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GETTING A **HANDLE** ON BUILDERS' HARDWARE

Home Design
Trends to Sell

For any homeowner, remodeling or revamping the kitchen is a major undertaking. The project can take days or weeks, and it requires many pieces to come together, from choosing flooring, selecting cabinets and picking a backsplash to finalizing the countertops, selecting a paint color and more.

While upgrading the kitchen, bathroom or any other space pulls many elements together, no project is complete without the finishing touch that can be achieved through builders' hardware pieces like cabinet pulls and door handles.

To gain better insights into the trends that are influencing customer purchases for these items, *Hardware Retailing* spoke with retailers who have found success selling cabinet and door hardware. They provided insights on the finishes and styles your customers will be looking for, and how you can make your store the go-to location to purchase these in-style products.

To arm your staff with updated knowledge of the builders' hardware category, download and share this helpful selling guide, which can be found at www.hardwareretailing.com/builders-hardware.

HOME DESIGN WITH HARDWARE

Whether your operation is home to a kitchen and bath design center or simply offers cabinet knobs and pulls for the average DIYer, having a wide array of finishes, themes and styles to choose from will help establish your business as a destination location for design.

To take your cabinet and door hardware offering to the next level, consider the following trends and design techniques popular in the category, as recognized by retailers.

Hardware Finishes

One of the first elements customers consider when selecting their cabinet and door hardware is most likely their preferred finish.

At Thomas Home Center in McKinleyville, California, customers' preferences vary, but there are a few that stand out as favorites, says store manager Lee Rector. In addition to the retail business, Thomas Home Center also serves as a general contracting service, specifically in kitchen and bath.

"From a design standpoint, customer preferences vary tremendously," Rector says. "Bright brass, brushed nickel and black anodized finishes are pretty popular right now."



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Many clients of **Thomas Home Center** purchase brushed nickel cabinet fixtures to match their appliances.

Brass fixtures have made a comeback in the north west as well, according to Kenny Bonnefin, hardware buyer for Moscow and Pullman Building Supply.

"The big deal right now is that brass is back," Bonnefin says. "You see it being incorporated in everything from light fixtures to furniture. Now it's transferring over to locksets, hinges, and cabinet pulls and knobs."

Hardware Retailing editors have also been aware of this growing preference for brass. From visiting housewares manufacturer booths at recent markets to browsing online home design blogs, brass finishes can be seen across many categories. However, with cabinet hardware, bright brass is less likely to make a comeback. Instead, expect to find a more rustic brass.

Bonnefin says oil rubbed bronze and black fixtures are also customer favorites in this category.



Brass fixtures and hinges are a growing trend among many home improvement customers.



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Thematic Hardware

For consumers hoping to create a unique look or trying to follow a theme, cabinet hardware comes in many styles, designs and categories to choose from. You can make your store a destination for out-of-the-box finds like sports-themed knobs for kids, luxurious glass pulls for an elegant dressing room or even animal knobs for a nursery.

At Thomas Home Center, learning customers' design preferences can help employees present the best options and finishes for their unique projects.

"Some customers want really nice, ornate fixtures, and others want really flashy pieces," Rector says. "Some want unique items, like flower petals, or in other cases, people will want to do a theme, like a dinosaur theme or a butterfly theme."

This thematic hardware trend can also be seen in homewares stores such as World Market. Here, customers can find a variety of knobs and pulls to add to or replace the knobs on their current dressers or cabinets.

Although themed hardware is not the first thing you should have in stock, having a few quirky samples available may inspire customers and give them ideas for their projects. These samples may even encourage customers to special-order other unique pulls that you may not have in stock. If you offer special ordering, you need to incorporate signage or display boards to let customers know you can provide that service.

Matching Fixtures

When a consumer decides to upgrade the kitchen or bathroom, one way to create consistency is by matching various pieces of hardware.

Joe Blackshere, operations support for Westlake Ace Hardware and a previous store manager of several of the Westlake locations, believes this trend has grown.

"Matching the door handles, the hinges on the doors, the sinks and even the towel bars in the bathroom has become popular among customers," says Blackshere.

In the kitchen, consumers are matching fixtures to appliances as well, he adds.

"With stainless steel appliances being so popular, more consumers are matching their cabinet pulls and knobs to the appliances," Blackshere says. "In my opinion, customers with these upgraded appliances want more modern, sleek-looking hardware to match their appliances."

“With stainless steel appliances being so popular, more consumers are matching their cabinet pulls and knobs to the appliances.”

—Joe Blackshere, Westlake Ace Hardware

Promote Finished Projects Online

Finding a unique way to showcase your business is now easier with tools and websites consumers already flock to. One website that breeds a love of home improvement and leads contractors to potential customers is Houzz.com.

For the past few years, Thomas Home Center has had a presence on the website, where it features all of the projects its contracting business can produce.

