

# Surgical Kitchen

BY DAVID GETTS

**T**he key to a successful small remodeling project is to make the new work match the existing details so that no one can tell that the space was ever modified. On this job, upgrading the double ovens in an existing kitchen meant that I had to create a little more room in a run of the 20-year-old cabinets for a new, larger oven cabinet, and then make everything look as though it had been built that way. The job was complicated because I had to modify the granite counter and base cabinet in place. It was more like kitchen surgery than remodeling.

My plan was to remove the ovens and the oven cabinet, as well as the upper cabinet to the right and the drawers below it, then to resize the upper cabinet and cut 3 in. from the counter and face frame below. If I worked carefully, the new oven cabinet would fit like a glove in the newly expanded space.

## Ovens out, electrical in

First, I protected the area by taping down Ram Board on the floor, setting up Zip-Wall barriers in doorways, and taping 4-mil plastic over all the cabinets. I also checked the electrical requirements before the work began. Two new circuits were needed, and fortunately, there was a subpanel in the kitchen area that I could easily tap into. This made it a one-day rough-in for the electrician. If we had needed to run the circuit from the main house panel, I would have had the electrician run it into the attic space above the



# Remodel

How to modernize a kitchen while preserving the components



## REMODELING BY THE INCH

The existing ovens were tired and ready to go. The problem was that they were an odd size, 27 in. wide, while most new ovens are 30 in. wide. Rather than struggle to find the same size, my client, Ginger, decided that she wanted the larger oven, which meant enlarging the space by 3 in. for the appliance cabinet. This cabinet occupied the center of one wall in her fairly small kitchen. To preserve working counter space, it made the most sense to expand the cabinet space in one direction toward the inside corner rather than toward the cooktop. The move in that direction also would help to minimize any visual impact of the remodel.



**AFTER**

# CAUTIOUS DEMOLITION

## REMOVE IN PIECES

To avoid harming the neighboring cabinets, the author took apart the oven cabinet with reciprocating and circular saws.



## THE EASY UPPER

Because it didn't support the counter, the adjacent upper cabinet was simply unscrewed and brought back to the shop for resizing.



## BACKSPLASH SURGERY

A multitool was the first choice to remove backsplash tile in the footprint of the new cabinet. It was much easier to remove full courses of tile and then replace the missing partials after the new cabinet was installed.



## NO MISTAKES HERE

The counter was cut carefully with an angle grinder fitted with a diamond blade. The nozzle of the job-site vacuum was positioned at the blade to capture as much dust as possible. The crew also wore dust masks and protective eyewear.

kitchen before the demolition began to minimize any disruption to the homeowner.

Next, I removed the existing ovens and cut apart the cabinet to make them easier to pull out. After the electrician roughed in the new outlets, I patched and primed the drywall behind the cabinets.

## Cutting a granite counter in place

If the countertop had been short, I would have pulled it out and had it cut off site. Because the countertop extended around a corner, though, I thought that removing it was too risky. If the counter broke, it would be impossible to find a slab that matched.

I hired a granite fabricator, who arrived with an angle grinder fitted with a diamond blade. I thought he would use a saw and straight-edge guide, but he was more comfortable cutting the joint by hand. He drew his mark on a strip of painters' tape and carefully cut along the line. Another method would have been to use a small circular saw and an edge guide, but the final couple of inches would still have had to be cut with an angle grinder or a similar tool.

## Reducing the cabinets' width

Of the two cabinets to be modified and reused, the upper was easier. I unscrewed it from the wall and took it back to my shop, where I used



#### FOLLOW THE GUIDE

To trim the lower cabinet's face frame, the author screwed a straightedge to the face-frame stile, then made the cuts with a small circular saw fitted with a 40-tooth carbide blade to minimize tearout. A multitool took care of the hard-to-get areas.



#### REPEAT AS NECESSARY

After the face frame had been trimmed, the author used the same technique to trim the cabinet side and back.

a tablesaw, a small circular saw, and a straightedge to cut it down. Because the base cabinet was supporting the countertop, I left it in place and did the modification on site.

