

Walk into any well designed Los Angeles kitchen and the cabinets usually set the tone. They frame your appliances, hold everything you own, and quietly take daily abuse from kids, pets, and rushed mornings. When they are custom built and installed properly, they feel solid in your hand, the doors close with a clean sound, and nothing rattles.

That level of fit and feel is not an accident. It is the product of a very specific process and a trade that sits at the intersection of design, engineering, and hands-on craftsmanship.

This guide walks through how custom cabinets are actually made in a professional Los Angeles cabinet shop, what it costs, how long it takes, and how to judge whether a particular cabinet maker is the right one for your project.

What a cabinet maker really does

People often ask, what is a cabinet maker and what does a cabinet maker do that is different from a regular carpenter?

A carpenter is usually a broader trade. In residential work, a carpenter may frame walls, install doors and trim, and do a bit of everything on a jobsite. A cabinet maker is a specialist. Their focus is on building and installing cabinets, built-ins, and sometimes furniture, to tight tolerances.

A good Los Angeles cabinet maker is part designer, part engineer, and part problem-solver. On any given project, they are:

- interpreting your design ideas and lifestyle into workable cabinet layouts
- engineering boxes, doors, and drawers that will stay square, operate smoothly, and meet code
- selecting appropriate materials, such as hardwoods, plywood, or MDF, based on performance and budget
- managing finishing, hardware, and installation so everything lines up in the real room, not just on paper

Most professional cabinet makers in LA also install their own work. Some larger shops have separate installation crews, but they are still under the direction of the maker or project manager.

The short version: you hire a cabinet maker when you want cabinets that do not just look good on day one, but still function correctly ten or twenty years from now.

Custom vs stock vs semi-custom: what you are actually buying

Before you can follow the step-by-step process, it helps to understand what type of cabinetry you are dealing with.

Stock cabinets are mass-produced boxes in fixed sizes, finishes, and door styles. You can buy them at big-box stores. They are cheaper and faster, but you are limited to the manufacturer's catalog and you adapt your kitchen to those sizes.

Semi-custom cabinets use a stock line as the base, but give you some flexibility in widths, depths, finishes, and modifications. This is a middle ground. You get more choice, often better construction than basic stock cabinets, but you still live within a catalog system.

Custom cabinets are built from scratch for your kitchen. Every box, door, drawer, and panel is sized to your room. You can specify almost anything, from door profiles to internal organizers, to unusual appliance panels. In Los

Angeles, most serious cabinet makers are working in this fully custom space, or at least at the high end of semi-custom.

So what is the difference between custom and semi-custom cabinets in practical terms? With semi-custom, you might be able to shift cabinet widths in one-inch increments and pick from a list of door styles. With full custom, the cabinet maker can size a cabinet to a sixteenth of an inch and create or modify a door profile from scratch if needed.

Are custom cabinets better than stock cabinets? From an experienced perspective, yes, if you care about long term durability, storage optimization, and design flexibility. But they are not automatically the right choice for everyone. They cost more, require more decisions, and take longer to produce.

Materials: plywood, MDF, hardwoods, and what actually matters

When people start researching, they quickly get overwhelmed by material arguments: are plywood cabinets better than MDF, what is the best wood for custom cabinets, and what material is best for kitchen cabinets in a busy home.

Here is how cabinet makers in Los Angeles generally think about it.

For cabinet boxes, high quality plywood is usually the best choice. A typical custom kitchen will use 3/4 inch plywood for cabinet sides, tops, bottoms, and shelves. Thinner material, like 1/2 inch, is sometimes used for backs, though many premium shops now use 5/8 or 3/4 inch for strength. The key is that the core is stable and the veneers are flat, not full of voids.

MDF, or medium density fiberboard, has its place. It is very stable, takes paint well, and machines cleanly. Many cabinet makers prefer MDF for painted doors and panels, especially shaker styles, because solid wood can move and show joints over time. MDF is not ideal for wet environments, but in a kitchen that is properly ventilated and not abused with standing water, it holds up well when sealed and finished correctly.

