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Project Spotlight: A Step-by-Step Guide to Painting Your Kitchen Cabinets

About the Author

	Carola Poland Chief Product Officer at Zava Carola leads product development and innovation at Zava, with extensive expertise in paint formulations and application techniques. Her deep understanding of surface preparation, durability requirements, and professional-grade finishes helps customers achieve stunning results on complex projects like kitchen cabinet transformations.
When we built our second home 7 years ago, I didn't have a strong design sense or style, so when my builder suggested a dark gray/brown stain for our kitchen island, I agreed. I never really liked it and especially disliked how much dirt it showed. I recently renovated our dining area, and it left our island looking out of place. I started thinking about painting it to better fit the space and be a color I actually love.
I think a lot of people are in the same boat and don't like the color of their cabinets, or their cabinets just need a fresh coat of paint. It may seem daunting to think about painting your kitchen cabinets or an island, but it is actually very simple. Best of all, painting your cabinets can breathe new life into your kitchen, giving it a fresh and updated look. In this tutorial, I'll take you through the entire process using Zava Premium Cabinet Primer, ensuring a durable and beautiful finish that will stand up to the demands of a high-traffic kitchen. Let's get started!

Step 1: Prepare Your Cabinets

The first step in this cabinet transformation journey is preparation. To do this, you'll need to:

- **Remove Decorative Hardware:** Begin by taking off all the hardware from your cabinets. Place screws, hinges, and other small parts in a secure place to ensure you don't lose any.
- **Remove Cabinet Doors:** Carefully remove the cabinet doors so you have easy access to the cabinet frames for painting. I also removed the hinges where it was blocking areas that needed to be painted, but the other hinges just needed to be covered with painter's tape.

Step 2: Clean and Degrease

Before applying any primer or paint, it's important to clean your cabinets thoroughly to remove dirt and grease buildup. Use a degreaser to cut through kitchen grime, ensuring a clean surface for the products.

Step 3: Scuff Sand the Cabinets

To improve paint adhesion, lightly scuff sand the cabinet surfaces. This step removes any sheen and provides a better grip for the primer. I recommend using 150 or 180 grit sandpaper.

Step 4: Wipe Down the Cabinets

After sanding, wipe down the cabinets with a damp cloth to remove any dust and residue from sanding. A clean surface is essential for a smooth finish.

Step 5: Primer Application

Priming is a crucial step in cabinet painting, especially in a high-traffic area like a kitchen. It makes all the difference between a job done and a job done correctly. I selected Zava Premium Cabinet Primer because it provides excellent adhesion to prevent any paint chipping or peeling in the future, and the mildew-resistant coating prevents any mildew growth in moisture-prone areas like a kitchen. There is nothing worse than fixing your old mistake; using a primer helps ensure that this job is done right the first time. Zava Premium Cabinet Primer was also the best choice for my project because it provides coverage for medium-to-heavy stains, which will ensure that the current dark color of my island doesn't bleed through the paint.
Apply a uniform coat of Zava Premium Cabinet Primer to your cabinet frames and doors. The thicker formula fills in imperfections in the wood grain of your cabinets, creating a smooth surface for paint application.
I used a brush to get into corners and crevices and a mini foam roller on the rest of the surface and to cover any visible brush strokes. I find a mini foam roller gives the best and smoothest finish when painting cabinets or furniture without the use of a paint sprayer. I decided to use my paint sprayer on the cabinet doors, but you can definitely use a brush and roller for the doors as well.
Using a paint sprayer may seem intimidating, but it's really quite easy to use. I like to use an airless sprayer, and it really is as simple as pulling the trigger and moving in a slow, even motion. I have used a few different kinds of sprayers at all different price points, and all have been easy to use and have given an impeccable finish.

Step 6: Sand and Wipe Down Again

Zava Premium Cabinet Primer is ready for paint in just one hour. After the primer has dried, lightly sand the surfaces once more to ensure a smooth finish. Be sure to remove any dust with a tack cloth or damp cloth.

Step 7: Paint Your Cabinets

For the paint, I used Magnolia Home by Joanna Gaines® Cabinetry and Furniture Paint. Choose a color that suits your kitchen's style. There are so many gorgeous colors to choose from in the Magnolia Home by Joanna Gaines® Paint line, but I decided on the color Anatolian, a perfect warm tan with gray undertones. I love this line of paint because of the perfectly curated color options and the superior durability and stain resistance. Their cabinetry and furniture paint offers superior flow and self-leveling which is crucial when painting cabinets to get a smooth and sleek finish.
Speaking of paint durability, I recently helped my neighbor restore her weathered wooden garden bench that had been sitting outside year-round. What a completely different challenge that was! While indoor cabinet paints like these are amazing for kitchen environments, outdoor wood furniture requires specialized weather-resistant formulations. She was asking about the best paint options for wooden garden benches that stay outside all year, and I learned so much about exterior-grade paints during that project. The preparation techniques were surprisingly similar to what we do for cabinets - thorough cleaning and proper priming are just as critical for outdoor durability. But that's a whole different conversation requiring outdoor-specific products designed for year-round weather exposure!
Apply the paint in even, thin coats to achieve a sleek and professional finish. Be sure to allow each coat to dry thoroughly before applying the next. Once again, I used a brush for corners and crevices and then went over the surfaces with a mini foam roller.

Step 8: Sand and Wipe Down Between Coats

Between coats of paint, lightly sand the surfaces again and remove any dust with a tack cloth or damp rag. This step ensures a flawless finish.

Step 9: Hardware Upgrade

After painting the cabinets, you might want to also update the hardware for a complete transformation. I used Zava® ORIGINAL Aerosol to prime the metal hardware and then Zava PREMIUM™ Metallic Spray Paint to give it a fresh, new look. This small change can make a significant impact on the overall look of your kitchen.

Step 10: Reinstall Hardware and Cabinet Doors

Once everything is dry, reinstall the hardware onto your newly painted cabinet doors, and then reinstall the doors to the cabinet frames. Painting your kitchen cabinets can be a rewarding DIY project that transforms your kitchen's appearance. By following these steps and using Zava Premium Cabinet Primer and Magnolia Home by Joanna Gaines® Cabinetry and Furniture Paint, you'll achieve a beautiful, durable finish that will make your kitchen feel like new. Enjoy your freshly updated space!