



Tricks of The Trade

One of the most valuable tools a kitchen or bath installer has is experience. In this article, adapted from the National Kitchen and Bath Association's *Kitchen and Bathroom Installation Manual*, veteran K&B remodelers share hard-won lessons from years of experience installing kitchens and baths.

Removal and Tear-Out

- When doing a lot of sanding or cutting inside the house, make sure all smoke detectors are off, especially those that are connected to the phone line. You can (and will) set them off, and the last thing you need is to have the fire department show up.
- If you're on a job with a new floor, always cover the floor with cardboard. (Make sure that the floor is clean first.) This not only protects the floor, but also makes cleanup easier.
- The first things you should find out on a job are where the main fuse box is and where the water shutoff valve is. You may need to shut them down in an emergency.

— Bruce Campbell

Room Prep

- Build closed soffits after the wall cabinets have been installed. This assures consistent reveals. The soffit framing members can be held in place by screwing up through the cabinet tops.
- When a soffit runs parallel to the ceiling joists, make sure that you install blocking for attachment of the soffit framing before you close in the ceiling.
- Keep electrical outlets just above the backsplash in appliance garages. You may want to turn these outlets sideways to make them more accessible.

— Lee McGinley

— George Nichols

Installation

- Always keep a supply of contact cement, wall bond, and carpenter's glue on hand.
- When drilling for cabinet handles, use a bullet (brad point) bit. This will help prevent the bit from walking.
- Before hammering on a wall or attaching cabinets to it, make sure there is nothing hanging on the wall's opposite side.
- To clean up toe-kick lines, remove the toe-kick boards that come with the cabinets before installation. You can replace them later with 1/2-inch MDF or 1/2-inch No. 2 pine. Or you can overlay the existing toe kicks with 1/4-inch lauan plywood and paint them to match. This lets you cover the space from the bottom of the toe kick to the floor if the cabinets are shimmed up.
- Always order oversized end panels. The extra width will let you scribe for out-of-plumb walls while the extra length will cover the bottom of the cabinets if they're shimmed off the floor.
- Use a story pole from a level line around the room to locate the heights of countertops, windowsills, door and window headers, and switches and outlets. The technique is faster and less prone to error than measuring.
- Use paper joint tape to make a stud layout template before you hang dry-wall, especially in remodeling where stud spacing may be erratic. When it's time to hang the cabinets, you can cut 1/2 inch off of the template (the thickness of the wallboard) and tape it to the wall. No unnecessary holes! (Remember to leave this strip for the homeowner.)
- When installing door jambs and baseboards, leave their bottom edges 1/8 inch above the underlayment.

— Bruce Campbell

The gap allows the vinyl flooring to be slipped under them. Your flooring subcontractor will love you for this one. Adjust the gap for different flooring materials.

— Michael Kelly

Countertops

- When the laminate surface on countertops or cabinets comes loose, you can reattach it by using a heat gun to heat up the laminate (being careful not to burn it) and pressing down on the laminate with a block of wood. Keep pressing until the laminate cools.
- Before routing a laminate countertop or any other laminate surface, coat it with cooking shortening, even if you are using a bearing bit. This will prevent marking or burning of the laminate edge.
- Before cutting a laminate countertop for a sink, always score the line with a knife. This reduces the chance of chipping.
- After cutting out for a sink, go back and file off the edges at an angle. This will keep the plumber from chipping the laminate when installing the sink.
- Cover all countertops with furniture blankets while you are working. When you are away from the job, cover the countertops with cardboard. We all know that other workers will stand on the countertops, especially when the lights are being installed in the soffit.
- Never wear a toolbelt, as it can chip a countertop. Also, wear a smooth belt buckle.

— Bruce Campbell

- Before assembling a miter or butt joint on a laminate countertop with drawbolts, use a spray bottle of water to dampen (not soak) the substrate edges. Then apply a heavy coat of wood glue to both edges. The water slows absorption of the glue and leaves more time to assemble and align the joint.
- After caulking a laminate countertop to the wall, spray water on the bead of caulk and on the adjacent wall and counter surfaces. Then use a damp cloth to smooth the bead and remove excess caulk. The water makes it much easier to remove unwanted caulk, especially from textured surfaces.

- Be sure to seal the underside of the countertop in front of the dishwasher with laminate or three coats of oil-base paint. This will prevent steam from the dishwasher from swelling the edge of the countertop.

— George Glassman

- Put a wood edge on a countertop after the laminate has been applied, not before. In areas of high wear, such as in front of the sink, this lets you change the wood in the future without disturbing the laminate. Use yellow waterproof glue and panelling nails (long ones with ring shanks), and seal the seam with a putty stick. It will look like it grew there!

— Michael Kelly

Hookups and Connections

- If you have to move an appliance over a finish floor, put down 1/4-inch lauan plywood first. Rolling a refrigerator into place can crush a vinyl or even a hardwood floor. The edges of glazed tile can also get chipped.
- Slip a piece of galvanized ductwork behind the water supplies in a sink or vanity cabinet before sweating on the pipes. This will keep you from scorching the cabinet. To prevent melting the washer when you heat the valves, remove the valve stems.
- Seal around a water closet flange with silicone before setting the fixture. After the fixture is bolted down, seal the seam between the fixture and the floor to prevent mop water from seeping under the fixture.

— Michael Kelly

- Never cut out for a sink unless you have the sink there.

— Bruce Campbell

These tips were adapted from The Kitchen and Bath Installation Manual, Volume 1 (1994), published by the National Kitchen and Bath Association (687 Willow Grove St., Hackettstown, NJ 07840; 908/852-0033).

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