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Modustrial Maker Loft

RAUVISIO noir matte black cabinets bring a modern industrial style to this open-plan home.

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Lawyer-turned-DIY builder/YouTube influencer goes big and goes home

Mike Clifford is something of a jack of all trades. His competitive nature initially led him to a career in law, where he ascended the corporate ladder, ultimately becoming a partner at his Chicago-based law firm. Yet law didn't feed his creative spirit, nor his passion for working with his hands. So when he wasn't racking up billing hours at his firm, he found himself drawn to his workshop, where he focused on building new things. He loved the challenge of creating and building, and the opportunity to work on different projects every day kept him fresh.

Sometimes, he wasn't quite sure how to do something, so he turned to videos on YouTube for help. The social media site became a valuable resource for him, and soon he was making his own videos to share the processes behind his own projects. These videos seemed to resonate with people, and his following grew.

Flash forward, several years and several hundred thousand subscribers later, and Clifford has reinvented himself as a hugely popular social media influencer, successful enough to walk away from his law firm and focus on his passion for building full time. Today, his YouTube channel, Modustrial Maker, has 857,000 subscribers and his videos regularly get upwards of a quarter of a million views.



Reinventing the home space

Having reinvented his career, it's no surprise that he decided the next step was to re-imagine his workshop. He decided to go big and go home, purchasing and gutting an abandoned warehouse which he would transform into a home that would offer both living and working space. The whole project became the basis for a series of YouTube videos that has garnered more than four million views to date.

"The renovation was a massive process," he explains. "We ripped everything down until just a brick shell of the building was left. I'd never done anything remotely this big before, but the interior was perfect, and I had a vision of a big, open space where I would have a home upstairs and a spacious workshop downstairs." The open space would include a dining/living/kitchen area, three bedrooms, a master bath and guest bath and a large studio.



Clifford hired an architect to get the permits and a general contractor to create the raw space, but he wanted to do all the finishes and design himself, so it became "a major learning project," from choosing materials and learning how to use a CNC machine to learning the design aspect of planning out a kitchen.

A modern industrial kitchen

His vision for the kitchen included a modern, industrial look with an open timber loft feel to it. He wanted cabinets that would complement the exposed brick walls and timber on the ceiling, and he knew that matte black would be the perfect way to bring his vision to life.

Once again, he went to social media where he was inspired by photos of a REHAU RAUVISIO noir matte black kitchen that he found on Pinterest, and the rest is history.

"Once I saw the matte black, I knew this was what I wanted. Both matte and black tend to show fingerprints, but I got samples first and was pleased to see that normal, everyday use doesn't leave fingerprints...which is great because I don't like to clean cabinets!"

Clifford knew he wanted to partner with REHAU from the first time he saw the photos. "The appearance of the RAUVISIO noir After Dark cabinets got me in the door, but the functionality, as far as being amazingly durable, well, that's what sold me on it. I even did tests like dropping and hitting it to make sure it was going to be durable enough that 10 years from now, it will still be an amazing kitchen and look like it's brand new."

While many people shop around, Clifford believes that when the fit is right, you just know. "I chose REHAU because they were great to work with and they had a product I loved. I had a vision for my project and they just got it."

Cabinet configurations

Clifford is admittedly “not a huge chef” and he wanted his place to have a bit of a bachelor pad feel, so with the open living area, he modified the work triangle to provide easier access to food storage from the main living area. “This way, when you want to grab a beer, you can just grab a beer.”

He wanted plenty of storage, so he decided on a pull-out pantry. He explains, “One thing I really love is having a pull-out pantry. I actually decided to go with two pull-out pantries inside tall cabinets on either side of the refrigerator. They have full pull-out doors that allow access to the pantry storage from both sides. What’s great about that is how nothing gets lost in the back of the cabinet.”

He continues, “The hardware attaches to the back of the door so I have full length cabinets and the whole unit pulls out as one seven-foot-tall pantry storage unit.”

Once the cabinets were chosen, he paired them with glass fiber-reinforced concrete countertops in grey, continuing the industrial feel. “I do a lot of decorative countertops, and I worked with the owner of Fishstone to manufacture the concrete countertops, which are a perfect match.” He selected diagonal hardwood flooring in maple to balance out the dark cabinets so it wouldn’t feel too heavy and dark, and used design software to come up with a plan for the L-shaped kitchen, which includes a 10-foot island that does double duty as space for entertaining or for shooting videos.



Putting it all together

Once he had a plan, he took his cutlist and entered it into the form on the REHAU order portal so the doors could be manufactured. The next step was visiting the REHAU facility to see the doors and drawer fronts come together. He notes, “Visiting the REHAU facility and watching them manufacture the doors was super cool,” and says he was amazed at the fast turnaround, with the doors being manufactured and shipped in only 2 weeks.

He installed the cabinets himself, which he explains “is a lot more difficult than you’d think. It’s a challenge, making sure everything is level when you’re doing eight cabinets, because if one is off, you have to adjust the others again. It took about two days to get them squared and plumb and level.” Throughout the process, he shared his journey on his YouTube channel, as fans watched his dream kitchen come to life.



Sometimes, he even asked them for their input. For instance, when many of his followers suggested moving the location of the cooktop to a more video-friendly location on the island, he researched some cooking shows online and realized it made sense.

The kitchen was a major project, especially since he was working on other parts of the home concurrently. But the end result was well worth it, he maintains.

Beyond the kitchen

When he was ready to finish the bathrooms, Clifford returned to the RAUVISIO line for his vanity and linen closet. Here he chose the engineered wood surface RAUVISIO terra Lakefront Elm. He says his selection was driven by two things: “The amazingly detailed, realistic wood-grain pattern and texture, and the durability. It’s great for a humid bathroom environment.”

By this time, he was a pro with his CNC machine, so he found that the panels were very simple to cut and the perfectly matched edgeband really completed the look. “People are amazed when I tell them it isn’t real wood,” he says.

The big reveal

When Clifford finally did the big reveal on YouTube, his subscribers went wild over it – the original video of his journey has more than 4.1 million views and 106,000 likes, while the big reveal garnered another 466,000 views. He says, “I still can’t believe I made that, how good the doors look, and how square the joints are. And I really love how my kitchen stays relatively smudge free!”

Project: Modustrial Maker Loft, Chicago

Project type: Whole home and studio remodel, completed in 2022

REHAU products used: RAUVISIO noir™ After Dark, RAUVISIO terra™ Lakefront Elm

Photographer: Angelika Piatek Photography

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