

# Maximize Pantry Storage

Replace shelves with shallow drawers, and you can stop diving deep to find the soup

BY REX ALEXANDER

**T**he minute I walked into Judy and Carl Rawski's home, I could tell they were tidy people. Not a thing was out of place. They both talked about how they had revamped many of their kitchen-cabinet interiors to make them more efficient but were stumped when it came to a closet they had designed at the end of a cabinet run. Frustrated with the usual wire shelving or boards resting on cleats, they were looking for lots of storage that was accessible, easy to clean, and attractive.

I like simplicity when designing a pantry, so I came up with the idea of building a closet-size cabinet to eliminate wasted space. Shallow drawers installed at various heights inside the cabinet would span the opening and make stored items easy to reach.

## Prepare the closet for the cabinet

I wanted to use all the available space in the closet but still have the pullout shelving slide past the butt-hinged doors, even if they were opened only 90°. This meant the cabinet sides would need to be about 1½ in. inside the existing door jambs (drawing facing page). To inset the cabinet, I used 2x2 blocking at the front and 2x4 blocking at the back of the closet, which left enough room for a 32-in.-wide carcass.

I also installed blocking against the door's head jamb so that the cabinet's head casing would match the sides. On the closet floor, I attached ¾-in. by 1½-in. screw blocks perpendicular to the front edge, followed by two 4¼-in.-tall base supports. Smaller blocks serve as nailers for the side casings.

## Cut the parts, finish, then assemble

The Rawskis' kitchen cabinets have maple interiors, so I used maple plywood for the pantry closet. After I cut the parts, I put a dado head in my tablesaw and cut the tongue-and-rabbit joints for the carcass.

I finished all the parts before assembly. After taping off the areas to be glued, I lightly sanded all the surfaces with 220-grit sandpaper, then applied a satin polyurethane with a fine-nap roller. Two coats adequately protect the wood and give the surface a nice sheen. The finish levels out perfectly, and roller marks disappear. After removing the tape from the joints, I applied glue, clamped



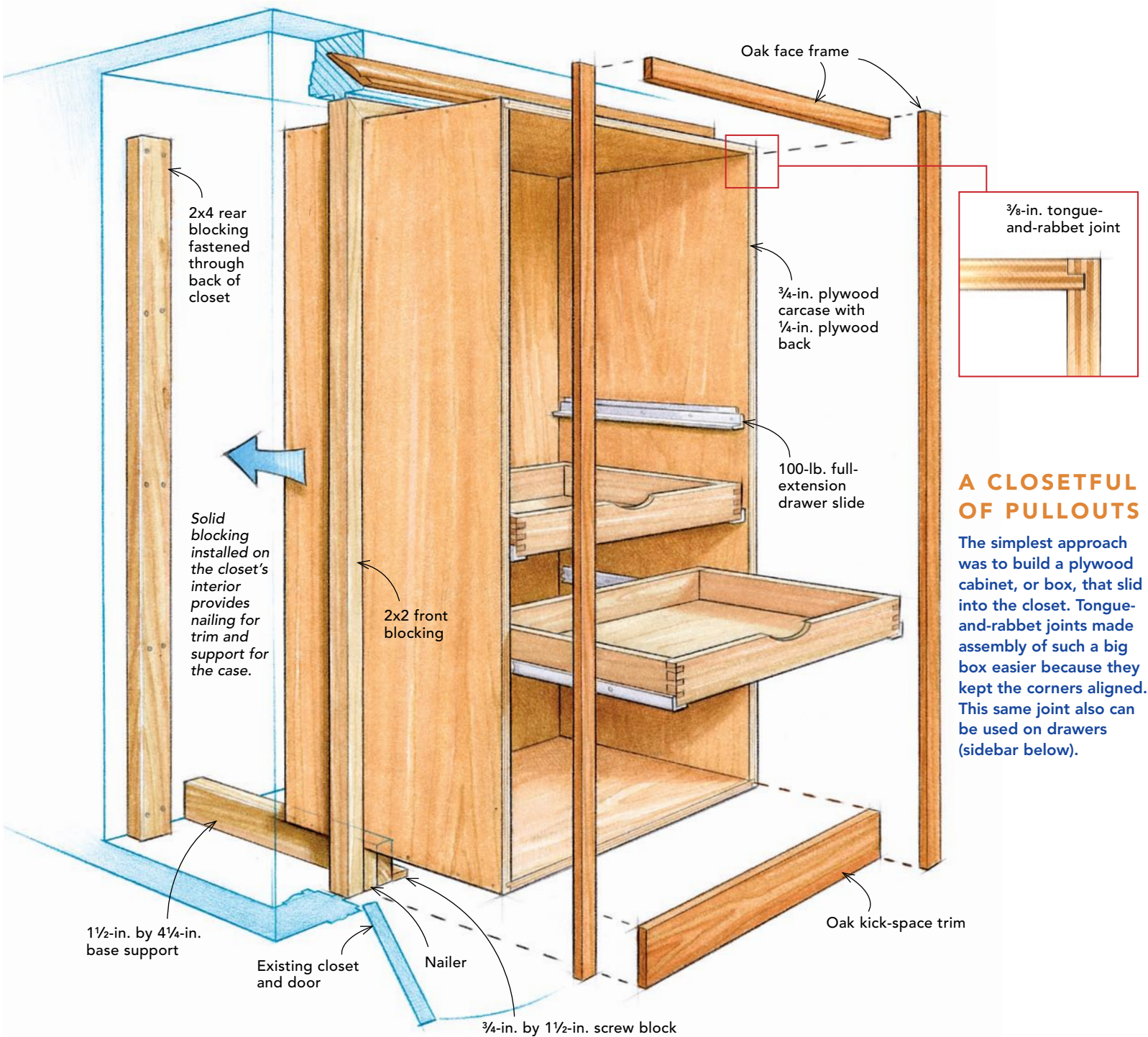
together the pieces, and nailed the joints for insurance. Squaring up the carcass was easy once the ¼-in. plywood back was fastened in place.

