

If you own a home in Los Angeles, your kitchen probably pulls a lot of weight. It is where you cook, entertain, and very often where buyers decide how they feel about your home. Cabinets set the tone, and they also soak up a big chunk of any remodel budget. That is why the question keeps coming up: is it cheaper to refinish, reface, or replace kitchen cabinets in L.A.?

I have walked through this decision with plenty of homeowners, from small bungalows in Highland Park to large homes in the Valley. The right answer is rarely one-size-fits-all. It depends on the condition of your existing cabinets, your timeline, and how long you intend to stay in the home.

Let us unpack the real differences, realistic Los Angeles pricing, and where a good cabinet maker fits into the picture.

## **What you are actually choosing between**

Before you can compare costs, you need clear definitions. I routinely find that people mix up refinishing and refacing, and that leads to bad estimates and frustration.

Refinishing means keeping your existing cabinet boxes and doors, then stripping, sanding, and repainting or restaining them. The layout stays the same, the door style stays the same, and you are mostly paying for labor and finishing materials. If your doors are in good shape but the finish is tired, this is the lightest touch.

Refacing means you keep the cabinet boxes, but replace the doors and drawer fronts completely. The face frames (on framed cabinets) get a new veneer or laminate to match. Hinges often get upgraded to soft close. You end up with a different style, color, or wood species without tearing out the boxes.

Replacing means exactly what it sounds like: removing the old cabinets and installing new ones. Within replacement, you have three tiers:

Stock cabinets: Pre-made sizes and limited styles, often flat-packed or modular. Think big box stores. Cheapest upfront, least flexible.

Semi-custom cabinets: Still based on standard sizes, but you can tweak dimensions, finishes, and features. This is a middle ground many Los Angeles homeowners pick.

Custom cabinets: Built to your space from scratch by a cabinet maker. Full flexibility in size, layout, materials, and details. Highest cost, highest control.

Once you see it that way, the cost question becomes more nuanced than a simple yes-or-no.

## **Realistic Los Angeles cost ranges**

Costs vary by neighborhood, access, and the condition of what you already have, but there are typical ranges I see repeatedly for a mid-size kitchen of about 10 by 12 feet with roughly 25 to 30 linear feet of cabinets.

Refinishing cabinets in Los Angeles usually runs from about \$3,000 to \$7,500 for a professional job. On the lower end you have smaller kitchens with straightforward paint. On the higher end you have more detailed work, repairs, and possibly changing from stain to paint or vice versa. If the finish quality is high, this can be a strong value.

Refacing cabinets in Los Angeles often ranges from about \$7,500 to \$18,000. The material you choose is a major driver here. Thermofoil or laminate will usually cost less than solid wood doors in custom colors. Hardware upgrades, like soft close hinges and drawer slides, bump the price too.

Replacing cabinets has the widest range, because material choices explode. For stock cabinets from a home center, a typical LA kitchen might fall between \$8,000 and \$18,000 installed, depending on the line and configuration. Semi-custom cabinets might land between \$18,000 and \$35,000. Fully custom kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles can easily run from \$35,000 to \$80,000 or more, especially with specialty finishes, internal organizers, or difficult site conditions.

Those numbers do not include countertops, appliances, electrical work, floors, or moving walls, which is where total kitchen remodel costs really climb.

So, strictly on cabinets alone, refinishing is almost always the cheapest route, refacing tends to sit in the middle, and replacement is the most expensive. The bigger question is whether those savings actually fit your goals.

## **When refinishing is the smartest money**

Refinishing makes the most sense when your cabinet bones are good. That means solid, square boxes firmly attached to the wall, doors that close properly, decent quality hinges, and a layout that generally works.

If you like your door style, or at least do not hate it, refinishing can be a very cost-effective way to refresh the room. This is particularly true for solid wood cabinets, which tend to take sanding and finishing beautifully. One homeowner in Sherman Oaks I worked with had 1990s oak cabinets with classic raised panel doors. They were tired and yellowed, but the boxes were high grade plywood. We filled the grain, sprayed a warm white lacquer, swapped in new knobs and pulls, and suddenly it looked like a different kitchen for well under \$10,000.

On the other hand, refinishing has clear limitations. If your doors are warped, cracked, or cheap thermofoil that is peeling, no amount of paint will fix that. If you hate the door profile itself, refinishing just locks you into a nicer version of something you already dislike. If the layout is dysfunctional, refinishing does nothing for that. You still cannot fit a trash pull-out where there is no cabinet to house it.

People often ask if it is cheaper to refinish or replace kitchen cabinets. Purely on a check-writing basis, refinishing wins easily in Los Angeles. But if you are staying in the house more than 5 to 10 years and your layout drives you crazy, those savings may not feel like a win.

