

Building a Kitchen Island Top



In our kitchen we have very little counter space to prepare meals or to serve guests. So I shopped around looking for a kitchen island. After pricing out several, I started to think differently. Looking around my home, I made note of a buffet table that was not really being used other than a lamp placed on top for

general lighting. My idea; use the buffet as a base then add a top to create a kitchen island. The fact that I had some extra 4 inch by 4 inch tiles from a hallway in my garage just sitting there waiting for a project made the idea make even more sense.

So now I had a plan and here is how I accomplished the kitchen island.

Materials List:

- ¾ inch plywood 8 foot sheet
- 1 x 6 inch poplar trim
- Circular saw
- Tape measure
- Clamps
- Miter saw
- Cordless drill assorted bits and screws
- Wood glue
- Nail gun, or finish nails and hammer
- 4 x 4 inch tiles
- Tile spacers
- Tile cement
- Notched trowel
- Masking tape
- Stain/foam brush

Building the island top

The base of the island top is constructed out of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch plywood. To find the size needed for the island top, I measured the buffet's width and length. I needed to determine the width and length of the island top so that it would cover the base and give me plenty of work space. Using the tiles and the poplar lumber, I was hoping to get three tiles across with two side rails made out of 1 x 6 poplar.



After measuring the top of the buffet, I laid out three tiles on top of the $\frac{3}{4}$ inch plywood with the two 1 x 6 poplar rails to determine if three tiles could be used. Once I had decided three tiles was perfect, I had the width of the plywood top.



I measured the distance of the lay out, this determined the width of the plywood for the top.



I then used the same technique for the length, laying out tile until I had the number of tiles that would cover the buffet length as well as extra working space.



With the length and width established, I cut the plywood to width using a 1 x 3 as a fence to guide the saw, making sure to get a nice straight cut.



I reversed the process to cut the plywood to width.

Adding the trim pieces

Once the plywood top was cut to width and length, it is time to add the top trim pieces.

Using 1 x 6 poplar, I measured the new width of the plywood base and cut the trim to length. The pieces should have a mitered joint so I cut the pieces at a 45 degree angle using the miter saw.

To attach the pieces to the side, I ran a bead of glue along the length.



Then, I secured the trim using finish nails and a hammer or you can use a nail gun.



Next I measured the side of the plywood for the side trim and cut it to length.



As before, I glued and nailed the side pieces into place.



Using the mitered corners really makes the top look sharp.



I made sure to straighten the joint of the corners by using glue and nails as well.



I then repeated the process until all four sides were trimmed out.



Adding the top trim pieces was next. I used a mitered corner for these pieces as well.



I measured and marked the 1 x 6 and cut it to length using the miter saw.



I first put down a wavy bead of wood glue.



Then I nailed the pieces into place.



I completed all the top trim pieces until the entire top had been trimmed. It's best to keep the pieces glued with clamps overnight to make sure the glue sets properly.



Prepping the top



I painted the inside edge of the top trim with a dark gray paint to match the tile. This will give a nice bleed off of color when the tiles are put into place. I made sure to wipe off any paint that got on the top of the trim.



After the paint dried, I sanded all the surfaces smooth with a palm sander.

The top support system

To place the island top on top of the existing buffet, a support system needed to be added underneath the new island top. The addition of the supports would also add needed height to the top (less bending over while food prepping) as well as support the weight of the piece.

By using the measurements of the buffet top, I laid out the pieces that would become the support system.



I transferred those measurements to the bottom side of the island top using a square.



I then attached 2 x 2 supports running across the width along the bottom of the island top.



Attach by drilling pilot holes.



Then, drill a countersink hole.



Secure using 2 inch dry wall screws.



Then to hold the top into position on the buffet and to keep it from sliding during use, I added side rails constructed out of 1 x 3, using the measurements of the buffet top, allowing only an 1/8 of an inch play on both sides.



Final lay out of tile

Even after measuring and laying out the tile before hand, there was still a little more lay out that needed to be done, just to make sure all the tile would fit properly. It was a good thing I did this final check, I was short a few tiles of the proper size, so I needed to cut a few to size. To cut the tile to size, I rented a wet tile saw at an equipment rental center (about \$60.00 for the day).



I did one more dry fit of the tile to make sure that all the tiles fit properly.



I did have to cut a few tiles to width and length because I ran out of 4 x 4 inch tiles. Fortunately, I had left over tiles that were larger so I used the tile cutter to cut them to size. Tile cutters are easy to use and with a few test cuts I was able to cut the tiles I needed within a matter of minutes.



Once all the tiles were cut, I did one last lay out and stepped back to get ready for the final step, setting and grouting the tile.

Things just happen.

After doing the final layout, I realized that once the tile was in position, it was set too far down into the top, in other words, once the grout was added there would be an edge or a step down running along the trim into the tile. I wanted a smooth top so I had to do a little addition to the base.

To build the base up to have the tile set smooth with the outer trim pieces, I need to add two pieces of 1/8 luann plywood. I cut the pieces to size and put into place.



I then secured the pieces to the base using 1 inch dry wall screws. Now the base was ready for tiling.



Adding the tile

Now with the island top constructed, I brought it in from the garage and placed it on top of the buffet. It was easier setting the tile in place when the island was in its final position. The tiling process can now take place.



Prior to tiling, I masked off the top trim to protect the trim from the tile cement.



I applied the mastic to the counter top using a notched trowel making sure to angle the trowel so that it created grooves in the tile cement, this will help the tiles adhere properly.



To set the tile you must place the tile into position and rock it back and forth slightly to set it into the tile cement.



When placing tiles, it's best to use tile spacers. I made sure to use enough spacers to keep the tile spaced evenly.



Once all the tiles were placed, I gave each tile a gentle tap with a rubber mallet to properly set the tiles. I allowed the tile cement to cure over night then removed all of the spacers.



I applied tile grout (premixed) that matched the tile color. Using a rubber float to apply the grout, I worked with the float at a slight angle to cover the tiles completely. I made several passes to work the grout into the tile. Then, I removed as much excess grout as possible to make it easier to clean the top with a sponge.



Using a large sponge, I removed the remaining grout, wiping the entire surface. I rinsed and repeated often until all the grout had been cleaned from the tile.



I did one last final wipe down with the sponge and removed the tape that protected the side trim and the tile looked terrific.

The Final Step, staining the piece

I choose to go with an English Mahogany stain for the final finish. It will match the cabinetry in the kitchen and give a nice contrast between the tile and the wood trim.

I masked off the tile so the stain didn't creep onto the tile and I applied the stain using a 2 inch foam brush. After allowing the stain to penetrate, I removed the excess with a soft cloth.



The final look of the island top turned out terrific, I applied several coats of polyurethane to protect the finish. I also applied several coats of a tile sealer to protect the surface. I plan to do every so often to protect the tile from any spills that may occur.

Now you may not have a buffet that you can add and island top to, but this is just a great way to take one piece of furniture and add a detail that makes it more useful. In my situation, I needed a larger kitchen work surface and the buffet was not being utilized to its fullest, so as Shari would say, "Viola" ...Kitchen Island!

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