

Cabinets carry more visual weight in a kitchen than almost anything else. In Los Angeles, where open floor plans and resale value are constant topics of conversation, the decision to reface, refinish, or fully replace kitchen cabinets is not just about taste. It is about budget, timing, and what actually makes sense for the structure you already have.

I have seen homeowners spend more than they needed to chasing the wrong solution, and I have also seen people pour money into refacing cabinets that should have been ripped out years earlier. The right answer depends on what you have, what you want, and how long you plan to stay in the home.

This guide focuses on whether cabinet refacing is worth it for Los Angeles kitchens, but to answer that properly, we need to talk about costs, materials, how cabinet makers work, and where refacing makes sense versus full custom cabinets.

What cabinet refacing really is (and what it is not)

Refacing means you keep the existing cabinet boxes in place and replace the “skin”:

- New doors and drawer fronts
- New veneer or laminate on the visible face frames and sides
- New hardware, and often new soft-close hinges and drawer slides

The layout stays the same. You are not changing the depth or height of boxes, and you are not moving walls, plumbing, or appliances. In most LA kitchens, refacing is a 3 to 7 day process once materials are ready, so it is far quicker and less disruptive than a full remodel.

Refacing is not:

- Repairing rotted boxes or water-damaged particleboard from an old leak under the sink
- Fixing bad layout, short runs of cabinets, or serious storage issues
- Adding full-height pantries, moving the fridge, or converting a peninsula to an island

If your main complaint is “my kitchen looks dated but functions fine,” refacing might be a fit. If the kitchen drives you crazy every time you cook because of layout, refacing will not solve that.

Costs of cabinet refacing in Los Angeles

In Los Angeles, refacing is not the bargain some online national averages suggest, mostly because labor and overhead here are higher. For a typical 10-by-10 or 12-by-12 kitchen, realistic ranges look like this:

For a modest condo kitchen with standard 8 foot ceilings and around 20 to 25 cabinet openings (each door or drawer front counts as an opening), expect roughly:

- Basic laminate refacing: around 6,000 to 9,000 dollars
- Midrange wood veneer refacing: roughly 9,000 to 14,000 dollars
- High-end materials (solid wood doors, premium hardware): often 14,000 to 20,000 dollars

For larger single-family homes in areas like Sherman Oaks, Pasadena, or Culver City, with 30 to 40 openings and possibly an island, numbers climb:

- Midrange wood veneer with new doors: typically 12,000 to 20,000 dollars

- High-end styles and finishes: 20,000 to 30,000 dollars or more, especially with custom features

A few factors that push costs up in LA specifically:

First, access and parking. Crews hauling tools and materials up stairs in a mid-city fourplex spend more time before they even start work. Second, finish quality. Many Los Angeles homeowners expect furniture-level finishes, not quick-and-dirty work, and that slows production. Third, licensing and insurance. Legitimate cabinet makers and refacing companies carry workers' comp, liability insurance, and are licensed contractors. That overhead is baked into the price.

Compared with full custom cabinets in Los Angeles, refacing usually runs at roughly 40 to 70 percent of what a full tear-out and replacement would cost for the same footprint. That spread gets narrower when someone chooses very basic stock cabinets instead of custom work.

How much do custom kitchen cabinets cost in Los Angeles?

To understand whether refacing is worth it, you need a ballpark for replacement.

For a straightforward LA kitchen using midrange custom or semi-custom cabinets:

- Semi-custom cabinets: often 15,000 to 30,000 dollars for cabinetry alone
- Fully custom cabinets with a local cabinet maker: commonly 25,000 to 50,000 dollars, and higher for large or highly detailed kitchens

Add installation and related work and the full cabinet portion of a remodel (boxes, trim, panels, installation, minor modifications) can easily land between 20,000 and 60,000 dollars.

Several clients over the years have asked, "How much should I pay for custom cabinets?" A reasonable answer in Los Angeles is that good-quality custom work usually sits around 1,000 to 1,800 dollars per linear foot of cabinetry, depending on material, finish, and details. If someone quotes drastically below that, either they are using very cheap materials or cutting corners on labor.

So is it cheaper to buy cabinets or have them made? In plain terms:

- Stock cabinets from big-box stores or online often cost less upfront.
- Custom cabinets from a local cabinet maker cost more, but you get exact sizes, better fit, and often better materials and hardware.

That extra cost is also why homeowners ask why custom cabinets are so expensive. You are paying for labor in a local shop, precise fitting to imperfect LA walls, thicker materials, and usually a more durable finish.