## **Where refacing earns its keep**

Cabinet refacing fills a valuable middle ground. It is often worth it when the cabinet boxes are respectable, but the doors scream a specific era and you are ready to move on.

For example, I have refaced plenty of 1980s and 1990s tract home kitchens in Santa Clarita and the South Bay. The boxes are usually decent enough, but the doors have arched raised panels in orange oak. With refacing, we strip off the exterior veneer of the face frames, apply a new matching veneer, install flat shaker doors in paint-grade maple or MDF, and upgrade the hardware.

Typical Los Angeles refacing costs, as noted above, run in that \$7,500 to \$18,000 band for an average kitchen. The upper half of that range is more common if you are doing solid wood doors with quality finishes.

So is cabinet refacing worth it? If the layout is mostly fine and your boxes are structurally sound, yes, often it is. You can get something close to a new kitchen look at about half to two-thirds the price of semi-custom replacement, without the dust and disruption of a full tear-out.

It is not worth it if your cabinets are sagging, water damaged at the sink base, or fundamentally cheap. In lower quality builder-grade kitchens, the boxes are sometimes particleboard with minimal fastening. In that scenario,

refacing can feel like wrapping gift paper around a collapsing cardboard box. Short term, it looks better, but you are investing thousands into a weak base.

## **When replacement is the right move**

Replacement becomes the clear favorite in three main situations: failing structure, a bad layout, or a major style and functionality upgrade.

If you have swollen particleboard boxes from repeated leaks, or cabinets pulling from the wall because of improper fastening, do not pour money into refinishing or refacing. Replacing gives you new boxes, the opportunity for better materials, and a chance to correct how things are mounted.

Layout issues are also a powerful driver. If you are stuck with a cramped U-shaped kitchen in West LA and want to open to the dining room, keep in mind that refinishing and refacing freeze the existing footprint. Replacement lets you introduce things like drawer bases instead of door and shelf cabinets, wider pot drawers, tall pantry units, or integrated trash pull-outs. Those have more impact on daily life than most people realize.

At this point the key question becomes: are custom cabinets worth the money, or should you stick to stock or semi-custom lines?

## **Custom, semi-custom, and stock: what actually differs**

What is the difference between custom and semi-custom cabinets in practical terms?

Stock cabinets come in fixed widths, heights, and depths. You design the kitchen around the catalog. Fillers, spacers, and compromises come with the territory.

Semi-custom cabinets start from a standard system of sizes, but you can adjust dimensions within limits, choose among more finishes, specify interior options, and sometimes alter door styles. A lot of good quality brands live here.

Custom cabinets are built from the ground up for your kitchen. If you want a 17 and 3/8 inch wide pantry to clear a window casing, you can have it. If your LA home has plaster walls that are out of square, a custom cabinet maker can scribe and build to fit those quirks.

Are custom cabinets better than stock cabinets? For durability, fit, and long term serviceability, usually yes, assuming you hire a competent shop. The wood thickness, joinery, hardware, and finish are often a step above. For raw cost control, stock wins.

Is it cheaper to buy cabinets or have them made by a cabinet maker? If you only look at initial cost, buying stock or even semi-custom is typically cheaper. Having them made to order by a true custom cabinet maker almost always carries a premium, because you are paying for skilled labor, local production, and bespoke design.

The question I ask clients is different: how long will you live with this kitchen, how much value does it add to your daily life, and what does your overall budget look like? In a starter condo you plan to sell in three years, custom cabinets are harder to justify. In a long term home in Pasadena or Manhattan Beach where the kitchen is a focal point, the investment is easier to defend.

## **What a cabinet maker actually does**

People often ask, what is a cabinet maker, and is that just a fancy word for carpenter?

A cabinet maker specializes in building cabinetry, casework, and often built-in furniture. They work with precise measurements, panel goods like plywood or MDF, hardwoods for face frames and doors, and a variety of hardware and finishes. The work happens mostly in a shop, with controlled tools and jigs, then the pieces are brought to the jobsite for installation.

What does a cabinet maker do day to day? They read plans, design and draft layouts, cut and assemble boxes, build doors and drawers, apply veneers and finishes, and install the finished product. Many custom shops also fabricate bathroom vanities, entertainment units, mudroom built-ins, and even certain types of furniture.

What is the difference between a carpenter and a cabinet maker? Carpenters typically work on framing, decks, rough construction, and sometimes basic trim and [Kitchen Remodeling Services In Los Angeles](#) finish work. Their work is critical, but the tolerances are broader. A cabinet maker works at much tighter tolerances, with more focus on aesthetics, hardware, and finishes. There is overlap, and some professionals wear both hats, but the mindsets and tool sets are slightly different.

