

Built in the spirit of fine furniture and designed to complement historic spaces, furniture-quality cabinetry is a link to the traditions of the past.

AN 18TH-CENTURY American cabinetmaker was a true furniture artisan, a maker and carver of fine casework. Today, when most kitchen and bath cabinetry—even “custom” work—is composed of interchangeable boxes, drawers, and face fronts—a growing handful of makers have revived the cabinetmaker’s tradition in their work. Their tactic? Build it like furniture fitted to the room, using time-tested furniture-making techniques.



Fit as Furniture

BY MARY ELLEN POLSON

“The construction method of our cabinetry is pretty much similar to the construction methods of our furniture,” says Matt Moser, oldest of four sons of legendary furniture maker Thomas Moser, and owner of Matthew T. Moser & Co., a company that specializes in kitchen cabinetry and architectural woodworking.

For Moser and others, that means using fine furniture details like hand-mortised tenons (at least an inch long) and dovetailed bracket bases—and cutting drawer fronts from the same boards. [cont. on p. 40]

TOP: Kevin Ritter of Timeless Kitchen Designs uses vintage lumber, and finishes with milk paint to produce the look of aged furniture. **RIGHT:** Stickley introduced a freestanding Mission island. **FAR RIGHT:** (top) Mahogany china cabinets and matching English work table by Kennebec are all but freestanding. (bottom) Built-ins like this window seat by Crown Point Cabinetry are part of the flow.



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“All the face pieces are matched as they would be on a single piece of furniture,” Moser says.

Where Moser’s clients are often inspired by contemporary pieces they’ve collected, other clients prefer kitchens inspired by antiques, both high style and country. “I do a lot of adaptations of pieces of furniture,” says Doug Dimes, president and chief designer of D.R. Dimes, whose kitchen design arm is an outgrowth of a maker of fine reproduction furniture. “Customers are looking for early American sensibility.”

Most of his cabinetry looks new—or as though a 250-year-old piece of furniture had been built today. Kevin Ritter of Timeless Kitchen Designs takes a different approach, deliberately aging cabinetry that uses antique wood for the faces of doors and drawers. “We’re inspired by the primitive, painted antique pieces,” says Ritter, whose father, Bryce Ritter, is known for his painted furniture re-creations of early-19th-century pieces.

Although the results are dramatically different, both Dimes and Ritter pay special attention to cabinet finishes. “At least 40 percent of our time and effort goes into the finish,” says Dimes, who specializes in tiger maple kitchens. “Most companies spend 10 percent.”

For Ritter, the perfect medium is milk paint, which enhances the aged effect he is after. “We mix it up so it’s a little bit chunky, uneven. That goes back to the way the old pieces looked.”

That’s not to say these makers shun modern technology. More precisely, they tend to use the best contemporary methods to achieve the finest results. For example, Moser uses extruded brass hinges finished

on a machine lathe, then hand-mor-tises them to the cabinets so they fit flush. And his closing mechanism is a bit of alchemy: instead of plastic-encased magnets that produce a twang when they’re released under pressure, his company inlays rare earth magnets on opposing cabinet doors and face frames that actually levitate. “These magnets aren’t actually touching each other, so there’s

OPPOSITE: Matt Moser designed a kitchen for a collector of Thos. Moser furniture. Islands are the most furniture-like of all casework. **BELOW:** Hand-turned legs and custom finishes mark a kitchen by D. R. Dimes.



no twang,” he says.

While the exterior of a Dimes cabinet looks like a piece of early American furniture, the interior is engineered “like ultramodern furniture,” Dimes says. “We use a notched shelf system, not drilled holes. We do that so the interiors are clean.”

Not surprisingly, much of the inspiration for a kitchen’s design comes from the architecture of the house itself, or, in Moser’s case, from furniture in the house. A believer in the Greek ideal of classical proportion, Moser also takes an intuitive approach to design that not only considers the distribution of vertical space, but also how light and



“We’re incorporating the design details that are characteristic of somebody’s house and incorporating them in a harmonious way with the kitchen.” —MATTHEW T. MOSER

cabinets, all at uniform heights. “A lot of our customers don’t want upper cabinets,” Dimes says, “so we have to find other places to store materials.” In a kitchen without enough space for a freestanding cabinet, for example, Dimes borrowed an idea from the Shakers and recessed cabinets into the wall.

Minimizing upper cabinets “opens up the room,” Ritter says, noting that when he does use upper cabinets, “I try to make them look antique” with glass from old windows.

The idea is to respect the spirit of the house in a kitchen that functions. To paraphrase Duke Ellington, “If it looks good, it is good.” ♦

shadow play over raised panels and mouldings, often adding them to an elevation or a perspective drawing. “Design is at least as important as the quality of construction,” he says.

Those ideas also lead away from conventional kitchen installations with banks of upper and lower

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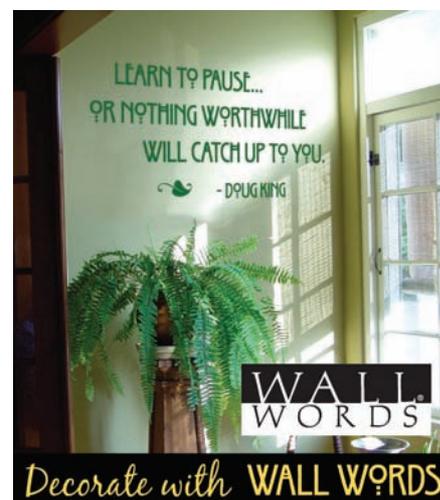
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