So are plywood cabinets better than MDF overall? For structural boxes, plywood is the better material in most kitchens. For painted doors and certain decorative elements, MDF or an MDF-hybrid door is often the smarter choice. A thoughtful cabinet maker will combine materials: plywood boxes, hardwood face frames (if used), and MDF or hardwood doors, depending on the finish.

For natural or stained cabinets, the best wood for custom cabinets depends on your style and budget. In LA, the most common hardwoods are:

- maple for a smooth, light, contemporary look
- white oak, sometimes rift or quarter sawn, for a higher-end, modern or transitional feel
- walnut for a rich, mid-century vibe
- alder or birch as more economical stained options

The most expensive kitchen cabinets often use high-end species like rift white oak, walnut, or exotic veneers, combined with intricate door styles or hand-applied finishes. The wood cost is part of it, but the labor to work those species cleanly is just as significant.

Design and planning: the first meeting with a cabinet maker

The process of making custom cabinets starts well before any wood is cut. On a serious project in Los Angeles, the first phase often takes longer than people expect, and it should.

When you meet a cabinet maker for the first time, you are not just getting a bid. You are checking if this is the person or team you trust to interpret your vision and manage thousands of small decisions.

You will usually cover:

- how you cook and live in the space
- what appliances you already have or plan to buy
- whether you prefer framed or frameless cabinets
- your style preferences, such as shaker, flat panel, inset, or slab doors
- finish direction: paint, stain, clear coat, or specialty finishes

Framed vs frameless cabinets is a key decision. Framed cabinets have a face frame around the front of the box, which the doors mount to. They are traditional in American construction and can be slightly more forgiving in older, out-of-plumb houses. Frameless cabinets, also called European style, skip the face frame and mount the doors directly to the box. They give you slightly more internal space and a cleaner, modern look. In Los Angeles, frameless is very common in contemporary and transitional designs, while framed and inset are strong in more traditional homes.

At this stage, the cabinet maker will either measure the existing kitchen or work off architectural plans for a remodel or new build. Accurate measurement is a skill in itself. If you are wondering how to measure for custom cabinets, the short answer is: let your cabinet maker or their team do it. They know where to account for drywall, tile thickness, flooring build-up, and out-of-square walls.

You can help by having clear information about your appliances, any existing plumbing or electrical constraints, and whether walls or windows are moving. In Los Angeles, you should also discuss whether your project will trigger permits, which we will address later.

Engineering the details: hardware, construction, and layout

Once the general layout is set, the cabinet maker starts engineering. This is where experience shows. It is also the phase most homeowners never see.

They are deciding how deep each cabinet should be, how many drawers can fit without conflicting with plumbing, and what type of drawer slides and hinges to use. Quality custom shops in LA almost always use soft-close, full-extension drawer slides from established brands, and soft-close concealed hinges on doors. The cost difference between these and cheap hardware is small compared to the total project, but the performance and lifespan difference is huge.

They are also deciding construction details, such as:

- box joinery, like confirmat screws, dowels, or dado and glue
- toe kick design, whether integrated or separate
- support for heavy countertops and large appliances
- reinforcement where pull-out pantries or trash pull-outs will live

If you are curious how thick custom cabinet wood should be, most high-quality shops use 3/4 inch for load-bearing structural pieces. Using thinner material is one way low-end manufacturers cut cost, but it shows over time in sagging shelves and racked boxes.

This is also where decisions about framed or frameless construction are finalized, since that affects door overlay, reveal, and hardware choices.

How custom cabinets are made in the shop

After approvals on design, materials, and pricing, the real fabrication begins.

First, your project goes into shop drawings. These are detailed plans for each cabinet, with dimensions down to fractions of an inch. On a Los Angeles kitchen, this package can run dozens of pages. The cabinet maker uses these to calculate exact cut lists and hardware needs.

Next comes cutting and machining. Most professional shops use a combination of table saws, panel saws, and increasingly CNC routers to cut parts. Whether the shop is old-school or highly automated, the critical piece is accuracy and repeatability.

