

Multi-Purpose Tools For Kitchen Work

by Chuck Green



Like most subtrades, cabinetmakers and kitchen installers have their own quirky set of specialty tools. I do a lot of kitchen remodeling, so I naturally take an interest in these tools. But I also do a lot of general remodeling. Because of this, I tend to look for cabinet tools that have other uses, as well as general-purpose tools that are of particular value in kitchen remodels. Here are a few of my favorites.

Heavy Lifters

The Gil Lift (1605 North River, Independence, MO 54050; 816/833-0611) and the Kab Jak (JCM Industries, 774 State Rd. 13, Suite 9, Jacksonville, FL 32259; 800/660-7371) are hand-powered forklifts that make it easy for a lone worker to move, lift, and place wall cabinets (Figure 1). A metal column is attached to a wheeled base. The cabinets are placed on a pair of forks that stick out from the column and that are attached via a rope to a hand crank. This lets you screw a row of cabinets together on the floor, hoist them into place, adjust the height and level, and

do any necessary shimming. The Gil Lift costs \$399 and the Kab Jak \$495, but since they let you work without a helper, they may be worth the cost if you hang a lot of cabinets. These lifts are also useful for moving other heavy objects. For example, if you need to put a heavy wall oven into a wall cabinet with 1/16-inch tolerances all around, you can devote your attention to fitting rather than lifting. Both lifts can be quickly disassembled and used as dollies to wheel cabinets and appliances around the site.

Solid-Surfacing Tools

Some of the most clever specialty tools are designed for making solid-surface countertops. A good source for these is The Pinske Edge (119 Main St., Plato, MN 55370; 800/874-6753). Among Pinske's newest creations is the \$249 Air Compass (Figure 2, next page), a router jig that lets you route curved counter edges with 13-inch to 90-inch diameters. An air-powered suction grip (it hooks up to a standard compressor) holds the center of the jig to the work surface, so there's no need to drive screws into it.

The grip is so strong that it will even latch onto porous wood surfaces. The company also makes several types of router guides, including heavy-duty extruded aluminum straightedges, right angles, and curves. The machined guides are made to more precise standards than the typical carpenter's straightedge, and are thick enough that they won't distort under stress from the router (Figure 3).

Pinske also makes the Power Grip system (\$270). It consists of a pair of super-strong suction cups that can be connected to one another by a turnbuckle (Figure 4). It's designed to draw two sheets of solid surfacing together for gluing, but can be used to pull other joints together as well. For instance, the Power Grip lets you pull the miters together on an L-shaped laminate countertop so you can glue the substrates together.

Supporting the Work

If you cut a poorly supported solid-surface backsplash, you tend to get some tear-out at the end of the blade cut. Even standard laminate countertops need solid support when being cut. American Design and Engineering (900 3rd St., #123 E, St. Paul Park, MN 55071; 800/441-1388) makes the Saw Helper (\$369.95), a portable stand and extension wing system for miter saws (see *Toolbox*, 9/94). It's a great tool to have on any backsplash or trim job. The Saw Helper's aluminum tables extend either 5 or 8 feet on each side of the saw blade to hold the trim securely in place. The Saw Helper fits all miter saws, even 15-inch models. It's easily removed from the saw and folded up, and has a fence gauge with hairline accuracy that works on either side of the saw. It's also good for other repetitive tasks like cutting balusters.

Dust Control

One of the biggest problems in kitchen remodeling is dust. I can't think of any room where dust control is such an issue; homeowners seem to need the kitchen to be the cleanest part of the house. Two of my dust control strategies include placing exhaust fans in the window, and using a product called the Dust Door (Brophy Design Inc., 524 Green St., Boylston, MA 01505; 508/393-7166), a dust-control membrane that's used to seal doorways and wall openings (see *For What It's Worth*, 3/94). The Dust Door



Figure 1. A cabinet hoist, like this one by Gil Lift, lets a carpenter install upper cabinets without a helper. It's also handy for moving cabinets and other bulky items around the site.



Figure 2. The Air Compass was designed for routing curves in solid-surface countertops, but it's also great for general-purpose router work. No screws or fasteners are needed — the suction cup grabs onto any flat surface.



Figure 3. Specialty router guides are thicker, more precise, and less likely to bend under pressure than site-made straightedges or the standard carpenter's variety.



Figure 4. The Power Grip system consists of a pair of suction cups and a turnbuckle. It's good for drawing countertops, cabinets, or any other flat surfaces together.

can also be fitted with a vacuum attachment that sucks dust out of the space and exhausts it outside.

A third strategy is to remove dust from the point at which it's generated. Many power tools now come with built-in exhaust systems that attach to a shop vacuum. The problems are that the vacuum must be repeatedly turned on and off and that shop vacuums tend not to have the best filtration systems. Both problems are solved by the new Power Tool-Triggered Wet/Dry Vac from Porter-Cable (P.O. Box 2468, 4825 Highway 45 North, Jackson, TN 38302; 901/668-8600). The power tool is plugged into this vacuum, and elec-

tronic circuits inside the vac sense when the tool is turned on and turn on the vac. They turn the vac off 15 seconds after the tool is turned off. The Power Tool-Triggered Wet/Dry Vac is compatible with power tools offering their own dust collection systems, including those not made by Porter-Cable. It has a pleated dual filter system with a 99.85% filtration efficiency between 2 and .2 microns. That means that it can retain particles as small as 1/500th the size of a human hair. ■

Chuck Green is a NARI Certified Remodeler. He runs Four Corners Construction in Ashland, Mass.