

Smart Words for Smart Homeowners

THE EXPERIENCE OF EXPERTS AND THEIR ADVICE ON RELEVANT HOMEOWNER TOPICS

Painting Kitchen Cabinets

Overview

These are the nine steps to a professional finish. Painting a kitchen cabinets is like any important painting job – quality is important. But mastering the perfect glassy finish is all in the prep work. Before your brush or sprayer ever hits the wood there must be a lot of time devoted to getting the surface ready to accept finish paint. That means properly cleaning, sanding, and priming every inch of the surface. If you skip any step the finish won't look great or last long or stick well. Don't compromise.

The Prep Work

Cleaning

Completely cleaning the wood is one of the the most important steps in the preparation process. Years of greasy fingerprints, water stains and fry splatters will leave a residue of grime that inhibits paint adhesion and longevity. You can remove most of the gunk with a good TSP substitute or a degreaser. Using a sponge and the appropriate cleanser wipe down all surfaces; the doors, drawer fronts, and cabinet frames. Clean all the surfaces that you plan to paint. Now let it dry before the next step.

Sanding

After cleaning you need to help the paint stick and lightly roughen the surface with some 100 grit sandpaper and then 200 grit paper. Now clean it with a damp paper towel. Now rub all surfaces with a good tack cloth to remove all the dust.

Priming

The primer you use can also make or break the finish. To get a flat, glassy surface, you need to use a high-build sanding primer. If you find open pores try to even the surfaces. One good product is Eurolux sanding primer from a company called Fine Paints of Europe. The sandable part of that equation is imperative, so that you can smooth the surface before painting on the finish coat. You may even need two

coats of primer to completely fill open wood grain.

Drying Between Coats

Keep the doors and drawers flat as the primer and paint cures and levels. Make a shelf type drying rack by drilling screws up through several pieces of scrap wood. That way you can flip your dry work to its other side when it's dry to the touch. Also, screw cup hooks into the edges of doors and drawers as grab hooks to hold or move them without fingerprinting the paint. These hooks help hang your work for secure drying.



Knobs

As long as you're sprucing things up you might consider changing the hinge and pull hardware. If you're reusing your old hinges, also flag the paired hinges with their doors and location for easier reinstallation.

Picking The Finish Paint

The formula of finish paint you choose contributes to the final durable, smooth look. Traditionally, painting cabinets for a high traffic area such as a kitchen required using oil-based paints. But working with oils can be messy and the fumes are toxic. While latex paints will never quite self-level and flow as well as oils, they're getting close. Latex formulas specified for cabinetry—labeled "100% acrylic"—will create an even, durable finish. In many cases, they're also low in VOC's (volatile organic compounds) which emit that noxious paint smell.

Applying The Paint

Prep The Room

Cover and tape the countertop near the cabinets with drop clothes or rosin paper and painter's tape. Cover and tape the backsplash with 0.5-millimeter sheeting plastic.

Mark The Items

Mark each cabinet door or drawer and its corresponding opening with matching numbered pieces of tape so you'll know which piece goes where.

Remove all pulls and knobs, and unscrew hinges from both the cabinet boxes and the doors. Pull out the drawers and if removable, unscrew the fronts.

Tape the slides or rails of each drawer side. Paint on these rolling surfaces will hinder their smooth operation.

Smooth And Fill

Using a putty knife, fill any dings or divots with a thin layer of wood putty. Also, fill any old hardware holes if you plan to change the hardware.

Using 100-grit sandpaper, sand the putty smooth and rough up the cabinets' finish. Sand with the grain, and apply enough pressure to push the paper into any crevices, nicks, or dents without rounding over the edges. Screw cup hooks into the edge of the doors and drawers—on the top edge of upper cabinets and on the bottom edge of lower cabinets and drawers.

Prime The Cabinets

Lay the doors facedown. Using a 2-inch paintbrush, apply a coat of primer. Brush first against the grain and then with it. Paint the interior panel before the rails and stiles. Let the primer dry to the touch before flipping the pieces to paint the other side. Prime the outside of the cabinet boxes (and the inside if desired) while waiting for the doors to dry.

Let the doors and drawer fronts dry to the touch, keeping them flat so the paint levels off. When dry hang them from the cup hooks to cure completely.

Sand The Primer

Allow the primer to dry for several hours. Using a random-orbit sander and 220-grit sandpaper, smooth away any brushstrokes in the primer on the panels and other flat surfaces.

Sand the trim using a fine-grit sanding sponge. Push the sponge into the groove of any trim detailing. Sand the cabinet boxes and frames in the same manner.

Finishing Process

Vacuum All Surfaces

Vacuum all surfaces thoroughly; then wipe them

down with a tack cloth. If necessary, apply a second coat of primer and re-sand the surface until you achieve a smooth, grain-free base coat.

Brush On The Finish Color

Use a new chisel-tipped paintbrush to apply the finish color. Beginning on the back of the doors and drawer fronts, brush on the paint, going with the grain. Paint the panels first; then work your way out to the rails and stiles. Apply a thin coating to avoid drips and uneven coverage.

While the doors and drawers are drying, keep them perfectly flat and dust free to allow the paint to level off. Meanwhile, paint the face frames.

Once the doors and drawers are dry to the touch, flip them over and coat the face. Again working from the interior panel out to the rails and stiles. Let them sit flat until they're dry to the touch. Then hang them to dry for another 2 hours before applying the second coat. The paint instructions may say sand between coats so read the directions.

Alternate Method: Spray the Finish

To keep the paint smooth, you should use a brush on the cabinet boxes and face frames. But for a superior finish on the doors and drawer fronts you can apply a single coat with an airless paint sprayer. Spray the edges first; then fill in the field on the face of the door. Make sure to overlap each pass by about 50 percent, and don't let up on the trigger until the spray is completely off the surface. Do not apply too much paint at any pass.

Keep the doors and drawers flat and level until they are dry to the touch. Then hang them to cure and dry completely.

Install The Doors, Drawers & Hardware

Once the cabinets have totally cured (another day or two, depending on the weather), attach the hinges to the doors and then to the cabinet frames. Fit them by turning the adjustment screws. Install the drawer faces. Be gentle.

Align The Doors

If your cabinets are not level, fool the eye by adjusting the hinges until the door and drawer seams look even.

Awards For Superior Results

We have been granted awards for superior work performance from our customers and from leading consumer rating agencies like Angie's List®. This is our 7th consecutive consumer award. Less than 5 percent of service companies ever qualify for this award in any single year, so it's quite an unparalleled and rare distinction to be a successive winner SEVEN consecutive years. (For math majors it's a probability of 0.0000000007813 and a very rare occurrence.)



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