Build a Custom

Pushed beneath the counter, it's a cabinet with an adjustable shelf.

BY PAUL JOHNSON

When designing a kitchen remodel for some of my favorite clients, we wanted to eliminate an awkward pinch point created by an existing peninsula without losing the counter space. The kitchen is just narrow enough that a dedicated island wouldn't work, but big enough that we wanted to somehow utilize the full space. We decided on a small rollout cabinet that could easily move around to wherever the homeowners would be working in the kitchen. We wanted to integrate it seamlessly with the rest of the cabinetry, but without it being fussy to take out or put in.

I wanted the cart to look like the rest of the cabinetry, which meant keeping the reveal around it as small as possible—not an easy task considering the 100-year-old out-of-level floor it would be rolling on. I had the tile guys do their best to flatten the old floor when they put in the new tile, but I also decided to build the cabinet carcase separately, fit it into place, and then attach the face frame so I could ensure a consistent gap all the way around. I tacked the face frame into place with glue and a few brads, and then fully attached it with pocket screws.

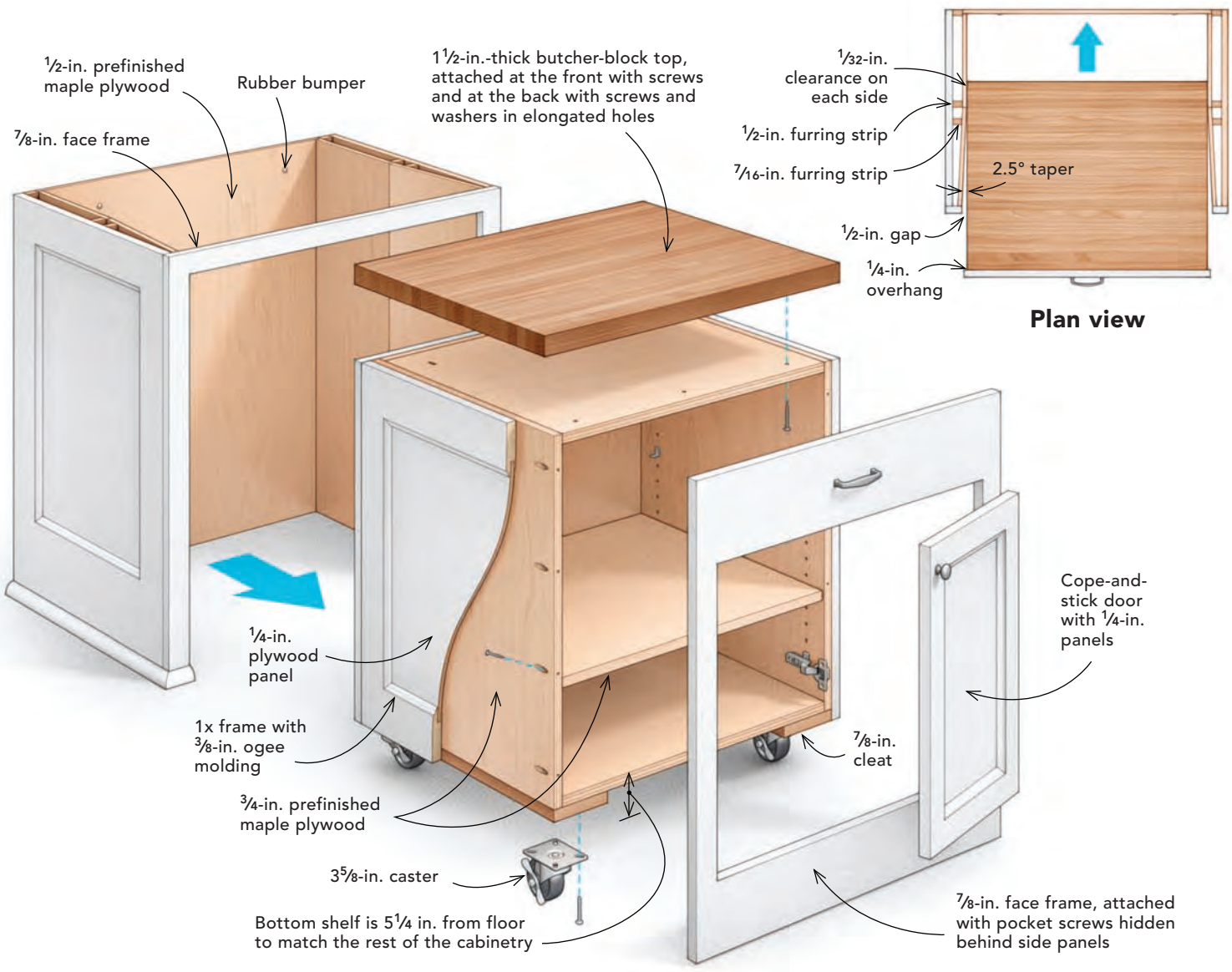
To allow for the cart to be pushed into place easily, but also to center itself without adjustment, I built housing that tapers toward the back and then straightens out. The front of the housing is 1 in. wider than the width of the cabinet, but tapers back to a section that is only 1/16 in. wider than the cabinet. The face frame overhangs the sides of the cabinet by 1/4 in. to hide the additional room at the front. I wanted to leave ample room for adjustment and to hide any inconsistencies between the rolling cabinet and the fixed cabinet it fits between, so I settled on a 1/4-in. gap. As it turns out, everything worked so well that I think I could have gotten away with a 1/8-in. gap instead.

I had originally envisioned a wider cabinet opening with high-density plastic rails or guides of some sort, but I didn't want anything to mar the paint on the rollout cabinet over time, so I settled on lining the opening with the same prefinished maple plywood I use for cabinet construction. The finish is

Drawings: Christopher Mills

Rollout Cabinet

Pulled out, it's an extra work surface with a butcher-block top.



slick and rock solid, so it should wear well over time, and it allows the cart to slide in and out effortlessly.

We're lucky to have a great store in town that specializes in casters (johnwnegus.com), so before I started construction, I went there to get help figuring out the best casters to use. We settled on medium-duty swiveling and locking casters that roll easily, but have enough resistance that the cart won't roll away on its own. I installed the casters far enough inside the cabinet's footprint that they don't extend past the sides of the cabinet when swiveling.

When the homeowners chose butcher block for the top, I knew that because wood moves, I'd have be thoughtful about how to attach it. I chose to screw it to the cabinet from below. In the front, I screwed it tight; in the back, I routed slotted holes to allow the wood top to move. This way, any movement will be toward the back, and won't create a gap between the top and the face frame where crumbs and debris could potentially collect.

The result is a fully functional, movable island that rolls wherever the owners need, doesn't take up any room in a somewhat narrow space, and integrates seamlessly into the cabinetry. □

Paul Johnson runs Paul Johnson Carpentry and Remodeling in Portland, Ore. Photos by Nina Johnson.