

sink was a \$22 find from Lowes. One thing this exercise in frugality has taught me is that there is some good design in home centers, but you have to patiently look around—in my experience, the odds of finding something functional, good-looking, and reasonably priced are about 1 in 20.

Working with inexpensive cabinets

Home Depot's Hampton Bay line includes some of the least-expensive kitchen cabinets available. I spent a total of \$2200 on the boxes and about \$50 on knobs and pulls. Admittedly, the appeal of this cabinet line is price, not strength. The secret to working with lesser cabinets is to make sure the bottoms are well shimmed on all sides so the box is fully supported. I also use about twice as many screws to fasten them, both to the wall and each other. They have adjustable hinges and soft-close drawers, and while the hardware is not as good as you'll find on better cabinets, it's not too bad. I was willing to make some adjustments, and I ordered and stashed away extra slides and hinges in case I need them in the future.

There are few options for odd-shaped and appliance cabinets, so I used a standard 16-in.-tall cabinet above the fridge and made the panels on the sides that support it. I also made a cubby below a standard cabinet for the microwave. I didn't want to sacrifice the space for a countertop model, and I don't like the look of over-the-range versions. Rather than use a shorter cabinet above the range so the cabinet tops align, I used a standard 30-in. cabinet to add visual interest.

Wood elements add warmth

To give a period feel to the kitchen and provide a little contrast to the white walls and cabinets, I opted for 1½-in.-thick maple butcher-block countertops from Lumber Liquidators. At about \$16 per sq. ft., they're a good value and they look and feel great.

The kitchen's maple floor is original to the house. I found it under seven layers of lauan plywood and sheet flooring. I spent dozens of hours using a ½-in. chisel to scrape away the black adhesive that held down the first layer, but the effort was totally worth it.

Given my budget, I think I aced this labor-of-love project. □

Wayne Hymer is owner of Wayne Hymer Inc. in Portland, Maine. Photos courtesy of the author.



Simple sink. Now that the kitchen has a dishwasher, a single-bowl sink is all that's needed for cleanup and food prep. A small shelf above repeats the natural tones of the maple countertops.