

The Remodeling Professor Presents:

All About Kitchen Cabinets

Levels, Lingo, and Looks

LEVELS

The LEVELS of Cabinet QUALITY (and Customization)

- **Builder Grade** - NEVER USE
- **Stock Line** - Consider only for the highest quality construction here
- **Semi-Custom** – The best choice for high-quality projects
- **Custom** - extraordinary craftsmanship, exotic woods, and truly custom pieces

LINGO

Cabinet Box Construction:

- **Particle Board** - the vast majority of all today's cabinets
- **Plywood/All-Wood/Solid Wood** – stronger, more rigid, UPCHARGE
 - The quality of the material is more important than the box material
 - Craftsmanship and detail are more important than the box material
 - Cost difference between mfg'r's is based on FEATURES more than box type

Cabinet Box Types:

- **Framed Cabinets** - use a face frame. Stronger, more rigid. Most common type.
- **Frameless Cabinets** - "European", "modern", "sleeker".
 - Frameless can be very low cost OR very high cost based on box QUALITY
 - Framed is the sturdier, stronger box type
 - Framed screw together through wood frame, frameless through box sides

LOOKS

Cabinet Door Types: (listed in the order of cost: low to high)

- **Standard/Partial Overlay** - considered "traditional". Least costly option.
- **Full-Overlay** - Rival to frameless look. Strong. 2nd least costly option.
- **Inset or Flush Inset** - Most costly due to craftsmanship & tolerances. "Furniture"

Cabinet Door Style:

- **Slab/Flat Panel** - Essentially one large flat door. Can be any material or finish.
- **Recessed Panel (flat panel)** - Common look: Shaker or full flat panel. Wood or veneer panels and wood frame are typical.
- **Raised Panel** - a panel that is not flat, but is in relief, bulges toward you.
 - Slab doors can be veneer, planks/slats, or solid wood (low to high \$). In LARGE cabinets like pantry cabinets - slab doors may warp.
 - The more detail, beading, ogees, routing, and decoration on a door face - the higher the price goes.

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Cabinet Door Materials:

- **Plastic or Metal** - Typically for auxiliary storage, not in high-quality kitchens.
- **Laminate (plastic)** - Identified with cheap cabinets - but not always. High-quality high-pressure laminate can be very durable and offer finishes not possible with wood. Plastic laminate and melamine are the most common type.
- **Thermo-Foil** - colored foil is heat wrapped and vacuum sealed over an MDF door mimicking a flat or raised panel look. Often inexpensive and “cheap” looking. They tend to peel over time and ‘yellow’ as well. Very ‘90’s style.
- **Wood veneer** - Real wood sliced very thin and applied to a particle board/plywood or MDF backer board. Can be stained or painted like solid wood doors.
- **Solid Wood** - The most prevalent option on the market. Many kinds of wood to select from offering a wide variety of grain looks, colors, etc.

Cabinet Finishes:

- **Paint** - Paint is a liquid finish that hardens on the wood’s surface. It adheres only as well as the preparation sequence, wood density, and paint quality allow. Paint finishes on kitchen cabinets are NOT EQUAL to those on furniture, and the paint WILL CRACK at joints over time with expansion and contraction. Most times you will be presented a waiver to sign if you buy painted cabinets that absolve the manufacturer of their warranty obligations regarding the durability of the paint finish. If you can accomplish the same look in stain, it is far more durable and easier to touch-up, and often less costly.
- **Stain** - Stain is a finish that soaks into the wood itself, offering a deeper and more lasting finish on wood cabinets. Natural colors are most prevalent, however, some transparent and colored stains exist (at a premium or on upscale lines) offering unique cabinet looks.
- **Glazes** - Painted on OVER a paint or a stain finished cabinet door a glaze is a highlight finish, often colored to make the appearance of the finish richer looking and to accent the nooks and crannies on highly detailed doors. Glazes are typically very costly, perhaps \$25-\$75 per cabinet of 10% to 25% on top of the cost of the order (this varies by manufacturer).
- **Unfinished/Raw** - Most of you will never need this or want this - but some manufacturers sell unfinished cabinets that DIY’ers can finish themselves.

NOTES:

- The cost of the basic cabinet is determined by the combination of selections made in each category above. Each brand and each shop will have slightly varying prices for the same cabinet type.
- The features in the next section can also drive up the cost of your cabinet order, but they can make your kitchen dramatically more useful. Some of the features come standard on Semi-custom and Custom cabinets from top manufacturers, but many can be individually purchased.

