Straight-Ahead Corner Hutch

A single-piece face frame means you can tackle this project in one day

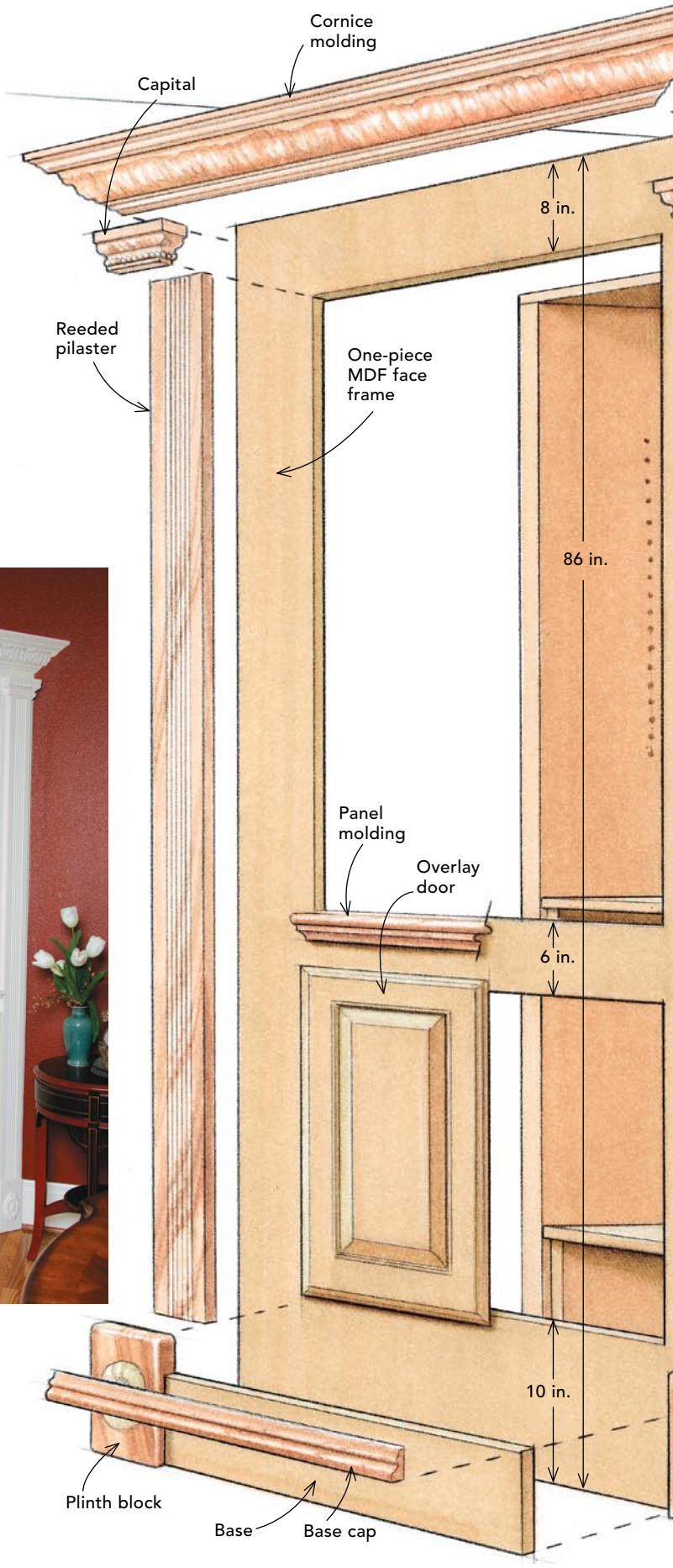
BY GARY STRIEGLER

A built-in corner hutch takes advantage of space that often goes unused. It also softens the feel of a room while adding architectural interest. I like this hutch because its finished appearance doesn't betray the fact that it's easy and affordable to build. The carcase, face frame, and shelves are made from ¾-in. medium-density fiberboard (MDF), and the trim details can be created with stock profiles.