The most important aspect of field surgery is getting good, clean cuts so that the new work fits tight in the space. After applying painters' tape to minimize the tearout, I drew the layout in permanent marker.

I also consulted with the finisher before I started doing any modifications. On his advice, I avoided sanding, which meant that I had to be careful to align the new faces as flush as possible. Fortunately, all of the joints either were on the hinge side of the doors or were

## BACK AT THE SHOP



#### SLOWER FOR SAFETY'S SAKE

Both the upper cabinet and drawers were cut down with the same techniques. After placing the drawer on its bottom and ripping it on a tablesaw, the author used a straightedge guide and a cordless circular saw to cut the narrower ends.



#### JOINERY OF CONVENIENCE

Rather than try to reproduce the drawers' dovetail joinery, the author trimmed the drawer side and used tapered wooden dowels to join the butt joints.



#### HERE, THE INTERIOR MATTERS MOST

The new oak plywood side joined to the newly resized upper cabinet had to be finished only on the inside; the exterior is concealed by the adjacent oven cabinet.

# ON-SITE INSTALLATION



## PREP THE OVEN BASE

The new ovens needed a sturdy, level base, so the author reinforced the existing base with layers of plywood screwed and glued together and shimmed level.



## ATTACH THE LOWER SIDE PANEL

Because both faces of the new side would be concealed, the author mounted unfinished AC plywood to the cabinet with pocket screws.



## BISCUITS INSTEAD OF NAILS

The cleanest, fastest way to attach the new face-frame stile was to use biscuits and glue. The author cut slots in place, then transferred their positions to the stile.



## WORKING SOLO EFFICIENTLY

The rebuilt upper cabinet was installed with the aid of a cabinet jack (about \$40; Fast Cap), which held it in place until the mounting screws were driven.



concealed behind the drawer faces, so any minor discrepancies were not noticeable.

Before any site work began, I built the oven cabinet so that it would be ready to install as soon as we needed it. One thing to keep in mind when building cabinetry for appliances is to follow the manufacturer's requirements, both for safety and for the warranty. The Miele appliances I installed here had specific venting requirements that led me to build the cabinet without a back and with open airflow throughout the height of the box.

After cutting down the upper cabinet, I attached a new side panel with biscuits and screws. I also reduced the width of the four

drawers, making sure that the reassembled part of each drawer was on the side that was obscured when it was opened. The hardest, most labor-intensive part of the job was making the new oven-cabinet doors and a resized door for the adjacent cabinet. I built the cherry doors with a cope-and-stick frame and raised panel that had an uncommon radiused profile.

## Reassembly on site

Back from the shop, I prepped the flanking cabinets first. On the drawer bank, I added a new side. Above, I reinstalled the upper cabinet and cut slots in both upper and lower box edges for the biscuits



### NOT MUCH WIGGLE ROOM

With the oven cabinet in place, the author screwed it to the left-hand base cabinet (near right). After adding plywood blocking (far right), the oven cabinet was fastened to the right-hand base cabinet.



### THE EXACT WIDTH

It was easier to fit the new right-hand stiles with the oven cabinet in place. The width of the stile was established by the distance between the oven cabinet and the drawer base rails. The author planed the stile to fit precisely.



### MATCHING IS PARAMOUNT

Like everything else on this job, the crown-molding profile was not stock, so the author had to re-create a section of the crown to blend in with the old.

that would attach the face-frame stiles. After rebuilding the oven-cabinet base, I pushed the big new cabinet into place, screwed it to the adjacent upper and base cabinets, and then biscuited the face-frame stiles into position.

After the drawer fronts and doors were installed, finisher Rick Fleming formulated a two-step stain process to match the existing finish. The first coat was a water-based aniline dye, followed by an oil stain and a clear topcoat, all of which he applied on site. □

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**You have to be there.** Because a room's mix of natural and artificial light is unique, the finisher's best bet is to try various shades on site. Here, a water-based dye was followed by an oil-based stain and a clear coat of polyurethane.