When refacing is worth it for an LA kitchen

Refacing shines in certain scenarios. When I walk a kitchen with a homeowner, I mentally run through a short checklist. Refacing usually makes financial and practical sense if:

1. The layout works. If your appliance placement, work triangle, and storage flow suit how you cook, and you are not craving extra pantries or major changes, refacing respects that existing structure.
2. The cabinet boxes are solid. Plywood or high-quality particleboard boxes that are square, not sagging, and free of water damage are perfect candidates. Many 1980s and 1990s LA tract homes actually have decent boxes; they just have dated oak doors or heavy arches.

3. You are mindful of budget and disruption. Maybe you have small kids, work from home, or just cannot be without a kitchen for eight weeks. Refacing keeps the bones in place, shortens downtime, and usually avoids major demolition.
4. You are preparing for near-term resale. In neighborhoods where buyers expect a clean, updated kitchen but you do not want a full remodel, refacing can be a solid middle path. A modern door style, soft-close hardware, and a fresh color can photograph almost as well as a full custom build when the underlying layout already works.
5. You are combining it with other cosmetic upgrades. In many LA kitchens, pairing refacing with new countertops, a backsplash, and updated lighting transforms the space enough that full replacement is hard to justify.

Under these conditions, cabinet refacing is often worth it, delivering a new look at a meaningful discount compared to a full tear-out.

When refacing is a waste of money

I have turned down refacing work in kitchens where I knew the homeowner would regret it. Refacing is a poor investment when:

The boxes are cheap or failing. If your cabinets are sagging, have swollen particleboard from leaks, or are pulling away from the wall, dressing them up with veneer and new doors is like putting new tires on a frame-bent car. It looks better for a while, but the underlying problem does not change.

The layout is bad. I recall a townhome kitchen in Hollywood with a 30 inch gap where a pantry should have been and a refrigerator door that blocked the only pathway when open. Refacing would not fix that. We ended up redesigning the entire run of cabinets. The price difference between refacing and a disciplined redesign was not as large as the homeowner expected, and the daily quality of life improved massively.

You want to remove soffits or raise cabinets to the ceiling. Many older LA kitchens have dropped soffits that waste space. Once you start demoing soffits or moving ceiling lines, you are outside typical refacing scope. Mismatched new and old boxes rarely look right next to each other.

You want a fundamentally different style or function. For example, converting a U-shaped, closed-in kitchen into a peninsula or island that opens to the living room. Refacing will change the surface but not how the kitchen lives.

When any of these are true, spending 10,000 to 20,000 dollars on refacing can be the wrong kind of compromise. Better to wait, save, and plan for a more thoughtful remodel or a full set of custom or semi-custom cabinets.

Comparing refacing, refinishing, and full replacement

People often mix up refacing and refinishing. They are very different.

Refinishing keeps your existing doors and boxes but strips, sands, and repaints or re-stains them. Labor is in the surface prep and spraying, not in new materials. In Los Angeles, refinishing alone might run 4,000 to 9,000 dollars for a typical kitchen, depending on the complexity and whether the doors are sprayed in a shop or in place.

Refacing replaces the doors and veneers but keeps the box structure. Costs sit above refinishing but below full replacement. Visually, refacing gives the most dramatic change short of a new kitchen, because you can swap from partial overlay to full overlay, change panel profiles, and adjust reveals.

Full replacement means new boxes, new layout if desired, and new everything. This is the only option that lets you correct poor original design, add storage, and change the flow of the space.

In rough order of cost, in LA conditions:

Refinish < Reface < Replace with stock or semi-custom < Replace with full custom cabinets.

Many homeowners ask, "Is it cheaper to refinish or replace kitchen cabinets?" Yes, refinishing is usually cheaper, but only if you are happy with your current door style and cabinet condition. If you hate those arched oak doors that scream 1994, no amount of paint will make you love them.

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A photograph of a modern kitchen interior with light wood cabinets, a white countertop, and a stainless steel sink. Above the counter, there are open shelves displaying various glassware and decorative items. A QR code is located in the bottom right corner of the advertisement.

What does a cabinet maker actually do?

A cabinet maker is a specialist focused on designing, building, and often installing cabinetry. That includes kitchen and bathroom cabinets, built-ins, media centers, and sometimes custom furniture pieces.

So what is the difference between a carpenter and a cabinet maker? Carpenters often work on framing, doors, windows, baseboard, and site work. Cabinet makers work primarily in a shop, with precise saws, routers, and finishing equipment, then bring completed boxes and doors to the home.

In practical terms, when you are thinking about custom cabinets or high-quality refacing:

- A cabinet maker designs and builds boxes, doors, and drawers to exact dimensions.
- They understand proportion, door reveals, hinge geometry, and how to align cabinet runs in real, imperfect rooms.
- Many cabinet makers also handle installation themselves. Some partner with dedicated installers while focusing on fabrication.