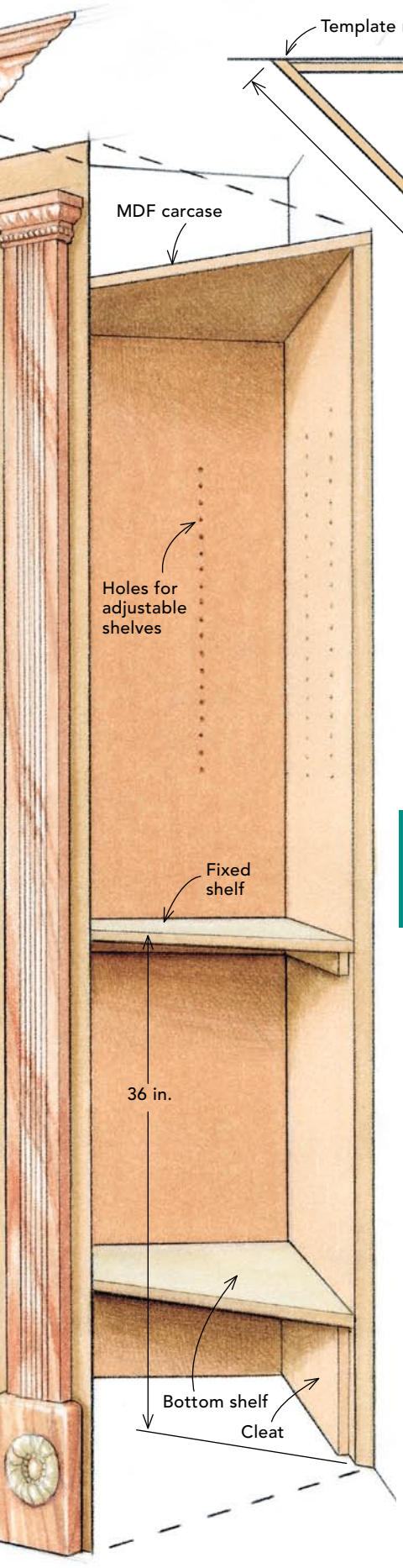
The hutch's scale should match the room's scale. For dining rooms, I've found that 42 in. across the face frame provides good shelf depth while maintaining a manageable size that won't intrude on the room. For trim details, I use a selection of stock profiles that give the hutch a classic feel: crown molding, reeded pilasters on plinth blocks, and panel molding all simply applied to the face frame.

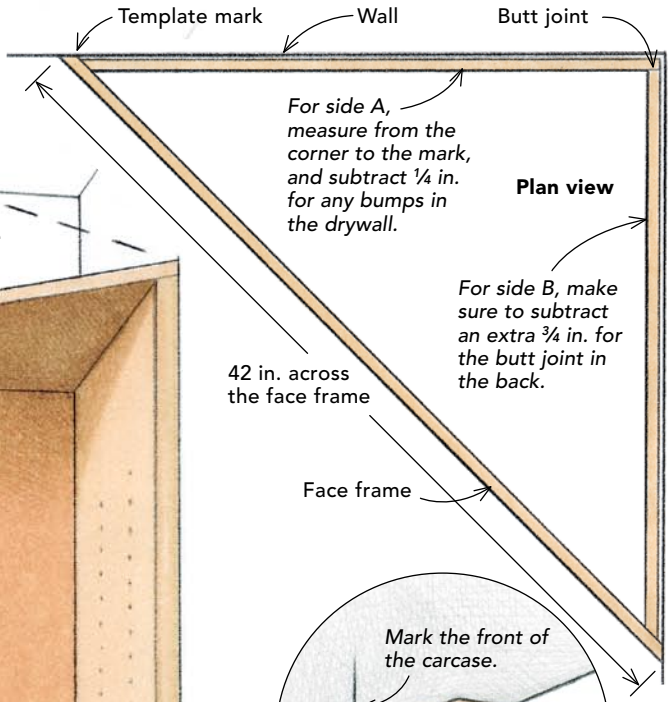
The one-piece face frame is the biggest time-saver in this project (see p. 88). This detail eliminates the work needed to assemble the frame from separate stiles and rails.

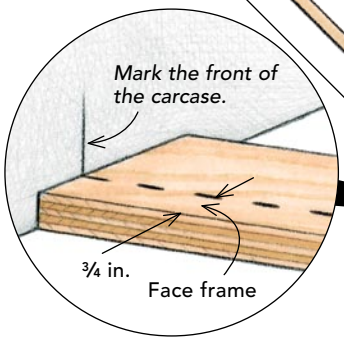
Gary Striegler is a builder in Fayetteville, Ark. Photos by Brian Pontolilo, except where noted.