## Install and trim the unit

I mounted all the drawers with Blum 550-mm epoxy-coated drawer slides ([www.blum.com](http://www.blum.com)). They handle up to 100 lb., are easy to install, and operate smoothly.

The carcass slid into place along the base supports and between the blocking. I screwed the carcass to the blocking at the front and back of the closet. Then I nailed quartersawn oak trim flush with the inside edge of the cabinet; the trim floats on the outside edge for expansion and contraction. Finally, I filled the nail holes in the trim and installed the drawers onto the slides. □

Rex Alexander is a cabinetmaker in Brethren, Mich. Photo by Dietrich Floeter.



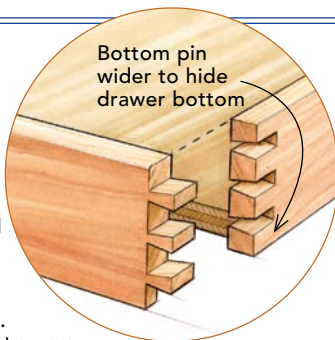
## A CLOSETFUL OF PULLOUTS

The simplest approach was to build a plywood cabinet, or box, that slid into the closet. Tongue-and-rabbet joints made assembly of such a big box easier because they kept the corners aligned. This same joint also can be used on drawers (sidebar below).

## Three drawer variations

### Dovetails

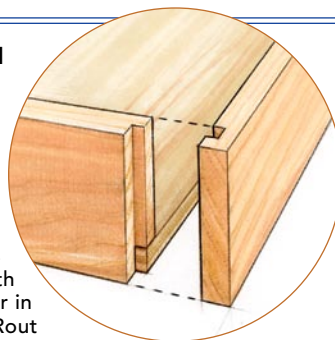
The drawers shown in the photo on the facing page were built of solid maple with hand-cut dovetail joints, which are almost as labor-intensive as they are good-looking. The scooped fronts were cut with a bandsaw and sanded smooth. The drawer bottoms were made of 1/2-in. plywood glued into a 3/8-in. by 1/2-in. rabbet.



Bottom pin wider to hide drawer bottom

### Tongue and rabbet

I've used this joint on drawers made from 1/2-in. Baltic-birch plywood. It's easily cut with a dado cutter in a tablesaw. Rout the rabbet for the bottom after assembling the drawer sides, front, and back.



### Biscuits

The third variation is also made from 1/2-in. Baltic-birch plywood, but has mitered corners that are joined with O-size biscuits. The biscuit joiner must be kept square to the stock when cutting, or the miter will be offset.

