

A Matter of PRIORITIES

Storage Options

Two kitchens, two lessons in value. In the first, an architect gets a custom look with stock cabinetry; in the second, a designer makes a mundane space special with an artful yet functional island.

By MICHAEL WALSH

When Jill and Scott Baskin moved into their Chicago house, they hired architect Claudia Skylar of Mastro-Skylar Architects to reconfigure and update several rooms. First priority: Gut a tiny galley kitchen, hallway and superfluous back stairwell, keeping in mind that every splurge in the kitchen meant a skimp in one of the other rooms. "You can make compromises without making sacrifices," says Skylar. "Creativity can compensate by making inexpensive things look costly and stock elements seem custom-made." And, in fact, the factory-built white laminate cabinets (\$6,000) look carpenter-crafted because Skylar added maple crown molding to the tops and maple edging to the counters; here and there, original laminate doors were replaced with maple-framed glass versions. The Baskins opted for American-made appliances, including a refrigerator (\$1,300) that looks like an expensive built-in because it was pushed into a recess created by removing the back stairwell. To make room for a bank of cabinets on one wall of the kitchen, Skylar moved a door a few feet to one side. "If spending that extra \$1,000 makes the difference between a kitchen that doesn't work and one that does, then I think it's worth the money." ▶

THE MOST FOR YOUR MONEY

"When choosing the cabinets, we decided to go with less expensive, less glamorous versions and play with their placement for added interest and a personal touch."

Claudia Skylar
Architect

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An 8-inch-deep ledge on the sink counter provides a shelf for small appliances without reducing counter space. Tucked into the arrangement of ready-made cabinets, carpenter-built maple shelves store spices and add a custom look. Framed-in-maple doors and windows and a new maple floor (cost: \$1,000) bring warmth to white laminate cabinets and countertops.