If you wonder, “Do cabinet makers install cabinets?” the answer in Los Angeles is usually yes, or they work directly with an installer they know very well. Installing cabinets is not simply hanging boxes on walls. It involves scribing to uneven floors, shimmiing for level across entire walls, and aligning doors and drawers so they run smoothly for decades.

Materials: plywood, MDF, and the best woods for custom cabinets

When you consider heavy refacing or full replacement, materials matter.

Are plywood cabinets better than MDF? For cabinet boxes that bear weight and get [Custom Kitchen Cabinet Makers In Los Angeles](#) [bradcokitchen.com](#) anchored to walls, high-quality plywood is usually preferred. It holds screws better, resists sagging, and tolerates minor moisture better than standard MDF. That is why many higher-end LA cabinet makers use plywood boxes with solid wood or MDF fronts depending on the finish.

For doors and drawer fronts, MDF can be excellent for painted finishes, because it machines smoothly and does not show wood grain telegraphing through paint. For stained or natural finishes, solid wood is still the standard.

So what is the best wood for custom cabinets? It depends on style:

- Shaker or modern painted cabinets: MDF center panels with hardwood frames are common and stable.
- Warm, natural kitchens: Maple, white oak, rift-cut white oak, or walnut are popular in Los Angeles.

When clients ask, “What material is best for kitchen cabinets?” I usually steer them toward plywood boxes, sturdy hardwood face frames (if framed), and a door construction that matches their finish preference.

As for thickness, many quality custom cabinet makers in Los Angeles use 3/4 inch plywood for boxes and shelves. Some budget lines drop to 5/8 or 1/2 inch. If you are wondering how thick custom cabinet wood should be, 3/4 inch for boxes and shelves is a good benchmark for longevity.

Custom, semi-custom, or stock: which is worth the money?

A lot of confusion comes from the terms stock, semi-custom, and custom cabinets.

Stock cabinets come in fixed sizes, often in 3 inch increments, and limited finishes. They are mass-produced and relatively affordable.

Semi-custom cabinets start from a stock line but allow modifications: different depths, some custom widths, more finish options, and upgraded interiors.

Custom cabinets are built to order. Sizes, interior layouts, materials, and finishes are all determined for your specific job.

What is the difference between custom and semi-custom cabinets in practice? Semi-custom lets you adapt within a system. Custom lets you design the system itself. In tight LA kitchens with odd jogs in the walls, true custom can make better use of space.

So are custom cabinets better than stock cabinets? In terms of fit, longevity, and design freedom, usually yes. Are custom cabinets worth the money? That depends on the home and your horizon. For a Beverly Hills or Manhattan Beach property, skimping on cabinets can hurt resale expectations. In a modest rental condo, stock or semi-custom often makes more sense.

The most expensive kitchen cabinets tend to be fully custom builds with exotic veneers, integrated lighting, and bespoke interior systems. That is where you see per-foot costs climbing well past typical LA ranges.

If you are looking for the cheapest way to get something that feels custom, one approach is to use semi-custom cabinet lines and invest in a good designer and installer, or to pair basic boxes with high-quality custom doors and a strong paint job.

How custom cabinets are made and how long they take

The process of making custom cabinets in a professional LA shop generally follows a sequence.

First comes detailed measurement. Walls are rarely straight, and even new construction in Los Angeles can have surprises. Good cabinet makers will measure ceiling heights in multiple places, corners, window locations, and all mechanicals.

Second, design and shop drawings. This is where decisions like framed or frameless cabinets, overlay style, interior storage, and appliance panels get settled. Frameless cabinets, which are common in European-style and many modern LA kitchens, maximize interior space and create clean lines. Framed cabinets, more common in traditional or transitional styles, add structural sturdiness and a classic look.

Third, fabrication. Sheet goods are broken down on a panel saw or CNC machine, edges are banded, and boxes are assembled. Doors and drawer fronts are cut, profiled, and sanded. Hardware locations are drilled accurately.

Fourth, finishing. Doors, panels, and sometimes boxes are stained, sealed, or painted, usually in a spray booth. The best finishes for kitchen cabinets in busy LA homes are catalyzed lacquers or conversion varnishes that resist scratching, moisture, and UV fading better than typical house paint.

Finally, installation. In most cases, a custom cabinet package for a typical LA kitchen takes 6 to 10 weeks from approved drawings to installation start, depending on the shop's workload. The actual install, assuming no major surprises, might be 3 to 7 days for cabinets, with additional time for countertops and backsplash.