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Cabinet FEATURES

- **Solid Wood drawer boxes with DOVETAIL construction.** A “must”.
- **Full-Extension drawer glides** - A “must”. These allow the drawer to FULLY pull out past the face frame of the cabinet for 100% ease of access.
- **Undermount drawer glides** - when not mounted on the sides of the drawer box, there is more width available for the drawer itself in the “hole” in the face frame. This means slightly more storage. Only some Semi-Custom and Custom manufacturers actually make the drawers wider! Often standard on top brands also.
- **Soft-close Drawers.** A “must”. This drawer glide hardware upgrade lets you push the drawer, then gently closes it in the final 2-3 inches regardless of the “oomph” you provided. No slamming drawers during an argument now to emphasize a point!
- **Soft-close Doors** - Same as the drawers above - they have hinges and piston-like add ons to allow doors to close softly. A smart extra.
- **Roll Out Trays** – Placed inside traditional base cabinets, these literal trays are on glides like those on drawers – and they allow your cabinet contents to be slid out of the cabinet instead of you getting on hands and knees to search in the cabinet for an item. It also makes storing appliances like a Kitchen Aid mixer simpler since it can be fully withdrawn from the cabinet before lifting without obstacles above it! These may come in some upscale lines of cabinets, but can often be added to any cabinet order for between \$25 and \$60 each. ABSOLUTE MUST.
- **Trash and Recycle Base** – A dedicated base cabinet that goes left or right of the sink and contains one or two 13-gallon rubberized trash receptacles that use standard kitchen trash bags. The single cabinet (15” or 18” wide) is typically used for trash, and the double unit (18” or 21” wide) is used for trash and recycling. This gets two eyesore items out of sight in a dedicated (and useful) location. A MUST.
- **Deep Drawer Bases** – Three drawer bases are wonderful for pot and pan storage near ovens and ranges. They can also serve as plate and bowl storage when outfitted with a pegboard and pegs, allowing any age and even wheelchair users to access daily dishes! SUPER SMART STORAGE!
- **Spice storage** – We no longer buy and use only the small jars of spices, so the old style spice racks don’t work. Cabinet manufacturers are always working on new ways to conveniently store spices. NOTE! Spices should NOT be stored immediately adjacent to the oven – heat damages spices!
- **Pantry Cabinets with ROT’s** – Tall pantry cabinets used to be a bad choice, You can’t see the stored dry and can goods 24” deep in a cabinet. But Roll-out trays have revolutionized Pantry cabinets! You can place up to 8 or so ROT’s in the bottom portion of a pantry cabinet, sizing each drawer’s height for the goods it will store (soup cans, pasta boxes, tomato sauce, salad dressings, cookies, snacks, even Tupperware storage of rice or baking supplies, etc.). As mentioned with ROT’s – they can even hold bread machines, mixers, panini presses, and other appliances.

The TOP section of the pantry cabinets usually have a shelf (no tray) for traditional dry goods storage. Or you can place oils, vinegar, syrups, booze or other larger

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items up there. They are truly versatile. And you can customize them to your heart's content since EXTRA ROT's are available from your shop in packs of 4 typically.

HOW TO SHOP FOR CABINETS WITH LESS STRESS

When it's time to "shop" cabinets – don't rush to a store and pick a brand and fall in love. And shopping for the "same thing" over and over at various locations is dreadful work too.

So get your new kitchen laid out professionally BEFORE shopping seriously for new cabinets. Why? When you send your actual design to the cabinet vendors that your contractor uses – you get prices from each vendor IN ADVANCE! When you visit each shop, you already know the price of your layout. And you can make value judgments based on the price **and** your estimate of the quality (as well as available features and colors you may like).

What you SHOULD do in advance of talking to an architect or kitchen designer is walk the aisles of the stores and start choosing the main features and styles you prefer (that were introduced here today). Pick the SPECIES OF WOOD (or laminate) you desire, the FINISH you desire (paint or stain for instance), the TYPE OF DOOR you want (standard overlay, full overlay, or inset), and the STYLE OF DOOR you want (slab, flat panel, or raised panel). That gives your architect or remodeler enough information to send with their preliminary drawing for vendor pricing. It saves you HOURS of talking to salesmen and listening to why their line is great and everything else is crap – which is not true.

FINAL TIP:

Don't let anyone talk you into buying ALL plywood boxes. While they ARE stronger than standard boxes, you only need that strength on the ends of islands or peninsulas, or if you are holding up concrete countertops. Otherwise standard boxes by a top-quality manufacturer are FINE.

And when you order standard boxes, you can get "finished sides" for cabinets whose sides will show (by the sink and stove the wall cabinet sides are visible – on the ends of runs base cabinet sides are visible). It is dramatically less costly to order finished sides to those few cabinets that a kitchen full of plywood cabinets. Some brands will allow you to make select boxes in the order out of plywood, which is also much less costly than the entire order.

Cabinets are screwed to the WALL. That is where their primary strength comes from. They are also screwed to one another for additional strength. Plywood is not a significant advantage, but it is a significant additional expense.