Parts are then edged, drilled, and prepped. Edgebanding covers the raw plywood edges on frameless cabinets, either with a solid wood strip or a high-quality banding material. Holes for adjustable shelves, hinges, and drawer slides are drilled at this stage.

Assembly comes next. Boxes are glued, screwed, and clamped square. Quality control at this step is essential. If a cabinet is slightly out of square in the shop, it becomes a big problem when a heavy quartz countertop is sitting on it in a house in the hills.

Doors and drawers are built in parallel. Drawer boxes in custom work are often solid wood with dovetail joints, though some shops use high-end metal drawer systems. Doors can be built from solid wood, MDF, or a combination, depending on style and finish.

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The advertisement is a black and white graphic with geometric shapes. It includes a QR code in the top left, contact information for Bradco Kitchens in the top right, the company logo in the middle right, the main headline in the center, and a photograph of a modern kitchen in the bottom center. The photo shows a bright, open-plan kitchen with white cabinetry, a central island, and large windows.

At this point, you start to see where the labor hours go, and why custom cabinets are so expensive compared to stock boxes. Every piece has been measured, cut, assembled, sanded, and checked by someone who is accountable for the final fit.

Finishing: where the look and durability are locked in

Finish is where cabinets either become beautiful or start their decline. The best finish for kitchen cabinets is one that balances hardness, repairability, and appearance.

Most Los Angeles cabinet makers use a professional-grade lacquer or conversion varnish, sprayed in a controlled environment, for both painted and clear finishes. These finishes are more durable than typical brush-on paints and can be built [Cabinet Maker Los Angeles](#) up in multiple coats with sanding in between.

For painted cabinets, the process usually involves:

- priming, often with a high-build primer
- sanding to knock down raised grain and imperfections
- multiple top coats of tinted lacquer or catalyzed paint

For stained or clear finish cabinets, the process is similar but starts with stain or dye, followed by clear coats. White oak, for example, can be stained in a wide range of tones, from very pale to deep brown, while walnut is often just clear-coated to show its natural character.

Proper finishing takes time and controlled conditions. Cutting corners here is the fastest way to end up with chipping paint, yellowing, or finishes that react badly to kitchen cleaners.

Delivery and installation: from shop perfection to real-world walls

Once cabinets are finished and cured, they are wrapped and delivered to the jobsite. This is the most stressful phase for a cabinet maker, because perfect boxes from the shop now have to fit into imperfect houses.

So, how long does a custom kitchen take to install in Los Angeles? For a moderate-sized kitchen, with everything ready and a clear site, the installation phase typically runs from three days to two weeks. Complex projects with multiple rooms, integrated panels, and tricky conditions can stretch longer, especially if countertops, tile, and appliance trades have to coordinate.

During installation, the crew:

- levels and anchors base cabinets, often using laser levels to establish a reference line
- shims and fastens wall cabinets into studs, making sure reveals and gaps are consistent
- fits fillers and panels to hide irregularities in walls and ceilings
- installs doors, drawers, and hardware, adjusting everything until it operates smoothly

Do cabinet makers install cabinets themselves? In most custom work, yes. Some shops specialize only in fabrication and let general contractors handle install, but for a higher-end kitchen, it is common and wise to have the cabinet maker responsible for both.

Can custom cabinets be modified after installation? To a point. You can add pull-outs, tweak hardware, or replace a door style later, but structural changes are harder and more expensive once counters, tile, and paint are in. One reason to hire a good cabinet maker early is to avoid needing major modifications after the fact.

Timelines: how long custom cabinets actually take

From signed contract to completed installation, how long does it take to make custom cabinets?

In Los Angeles, realistic timelines for a custom kitchen are:

- design and approvals: 2 to 6 weeks, depending on how decisive you are and how complex the project is
- engineering and shop drawings: 1 to 3 weeks
- fabrication and finishing: 4 to 10 weeks, depending on shop workload, size of project, and finish complexity
- installation: roughly 1 to 2 weeks for an average kitchen

All in, you are typically looking at 8 to 20 weeks. On a full home remodel, cabinets are just one part of a larger schedule that includes framing, plumbing, electrical, flooring, and finishes, so the cabinet timeline is often woven into a much longer process.

