

## Cabinet Affairs

Quality cabinets can last a lifetime, with proper care. Cabinets determine the feel of a room, whether a light, cool toned kitchen with natural maple cabinets or a master bathroom with deep, rich cherry cabinets. The cabinets become the base for choices for every other item in the room: flooring, countertops, paint color, even plumbing and lighting fixtures. From type of wood to color, texture, design and construction, cabinets are a major part of every home decision.

### Species and Color

Often the first decision to be made surrounds the type of wood from which the cabinets will be constructed.

**Paint Grade** is the least expensive type of wood used in cabinet making. As the name implies, these cabinets are mainly painted rather than stained, due to visual imperfections in the wood. These are generally used in secondary bathrooms or low-priced homes.

**Oak** is generally the first choice of hardwood for cabinets. There are over 200 different species, and oak is very strong and takes stain well. Oak can be straight grained, but is often irregular or cross grained. It is a dense and long lasting wood, and looks great in a wide variety of stain colors and cabinet styles. Most oak cabinets are made of red oak, but white oak is occasionally available.

**Maple** is a step up from oak in cost. It is one of the lighter woods, and there are only about 5 species used commercially. Maple is usually straight grained and has a fine grain, and holds stain very well. Since it is so light in color, maple is often used when a very bright room is desired. Maple is an upgrade for most builders.

**Cherry** is next on the cost scale. It is a very dark wood, so be careful when choosing stain colors. This wood has a deep, rich appearance (think cherry furniture.) In fact, cherry is often chosen for built-in cabinets and bookcases in a study or office.

**Hickory** or **Birch** are popular luxury cabinet choices. Hickory is very grainy and has a lot of color variation. It can have a rustic feel, and has a natural finish. Birch has a very fine swirly grain and is very even in tone, but tends to look better with either dark or natural stains.

**Walnut, ash, mahogany, and ebony** are among the priciest wood choices for cabinets. Most mahogany comes from rain forests on the west coast of Africa. African or Indian ebony are most common in the ebony category, which is a generic name for any kind of wood with a very dark heartwood. Walnut can be North or South American or European.

### Types of Cabinets

**Stock cabinets** are the quickest and least expensive to install. A variety of construction methods are used. These kinds of cabinets are popular with do-it-yourself kitchen re-modelers or builders working

with a tight budget. Both solid wood and veneers are used. Cabinets may even be able to be picked up the same day, depending on how close the buyer is to a distribution center.

**Semi-custom cabinets** are ordered and built specifically for a particular room according to the measurements of the room, from a list catalog of sizes and styles. There is a greater selection of finishes and styles as well as more specialized sizes. There are generally a wide range of optional items available for order like built-in wine racks or spice drawers. Semi-custom cabinets are generally used by custom home builders. Lead time is 4-6 weeks.

**Custom cabinets** fit a kitchen precisely and have no fillers between cabinets. Custom door styles, finishes, and interior fittings can be created specifically for a particular home. These are the most expensive type of cabinets and take the longest. Custom cabinets are the choice of buyers who want a unique kitchen, bathroom, or office, and have a lot of room in their budget. Time from order to arrival is generally 6-12 weeks.

Some cabinet manufacturers provide both custom and semi-custom cabinets. Many have websites that buyers can browse, but pricing is not provided as it depends on the particular layout and features desired. Most cabinet companies do not sell to homeowners or builders - they have authorized dealers with showrooms where a buyer can browse and work with a salesperson to select cabinets. Some builders work directly with their home buyers to help them make selections.

### **Basic Cabinet Door Construction**

**Laminate** - the most basic and least expensive of all cabinets are made of particleboard and covered with laminate (instead of higher quality veneer, which is a thin layer of real hardwood.) These are found most often in apartments.

**Recessed Panel** - the cabinet door looks like a picture frame, except instead of glass, the center of the frame is made of wood. The center panel can be made of plywood with a veneer on both sides, or can be made of solid wood. Recessed panel doors are most often square, but can also be available in arches.

**Flat Panel** - the entire cabinet door looks like one solid flat piece of wood. The door can be solid wood or veneer with solid wood edges.

**Raised Panel** - looking at the front of a cabinet door, it appears that a decorative outline has been cut out a few inches from the edges. The center of the door is the same width as the outside of the door. These are available in square, roman arch, or cathedral arch styles. Again, these are available with veneer or solid wood center panels.

### **Construction**

In general, the more detail and the more solid wood in the construction, the more expensive the cabinet. Ask your builder to show you examples of the different types of construction.

Many cabinets are constructed of plywood or particleboard, with a wood veneer overlay.

**Wood veneer** is a thin piece of solid wood typically applied to plywood or particle board with glue. The veneer can be stained and finished just as solid wood, with the same color results. It is uniform in finish, and the grain is very consistent. Using wood veneer on cabinet doors can be very beneficial - shrinking and expanding is limited and thus cracking and splitting is greatly reduced. Particularly in high humidity areas, a veneer over plywood can be the most stable choice.

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