

# ► Kitchen & Bath

## Two-Tone Kitchen Design

by Jim Kregel

**W**orking with more than one color or finish in your cabinet installations is an excellent way to increase the creative appeal of a kitchen project. Interestingly, most consumers who view a two-tone installation guess that a kitchen featuring more than one color costs more than one with a single finish. But unless you use a special premium finish as an accent, there's no additional cost. When done properly, a two-tone kitchen is an excellent way to add perceived value to an otherwise average job.

There's no absolute when it comes to the use of multifinishes, but if you haven't attempted this technique before, I'll offer a word of caution: Less is more. Rather than laying on

color and contrast everywhere, remain understated. Use less of the contrasting materials in your earlier projects until you're certain of the outcome. There's definitely an element of trial and error here. I've seen so many uses of two-tone that don't work that I caution everyone to be careful in this application. Once you've mastered it, you may want to try more novel approaches. But begin slowly.

A good way to get started with the two-tone effect is to look at the work of others. I've made a practice of observing the details created by other designers and have never stopped learning. I've grouped some basic themes below to give you ideas that you can adapt to your own work.

### *Juxtaposing*

**1** The dark foreground island cabinets in this kitchen have an interesting plum finish. The light hickory cabinets in the background are surrounded by the same painted plum finish, nicely framing them while creating a thread of continuity.



**2** Another approach to a multifinish kitchen is to apply one finish to the upper cabinets and another to the lower cabinets. This technique usually works best when the base cabinets are finished in the darker of the two colors, because dark colors are visually "heavier" and seem to belong on the bottom. Obviously, that is not a firm rule, because the opposite works nicely in this case, helped along by the unifying element of a matching wood floor. Using the natural maple as a trim detail in the rest of the kitchen ties all the elements of this design together.



**3** This example shows how the use of light upper cabinets and darker lower cabinets creates great visual balance. The eye focuses on the upper cabinets because they're light, while the darker cabinets tend to fade more into the background. Generally, it's best not to drag the focus high or low, but to maintain an eye-level perspective.



**4** This is two-tone at its most defiant — love it or leave it. Although I enjoy the contrast of the red and black and the bold excitement of the space, it's bound to have a limited shelf life for most clients.



### Highlighting

**5** A neutral gray and white scheme can be interesting, but you have to be careful not to force the look. In this case, the cabinet box has one finish and the inset cabinet door another. I'm not sure that this example entirely succeeds. The contrast may be too strong, leading the viewer to focus on the specifics, rather than the whole.

**6** Although this example is similar in approach to the preceding gray and white project, here the overlay door doesn't serve up the contrast all at once, and the two-tone effect is striking. The use of stacked moldings is an excellent way to create a strong horizontal line around a room. This particular combination is pretty strong and might be



best suited to define a smaller area, rather than the entire kitchen.

**7** In this kitchen, some doors and drawers have color, while others don't. It's an unusual combination and one of my favorites. The com-

bined use of two darker colors softens the difference in finishes. This is a more advanced and sophisticated approach to two-tone, however, and requires enough experience to assure you and your client of the outcome.

### Massing

**8** Two-tone doesn't have to be limited to moldings or details. This display introduces color in whole cabinet blocks, finished differently from the surrounding ones. I sometimes use this technique to create a focal point in a room.

**9** This showroom kitchen features a

seafoam green island before a backdrop of creamy white cabinetry. The island countertop picks up the creamy white, while the other tops are seafoam green. This is a great way to create visual excitement. If you use a dark and light scheme, use the darker shade on the island, as the foreground element, and make the background cabinets light. The reverse doesn't work nearly as well because the contrast becomes too strong.

**10** The kitchen in this example creates a focal point by using a different finish on the hood and cooktop. It also features three different finishes on the countertops: wood butcherblock on the island (excellent for cutting), ceramic tile in the foreground, and granite on the remainder. Some might consider this look disjointed, but customers respond differently to different combinations. There's no single "right" design solution.



### Outlining

**11** In a kitchen where white is the primary finish, natural maple molding on the countertop edge, open maple shelving, maple trim on the cabinet boxes, and maple cove molding provide visual relief and subtly outline the cabinets. The floor, a high-pressure laminate, features the same maple finish, helping to tie it all together. This is Two-Tone 101, and it works.

**12** White is again the primary finish in this kitchen, but a natural maple rope molding in the upper crown creates a strong focal point. The beadboard backsplash, the vertical wine storage, and the sides of the opposing wall cabinets feature the same natural finish, providing a subtle, understated contrast and a slightly bolder design statement than the previous example.

**13** The Green Giant test kitchens in Minneapolis took a different approach. Subtle and understated moldings, made of the same solid-surface material as the countertop, outline and anchor the design. Not shown in the photograph, even the toeboard and shoe molding were shaped from solid surfacing.


**14** Leaving the subtle zone, high-contrast blue moldings against white cabinets are definitely eye-catching. The bold blue and white sandwich of the crown molding along with the vertical details and blue corbels makes a strong statement. The blue backsplash within the hutch provides an excellent contrast for the displayed items. I generally like this project, but this much contrast could become tiring and

make the clients wish they'd done something less dramatic.

**15** Framing lighter cabinetry with a dark molding is an excellent approach. The effect in this example appears natural because, in spite of the strong contrast, it doesn't call attention to itself. The totally black cabinet at the end of the peninsula artfully defines the transition from the kitchen to the other areas of the house.



Clearly, you can create multicolored projects in a host of ways. One of the most important things you can take away from this article is that, like any other good design idea, two-tone has to be approached carefully. There's no single right or wrong answer as to how to define a space. Make use of your

keen instinct and work with your client, and you'll end up with some intriguing projects. 

*Jim Krengel is a Certified Kitchen and Bath Designer and the president of Kitchens by Krengel in St. Paul, Minn.*