If you wonder how long a custom kitchen takes to install in the context of a full remodel, most contractors will tell you that from demo to usable kitchen, 6 to 10 weeks is common, factoring in inspections, electrical, plumbing, flooring, cabinets, counters, and tile.

The average lifespan of custom cabinets, if built with quality materials and hardware, is easily 25 to 40 years. I still see 1960s and 1970s custom cabinets in Los Angeles that function fine after a good refinish.

Permits, resale value, and style choices in Los Angeles

Do you need a permit for kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles? For simple refacing or swapping cabinets without changing layout, electrical, plumbing, or walls, the city typically does not require a permit. Once you start moving appliances, altering outlets, or taking out walls, you are in permitted remodel territory. Always confirm with Building and Safety or a licensed contractor, but cosmetic refacing alone usually flies under the permit radar.

From a resale perspective, buyers in LA care about two main things: condition and style. The most popular kitchen cabinet style in the last decade has been Shaker, especially a clean, square-edge Shaker door. Flat-panel modern styles are strong in contemporary homes, especially in neighborhoods like Venice, Silver Lake, and West Hollywood.

People ask often, "Are white cabinets going out of style?" Pure white has softened; we are seeing more warm whites, grays, greige, and wood tones. But for resale, a light, neutral cabinet color still photographs best and appeals to the most buyers. If you are wondering what the best cabinet color for resale value is, a safe answer in LA remains either warm white, light greige, or a two-tone scheme with light uppers and slightly darker lowers.

Good cabinets, whether refaced or replaced, add value to a home when the quality matches the price point of the neighborhood. In a midrange LA market, smart refacing with modern doors, quality hardware, and a solid finish can absolutely be a good investment, particularly if the existing layout is functional.

Working with a cabinet maker: how to choose well

If you decide that refacing is not enough and you want new cabinets, or if you want a refacing job handled by a true specialist rather than a franchise, the question becomes: how do I find a good cabinet maker in Los Angeles?

A few practical things to look for:

1. Ask to see real, local jobs. Photos help, but standing in a finished kitchen tells you more about fit, alignment, and finish quality than any brochure. References from recent clients matter.
2. Check what materials and hardware they use. Ask directly: "Do you use plywood or particleboard boxes? What hinges and slides do you prefer?" Soft-close, full-extension hardware from reputable brands is standard for quality work now.
3. Look at their shop, if possible. A cabinet maker with an organized shop, clear finishing area, and proper dust control usually cares about precision.
4. Understand who installs. Some shops fabricate but subcontract install. That can be fine, but you want a clear chain of responsibility. If a drawer rubs or a door is out of square, you want one party accountable.
5. Ask detailed questions about process and timing. Anyone who promises full custom cabinets in two weeks is cutting serious corners.

If you are not sure what questions to ask a cabinet maker, a short list helps:

- What materials do you use for boxes and doors, and in what thicknesses?
- What finish system do you use, and how does it hold up in a kitchen environment?
- Who will be onsite during installation, and how long do you expect it to take?
- How do you handle modifications if something unexpected comes up on site?
- What is your warranty on cabinets, hardware, and finish?

You will learn quickly how transparent and experienced the cabinet maker is by how they answer.

Most cabinet makers in Los Angeles also handle bathroom vanities, and many can build furniture-like pieces such as hutches, window seats, or media cabinets. Some also coordinate countertops, although the actual fabrication and installation of stone or quartz is usually done by a dedicated countertop shop. A good cabinet maker often has a preferred fabricator they coordinate with, which streamlines the process.

As for financing, some larger custom cabinet shops or design-build firms offer financing or connect you with third-party lenders. It is less common with small independent shops, but it is worth asking if you are spreading costs.

So is cabinet refacing worth it in Los Angeles?

Refacing is worth it when your existing cabinet boxes are solid, your layout works, and your main complaint is aesthetic. In those situations, investing 8,000 to 20,000 dollars for new faces, doors, and hardware in an LA kitchen can deliver a strong visual impact, support resale, and minimize disruption.

Refacing is not worth it when you have failing boxes, an inefficient layout, or bigger goals for how you use the space. In those cases, money is often better spent on a planned cabinet replacement, whether with semi-custom

lines or fully custom work from a local cabinet maker.

If you are standing in your kitchen trying to decide, start by looking past the doors and asking three questions:

Are my cabinets structurally sound? Does this layout truly work for how I live and cook? Am I trying to bridge a few years until a bigger remodel, or is this my long-term kitchen?

Your honest answers will point you clearly toward refacing, refinishing, or full replacement, and help you get the most from every dollar you invest in your Los Angeles kitchen.