73).



Made-to-order drawers and inserts. CCF Industries markets a double-decker wine drawer (above) and combination spice and knife drawers (left) that are made-to-order. (See www.ccfdrawers.com for prices.)

PUT SHELVES ON A ROLL

Rolling replacement. Replace stationary shelves with a pullout, and you gain single-motion access to the entire cabinet. Rev-A-Shelf's new 448 series base-cabinet organizers have adjustable shelves and are designed to be fitted into existing cabinets (\$314).



Sliding shelves. Preassembled pullouts (\$45) from Shelves That Slide are made of Baltic birch and feature Blum slides. They can be made in dimensions to fit almost any cabinet.

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storage space usually comes down to buying the right manufactured solution. In a perfect world, that's done when the cabinets are installed. But what if you're dealing with a previous homeowner's cabinet configuration? Or if you've tapped out both your budget and your creativity just getting your own new cabinets into your kitchen? In cases like these, you're likely to start exploring the world of aftermarket storage options.

Manufactured storage solutions can be found in home centers (order the better ones through the kitchen department) and, to a greater extent, through online dealers. The choices are so wide, in fact, that finding the right solution may seem as hopeless as rummaging for a lost lid in the dark recesses of a blind corner. For this article, I set out to find the most sensible "off-the-shelf" solutions for what I consider primary kitchen-storage challenges. In terms of space, that means blind corners, high shelves, and undersink cabinets. In terms of specific items that defy convenient storage solutions, that would be food, small appliances, trash and recycling bins, and (my own nemesis) cookware.

In my search, not only did I exploit my own battles with kitchen chaos, but I also consulted designers and architects to find what solutions they rely on and recommend to their clients. Their choices were notably consistent, particularly with regard to the two biggest players in the storage game: Häfele and Rev-A-Shelf. Both brands not only supply cabinetmakers with internal storage features but also offer many of the same solutions to be installed after the fact. But beware: You will pay for quality. In some cases, the storage components you add will cost as much as the cabinet itself. Also, prices vary widely—especially online. It pays to shop around.

In the end, good kitchen storage is not about fancy gadgets; it's about finding the simplest tools for keeping just what you need right where you need it. And there's no shortage of products on the market to do just that.

Prices listed in this article are street price: what you're likely to pay based on a review of online and local retailers. Pictured products have been identified by manufacturer and series number. □

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Sensible storage for



Heavy-duty pullout. Häfele's frame-and-basket pullout is available in sizes that fit cabinets from 12 in. to 16 in. wide (\$858).

FOOD AND PANTRY ITEMS

Once upon a time—before command centers and conversation stations—kitchens revolved around food. Even today, every kitchen still needs someplace to store the potatoes.

The multijointed swinging and folding pantries introduced a few years ago may still turn heads, but they're not necessarily the only way to serve up the soup cans. Designer Alan Zielinski, for example, steers his clients to simpler pantry units that pull straight out. He points to more access, more light, and less wasted space (all that swinging can eat up as much as 20% of a pantry's capacity). When choosing a pullout unit, check the weight limitations, and look for adjustable shelves.

TRASH & RECYCLING

Trash and recycling bins can be tricky to locate in a kitchen because of their size and because they're most useful where they can be easily accessed. While the number of bins you'll need depends on local regulations (and your own diligence), most kitchen designers advise a minimum of two. Look for sturdy construction; David Alderman, president of Dave's Cabinet Inc. of Chesapeake, Va., recommends pullout bins that attach to the cabinet sides and door rather than the cabinet bottom. "When you're pulling at the top and it's attached at the bottom, it's almost like you're prying it open," he says.



Two to go. Omega National Products's KitchenMate dual waste pullout has ball-bearing slides and fits 18-in. cabinets (\$161).



Three-bin recycling center. The 5349 series from Rev-A-Shelf includes three 25-quart containers and an 18-quart canvas bag (\$437).

what you use every day

SMALL APPLIANCES

Aftermarket storage solutions for small appliances are fairly limited, with the possible exception of countertop garages (some updated with lift-type doors instead of problematic tambour doors) and rolling shelves outfitted with heavy-duty, full-extension, soft-closing hardware that allows full access and stable operation. Mention appliance lifts, and homeowners and designers fall into two camps: those who love them and those who feel they waste space and money. (They take up all or most of a 36-in.-high cabinet.) Nonetheless, all the major cabinet outfitters offer them.



Easy lift. Rev-A-Shelf's appliance lift (above, \$85) uses spring tension and shock dampers to lift and hold up to 60 lb., while the lift from Knappe & Vogt (left, \$214) operates with a gas cylinder. Häfele's lift, which comes in two sizes (\$140-\$146), holds 26 lb. Quoted prices are for lift hardware only; shelves are extra.

COOKWARE

Pots and pans wouldn't be nearly as problematic to store if they had no handles, had no lids, and weren't necessary virtually every time you fire up the stove. With all these requirements, good, functional cookware storage can be a challenge.



Lids on top. Rev-A-Shelf's Two-tier Cookware Organizer (5CW2 series) has independently operating shelves that hold up to seven lids and a variety of sizes of cookware. The shelves also can be mounted to the door (\$80).



Fry-pan corral. Rev-A-Shelf's Drop-in Cookware Organizer (5389 series) screws into the bottom of existing drawers or pullout shelves to keep frying pans and lids in order (\$77).

SOURCES

MANUFACTURERS

Cabinet organization, hardware, accessories

Häfele
www.hafele.com/us

Custom drawers and drawer inserts

CCF Industries
www.ccfdrawers.com

Drawer slides

Accuride
www.accurideslides.com

Hardware, slides

Blum
www.blum.com

Household storage solutions

Whitney Design
www.whitney-design.com

Kitchen, bath, closet storage

Rev-A-Shelf
www.rev-a-shelf.com

Sliding shelves (made-to-order)

Shelves That Slide
www.shelvesthatstide.com

Storage solutions, drawer slides

Knappe & Vogt
www.kv.com

Wood cabinet accessories

Omega National Products
www.omeganationalproducts.com

ONLINE RETAILERS

All varieties of kitchen-organization products

KitchenSource.com
www.kitchensource.com

Cabinet hardware, accessories

Cabinet Parts
www.cabinetparts.com

Cabinet organizers, hardware, accessories

Ovis
www.ovisonline.com

Hardware, kitchen and bath storage, lazy susans

Woodworker's Hardware
www.wwhardware.com

Hardware, storage, organization products

Rockler
www.rockler.com