Costs in Los Angeles: what to expect and why prices vary

The most common questions are: how much does a custom cabinet maker cost, how much do custom kitchen cabinets cost in Los Angeles, and how much should I pay for custom cabinets without getting taken advantage of.

Custom pricing depends on materials, complexity, finish, and the reputation of the shop. In recent years, for a professionally built and installed custom kitchen in LA, you will often see:

- entry level custom or high-end semi-custom: roughly \$800 to \$1,200 per linear foot of cabinetry
- mid-range custom: roughly \$1,200 to \$1,800 per linear foot
- premium or highly detailed custom: \$1,800 per linear foot and up

For a typical LA kitchen with 20 to 30 linear feet of cabinetry, that can put you in the \$20,000 to \$60,000 range just for cabinets and installation, not including countertops, appliances, or major construction work. Some luxury projects easily exceed that, especially with high-end species and complex built-ins.

How much does it cost to remodel kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles if you include removal, potential refacing or replacement, and new install? Modest updates might start in the low five figures. Full replacement with custom cabinets, alongside layout changes, can move quickly into the \$40,000 to \$80,000 range when all associated trades are considered.

For refacing, where existing boxes are kept but doors and drawer fronts are replaced and everything is veneered or painted, professional refacing in LA typically runs lower than full custom replacement but is not cheap. How much does it cost to reface kitchen cabinets? For an average kitchen, it is often in the range of \$7,500 to \$20,000 depending on door style, materials, and finish. Is cabinet refacing worth it? It can be, if your existing boxes are sound, you are happy with the layout, and you want a fresh look without full demolition. If the layout is poor or the boxes are low quality, refacing becomes false economy.

Is it cheaper to buy cabinets or have them made by a custom shop? Purely in dollars, stock cabinets will usually win. The cheapest way to get custom cabinets is often to simplify door styles, minimize complex features, and choose cost-effective materials, rather than chasing the lowest bidder across town. Watch for extremely low prices; they often hide weak materials, rushed finishing, or poor hardware.

Regarding markup on custom cabinets, professional shops in Los Angeles typically build in enough margin to cover overhead, skilled labor, insurance, and warranty. Healthy businesses need that. When you see bids that are dramatically lower than the pack, something important is usually missing.

Some custom cabinet makers offer financing, either directly or through third-party partners, especially those with a showroom presence. If cash flow is a concern, it does not hurt to ask, but factor the financing cost into your total budget.

Are custom cabinets worth the money and do they add value?

From a purely financial standpoint, are custom cabinets a good investment and do custom cabinets add value to a home?

In most LA neighborhoods, a well designed, well built kitchen is one of the top features buyers look at. Cabinets are a central part of that. You are unlikely to get a dollar-for-dollar return on every upgrade, but quality cabinetry usually improves resale value and marketability. Appraisers and agents may not separate cabinet value on a line item, but buyers feel it when they open drawers and doors.

The average lifespan of custom cabinets, when built with good materials and hardware and cared for reasonably, can easily be 20 to 30 years or more. Stock cabinets with thin boxes, weak hardware, and poor finish often show fatigue much earlier. So are custom cabinets worth the money? If you plan to stay in the home for several years and value both daily function and future resale, the answer is usually yes.

From a lifestyle angle, living with cabinets that are sized for your cookware, your height, and your specific appliances is hard to quantify, but very obvious once you have it.

Style, color, and trends: what Los Angeles buyers want

What is the most popular kitchen cabinet style in Los Angeles right now? Shaker remains strong, especially in transitional designs, though many clients are now leaning toward cleaner, thinner stiles and rails or even flat slab doors for a more European feel. In high-end contemporary homes, completely flat, handle-free fronts and integrated pulls are common.

Are white cabinets going out of style? White will always have a place, especially in smaller or darker kitchens where brightness matters. That said, there is a clear shift toward warmer tones, soft beiges, greiges, light woods like white oak, and two-tone combinations.