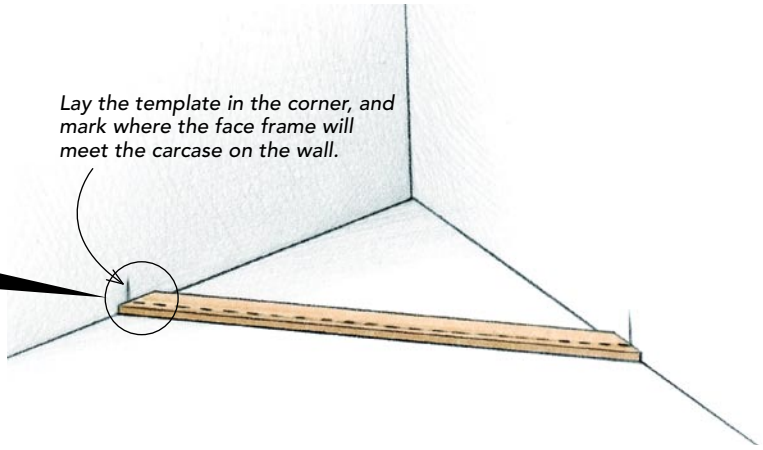


Drawings: Bob La Pointe. Photo this page: Rick Green.









A template quickly establishes the dimensions

I use a 5-in.-wide scrap of plywood or MDF. The template gives me the exact location of the hutch, which enables me to measure the width of the carcase sides. The template is 42 in. long, with 45° miters at both ends. A line ¾ in. back from the template's front edge represents the thickness of the face frame.

CARCASE GOES TOGETHER QUICKLY

The two sides are held together by two triangular shelves and a top. The shelves are fastened to cleats, and the top is glued and screwed to the sides from above.

1. *I tilt the saw base to a 45° bevel and rip the sides, guiding the circular saw against a straight length of MDF.*

2. *The fixed shelves are fastened to MDF cleats. To join the sides, I use a simple butt joint screwed from the back.*

3. *When the carcase is done, I plumb and shim it between the lay-out marks I made on the wall. The hutch is attached to the framing with a 3-in. screw in each wall near the top of the carcase.*

SINGLE-PIECE FACE FRAME REQUIRES NO JOINERY

MDF is stable and sturdy, and it takes paint well. I can save time and money by cutting the face frame from a single piece of MDF.

Cut the openings in the face frame with a circular saw. *I use a plunge cut guided by a straightedge. In the corners, I finish the cut with a handsaw or a jigsaw.*

The sides of the face frame are cut at a 47° bevel. *This makes for a snug fit against the wall and the front of the carcase. For this hutch, I used an 8-in. border on the sides of the face frame. Anything smaller starts to compromise the strength, and anything larger looks clunky and awkward.*

The face frame tilts into place. *I make the bottom shelf flush with the face frame, then attach it to the case with 15-ga. finish nails.*

FINAL TOUCHES DEFINE THE LOOK

Stock trim details give this hutch a classic look. I used crown, capitals, plinths, pilasters, and panel molding from White River Hardwoods (www.mouldings.com). I softened the corner by adding a 5-in.-wide panel in the back and refined the look with a simple beaded molding around the upper opening (*FHB* #170, p. 128). Your local door and window supplier should have a good selection of trim profiles. Online, you can find a nearly limitless variety of embossed and shaped trim profiles. Just remember that the trim, the door design, and the style of the room all should work together to create a unified look.

Tip *To bore holes for shelf-support pins, I use a self-centering bit and a drilling jig from Rockler ($27; www.rockler.com).*

Photo bottom right, facing page: Krysta S. Doerfler

Buy or build the doors. *I took the MDF door blanks for this hutch to a local cabinet shop, where a CNC machine milled the profiles. You can build the doors yourself (*FHB *#177, p. 146), or you can order them from online suppliers (www.scherrs.com; www.lakesidemoulding.com).*

FACE-MOUNT CUP HINGE

Compared to edge-mount cup hinges (photo above), face-mount, overlay-style cup hinges provide a stronger connection and a cleaner look. The Blum hinge shown here is from Woodcraft (#02R80; $5.50; www.woodcraft.com).