



MASTERBRAND CABINETS

High-gloss painted cabinetry in high-impact colors is in keeping with the contemporary feeling of this kitchen.

Glossy cabinets shine on

High-gloss finishes reflect fresh style in contemporary kitchens

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As ultra-contemporary kitchens gain in popularity, interest is soaring in shiny cabinets that contribute a huge modern cachet.

New York-based designer Patrick Mele loves the sheen and reflection that variations on glossy paint, other finishes and lacquer add to a kitchen. He and other

designers credit European cabinetmakers for producing some of the smoothest, glass- or mirror-like finishes, rivaling those from automotive manufacturers.

Patty Vila is among American homeowners who like the look. She resurfaced kitchen cabinets in her Miami Beach home by having them spray-lacquered white. "They look amazing, and it's a popular look for others living on the beach. It makes the room look larger, sleeker and cleaner," Vila

says. Chicago designer Scott Dresner also likes glossy cabinets as a way to add a pop of shine and make a kitchen look more distinct. He has his own private label line fabricated in Italy.

Mele, who likes a choice of hues depending on the colors in the rest of the interior, gives black a big thumbs-up. "It's like having a tuxedo in your apartment," he says.

But there's another trend that's emerged, which appeals to those who may not want such spare sophistication, reminiscent of the high-tech lab look popular in the late 1970s and '80s. They favor warming up minimalist glossy cabinets with some matte or wood-grain cabinets and honed countertops, says designer Veronica Van Deusen, owner of Fabulous Interior Designs in Fredericksburg, Va. But combining finishes and colors like a pro takes



JIM TSCHETTER/DRESNER DESIGN

Designer Scott Dresner designed a spanking-white kitchen with high-gloss painted cabinets for a contemporary vibe.

some careful planning.

Van Deusen recommends separating the different surfaces — either above or below countertops, or isolating the glossy cabinet boxes in a certain area such as an island or butler's pantry as a focal point.

Besides deciding whether to go with a total or partial glossy look, another key decision is which type of gloss to select, which can affect price. Many of the glossiest cabinets reflect a labor-intensive process of rolling or brushing on paint, spray-painting, applying a urethane-type finish or lacquering, often in multiple layers and sometimes with an automobile manufacturer-style buffing afterward. These choices can end up being as expensive as pricey stainless-steel and custom-painted cabinets, says Dresner.

Because of the time-consuming labor required and regulations regarding volatile organic compounds off-gassing with oil-

based finishes, the work may have to be done off-site, before installation. Even touch-ups may require removing cabinet doors and sending them back to a shop. Same goes when existing cabinet fronts are resurfaced. So, it's important to ask in advance about the process. But the good news is that the best glossy finishes usually are highly durable and viewed as a "lifetime investment," Mele says.

Less costly versions are available, though not all are exact clones. Vila shopped hard to find an installer to lacquer her cabinets for an affordable fee. Van Deusen has discovered costs sometimes can be trimmed if clients take their cabinets to an auto body shop, skilled in this type of work. Ikea retails high-gloss cabinets. And many paint manufacturers like Benjamin Moore and Dunn-Edwards have semigloss and high-gloss products for DIYers or professional painters.



BENJAMIN MOORE

Benjamin Moore's semigloss paints add a shine-enhanced finish without the hassle of true lacquer finishes.

Benjamin Moore's Advance line is an innovative product — a waterborne alkyd, a type of paint that produces a look similar to an automotive finish, says brand manager Joe Dellafave. "What makes it unique is that it offers a hybrid performance of oil-based paint but dries to a waterborne finish with minimal odor, cleans up easily, has low VOCs and is very durable," he says. It also can be applied on-site and contains a self-leveling component that eliminates the look of brushstrokes.

Still another option is to use cabinet boxes covered in a laminated paper or plastic material that's thermoformed to an engineered wood surface. They look glossy and are practical and affordable. MasterBrand Cabinets Inc. in Jasper, Ind., manufactures quality laminated and thermofoil products that are scratch-resistant and can be buffed for repairs on-site. They also clean easily, says Stephanie Price, senior design manager at the company's studio.

Designer Alena Capra from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., likes thermofoil fronts for their cost-effective look and durability when she seeks a shiny look. But before you make a choice, ask yourself the following questions to make a smart investment that works for you:

How important is going green? Many glossy paints are green but not all; lacquers can be either oil- or water-based. Read labels if this is important.

How much will fingerprints show?

Some reflective surfaces show them more than others — white more than black. To avoid smudges, install knobs or pulls, and place boxes in a less-trafficked zone or on cabinets that get less use — maybe those high up, suggests Mele.

How do you want to open cabinet doors?

Some designers and homeowners prefer an absolutely spare look and no pulls, which means cabinets have to have another option built in to open them. Those who favor pulls are advised to choose a style that's sleek and in stainless steel if they want to play up a modern look, Dresner says.

How durable is durable?

A glossy finish will make caring for cabinets exposed to grease, moisture and other contaminants easier, according to paint manufacturer Dunn-Edwards. Generally, the harder the coating, the greater its washability. But lacquer may require extra care to install. Again, read labels just as you do for food products to know what the finish is made of. Scientists at Bayer MaterialsScience, North America, headquartered in Pittsburgh, Pa., make resins for polyurethane coatings for kitchen cabinets. Bayer MaterialsScience sells the resins to paint manufacturers, which use the resins to formulate paint that produces finished high-gloss cabinets.