What is the best cabinet color for resale value? Neutrals tend to be safest: white, off-white, light gray, or natural woods. Strong colors can be stunning, but they may narrow the buyer pool. If resale is a priority, many LA homeowners choose a neutral main color and express personality in hardware, lighting, and décor that can be changed later.

Permits and Los Angeles specifics

Do you need a permit for kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles? Purely replacing cabinets in the same layout, with no changes to plumbing, electrical, or walls, often falls into cosmetic work that does not trigger a full permit in many jurisdictions. However, the reality in LA is that most kitchen remodels involve at least some electrical or plumbing changes, which absolutely do require permits and inspections.

If you are doing more than a straightforward swap, talk with your general contractor or designer about permitting early. Good cabinet makers are used to working within permitted projects and understand the timing of inspections, especially where rough plumbing and electrical affect cabinet placement.

Beyond the kitchen: vanities, built-ins, countertops, and furniture

What does a cabinet maker do outside kitchens? A lot. Most custom shops in Los Angeles also build bathroom vanities, media consoles, built-in wardrobes, mudroom storage, and home office cabinetry. Many are comfortable making standalone furniture pieces as well, such as dining tables, benches, or bookshelves, particularly when those need to match the kitchen cabinetry.

Do cabinet makers also do countertops? Some do, especially for laminate or wood tops. For stone, quartz, or porcelain, it is more common for a dedicated countertop fabricator to handle templating and installation. A competent cabinet maker coordinates closely with that fabricator, ensuring cabinets are ready and properly supported.

Do cabinet makers do bathroom vanities? Nearly all custom shops do. Vanities have their own challenges, mainly around tight plumbing and tight spaces, but the process is similar to a smaller kitchen.

How to find a good cabinet maker in Los Angeles

If you are wondering how to find a good cabinet maker and how you know if a cabinet maker is good before you sign a contract, look at three things: their past work, how they communicate, and how they handle details.

Referrals from contractors, designers, or neighbors are still the best starting point. Online reviews help, but cabinets are a long-term product, and quick reviews after install may not capture durability.

When you meet, look for clarity around their process, realistic timelines, and transparent pricing. A professional cabinet maker is not afraid of detailed questions; they welcome them, because good questions lead to fewer surprises.

Here are focused questions you can ask a cabinet maker to judge their fit with your project:

1. What materials do you use for boxes, backs, and shelves, and at what thicknesses?
2. What hardware brands do you use for hinges and drawer slides, and are they soft-close and full-extension?
3. How is finishing handled, what products are used, and can you show samples of painted and stained work after a few years of use?
4. Who installs the cabinets, and how do you handle issues that appear during or after installation?
5. Can I see photos or, ideally, visit at least one recent project with similar style and budget to mine?

Pay attention not just to the answers, but to how confidently and specifically they respond. A vague answer on finish or hardware is a red flag.

Stock, refacing, or custom: choosing what fits your project

With all this in mind, is it cheaper to refinish or replace kitchen cabinets? Refinishing or repainting existing cabinets is almost always cheaper than full replacement, as long as the existing boxes are structurally sound and the layout works for you. It is a smart choice when you have decent mid-range cabinets that are simply dated in color.

Refacing slots in between. It costs more than repainting but less than full custom replacement. It is often worth it for homeowners who like their layout but hate their doors and visible surfaces. It becomes less compelling when existing cabinets are builder-grade quality or when you want to change appliance positions and layout anyway.

Custom replacement is the most expensive path, but it is also the one that gives you total control over layout, ergonomics, and style. In neighborhoods where buyers expect a certain level of finish, and for homeowners planning to stay for several years, it often provides the best balance of daily enjoyment and long-term value.

Custom cabinetry is one of those investments you touch every day. Understanding how custom cabinets are made, how long it takes, and what drives cost helps you decide whether they make sense for your home, and if so, how to work effectively with a cabinet maker.

In Los Angeles, where space is expensive and design expectations are high, a skilled cabinet maker can turn an ordinary kitchen or bath into a space that truly works for your life. If you take the time to choose the right partner,

ask the hard questions, and respect the craft, the result will reward you every time you open a drawer or close a door.

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