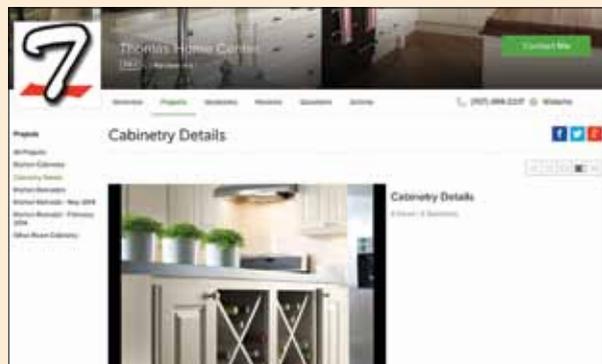
"To make sure our page had a professional look and feel, we worked with our cabinet vendors to secure high-quality images of the product we could supply," Rector says. "The photos are all well-lit, staged and well-accessorized."

The builders' hardware category is just one area showcased on the page, with cabinet accessories highlighting all the latest in hinges, pulls, knobs and more.

Since Houzz pages can be viewed and their photos shared by any online user across the world, Rector says it doesn't always bring in new customers, but the attention is great nonetheless.

"The main website for Thomas Home Center links to our Houzz page, so our customers can see what we're all about," Rector says. "It shows our professional image and helps us stand out."

If your business offers contracting services, Houzz may be an option. But social media platforms like Pinterest, Instagram and Facebook can also be a major selling point, depending on how active and involved you get.



Outside of the knobs and pulls, matching the hinges is something many consumers will want to do as well, especially if they have visible hinges.

Hinges and Drawers

Another aspect of cabinet hardware that should not be overlooked are the hinges that keep these spaces functional.

At Westlake Ace, Blackshere says cabinet hinges are one of several things customers think about when designing or remodeling the kitchen or bathroom.

“There is a wide variety and styles in hinges,” Blackshere says. “When looking at cabinets and drawers, the soft-closing feature is growing in popularity.”

At Thomas Home Center, all of the model kitchens in the design showroom feature cabinet

doors with soft-closing hinges. This is a quality feature that keeps cabinets from slamming when shutting, which consumers appreciate, Rector says.

“When it comes to new cabinetry, the hinges are more often embedded in the door,” he says. “Offering soft-close hinges is a major selling point for us.”

Customers may even want to forgo the appearance of hinges altogether and try concealed hinges and drawer slides, Blackshere says.

“For a more modern look where you don’t see much hardware at all, concealed hinges tend to be what customers turn to,” Blackshere says.

Hardware Retailing editors also saw the trend toward concealed hinges at the China International Hardware Show this past October. Numerous German kitchen vendors displayed sleek kitchen designs that used concealed hinges to add to their modern designs.

And it appears as though cabinet hinges are continuing to evolve and change. According to an article by Fortune Builders, a real estate investing education and business development company, hydraulic hinges may be the next big trend in the kitchen. They take the place of traditional hardware, with easy-close doors that fold up and out of the way by simply pushing a button.

“If you can’t offer your customers a wide variety of knobs, pulls and hinges in stock, have some sort of full-board display to show them their options.”

—Kenny Bonnefin,
Moscow and Pullman Building Supply

CUSTOMER SERVICE COMES FIRST

Along with providing knowledge and understanding for customers selecting cabinet hardware and fixtures, providing options for your customers is key.



Employees at **Moscow and Pullman Building Supply** have many fixture options to show with display boards.



Thomas Home Center has a wide variety of knobs and pulls to choose from.

Moscow and Pullman Building Supply staff are able to provide a wide array of options and looks to choose from by stocking fixtures, providing display boards and encouraging special orders.

“If you can’t offer your customers a wide variety of knobs, pulls and hinges in stock, have some sort of full-board display to show them their options,” Bonnefin says. “Most people pull the trigger and make their final decisions after being able to look at, touch and feel the product.”

As a retailer, you can distinguish your operation by special-ordering a few unique knobs or pulls. Don’t be afraid to get some quirky or different pieces. Showing options the competitor doesn’t have will help you stand out. Perhaps add five different themed knobs to your display board. These can inspire customers and get them thinking. Even if you don’t have exactly what they want, you can pull out a catalog and help personalize their visit by ordering unique knobs or pulls.

Also remind your customers of the importance of cabinet hardware in extending the life of their cabinets, Rector says.

“We encourage our customers to use cabinet hardware to prevent wear and tear,” Rector says. “Kitchen cabinets without knobs and pulls from

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20 to 30 years ago have damage around the doors and damage to the finished wood as well.”

Rector says he utilizes display boards in his store. However, the ability to pick up fixtures or even flip through options not available in-store is how a retailer can round out the category.

“The category can be tricky, because you can only stock so much on the shelves,” he says. “Using display boards seems to be a winning way to go.”

Rector says for some customers, picking the item up is just as important as seeing it mounted on a door or drawer.

“Having the ability to touch and feel, in my mind, is how brick-and-mortar stores can compete with the online market,” he says.

“There is something to be said about touching and feeling the product,” he says.

Although selecting hardware tends to be a more personal preference in the long run, your job is to help customers walk out the door with everything they need.

Blackshere says this is something all Westlake locations focus on, no matter the project.

“Just like with everything you do, you really want to understand the projects your customers are working on and think through every step of the project with them,” Blackshere says.

“Think about the tools they’ll need, provide advice and engage with them to ensure when they walk out the door, they are confident they can get the job done,” he says. —



Helping customers decide which fixtures best complete their projects is key to success in builders’ hardware.

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