Do cabinet makers install cabinets? Many do, especially smaller custom shops that handle the whole process from design to installation. Others focus purely on fabrication and work with separate installers. It is worth clarifying this up front.

## **How custom cabinets are made and how long they take**

How are custom cabinets made in practice? First, you or your designer measure the kitchen, usually with a detailed site visit. For custom work, accurate numbers matter. Next comes design: layout, door style, overlay type, framed or frameless construction, materials, and finishes. The cabinet maker then creates shop drawings that translate the design into buildable details.

Once drawings are approved, the shop cuts parts, assembles boxes, builds doors and drawers, and preps for finishing. Finishing can involve stains, paints, clear coats, or specialty techniques. After curing, hardware is installed and the cabinets are delivered and installed on site. The process of making custom cabinets is methodical because mistakes are expensive.

How long does it take to make custom cabinets? In Los Angeles, a reasonable range is 6 to 12 weeks from final approval of drawings to installation, depending on the shop's backlog, the size of your kitchen, and the complexity of the finish. Painted finishes typically add some time because of the priming, sanding, and curing process.

How long does a custom kitchen take to install? A typical installation for cabinets alone might take 3 to 7 working days for an average kitchen. Add time for countertops, backsplash, and appliance hook-ups. Complex projects with integrated panels, tall walls of cabinetry, or tricky site conditions can push that further.

This is where expectations matter. If you need the fastest upgrade, refinishing or refacing can often be completed quicker, sometimes within 1 to 2 weeks on site, depending on scheduling and finishing methods.

## **Materials: plywood, MDF, wood species, and finishes**

The question of what material is best for kitchen cabinets comes up often, especially when people compare pricing. The short version is that quality depends more on construction and appropriate use of materials than on a single magic ingredient.

Are plywood cabinets better than MDF? For cabinet boxes, a good quality plywood is generally more moisture resistant and holds screws better than raw MDF. It is often my default recommendation for boxes, especially near

sinks. For painted doors and drawer fronts, MDF can be an excellent choice because it has a smooth, stable surface that takes paint beautifully and resists minor movement that can cause cracks at joints.

What is the best wood for custom cabinets depends partly on whether you are staining or painting. For stain, species like maple, cherry, oak, and walnut are common. Oak brings visible grain, walnut brings warmth and richness, maple is smooth and light. For paint, many shops use paint-grade maple or a combination of hardwood frames with MDF center panels to balance cost, stability, and finish quality.

How thick should custom cabinet wood be? For boxes, 3/4 inch plywood is standard for quality custom work. Shelves should also be 3/4 inch, sometimes with edge banding. Back panels might be 1/2 inch or 1/4 inch with proper support. Doors often use 3/4 inch stock as well.

What is the best finish for kitchen cabinets depends on the desired look and durability. Professionally sprayed catalyzed lacquers and conversion varnishes are common for their hardness and chemical resistance. High-end waterborne finishes have improved greatly and are often used where low VOCs are a priority. For stain, a clear topcoat such as polyurethane or conversion varnish is typical.

When clients ask about framed or frameless cabinets, I explain it this way. Framed cabinets have a face frame attached to the front of the box, and the doors mount to that frame. They are traditional in American construction and can be very strong. Frameless cabinets, sometimes called European style, have doors mounted directly to the box, which allows better access to the interior and a more contemporary look. Neither is inherently better. It depends on the style you prefer and how the interior layout will work.

## **Style, color, and resale value in Los Angeles**

Aesthetic choices have real financial impact. What is the most popular kitchen cabinet style in L.A. Right now? Shaker doors still dominate, especially simple, clean profiles without heavy molding. Slab fronts show up often in modern and midcentury homes, particularly on the Westside and in the hills.

Are white cabinets going out of style? Crisp white kitchens are still very common across L.A. Because they make smaller spaces feel open and work with many architectural styles. That said, there has been a strong movement toward warmer whites, soft beiges, and muted greiges, as well as contrast islands in darker tones or wood.

What is the best cabinet color for resale value? In most Los Angeles neighborhoods, neutral, light tones with simple door styles perform well. They appeal to a wide range of buyers and let people imagine their own decor layered on top. Wild color choices may delight you, but if resale is top of mind, keep the big surfaces relatively calm and use color in appliances, seating, or decor instead.

Do custom cabinets add value to a home? When done thoughtfully, yes. Buyers notice solid construction, soft close hardware, functional organizers, and integrated panels. Custom cabinets often make the difference between a kitchen that feels ordinary and one that feels special, especially in higher price brackets. They can also last longer, stretching the time before the next major remodel.

What is the average lifespan of custom cabinets? With decent care and no major water disasters, a good custom cabinet installation can easily go 25 to 40 years. Stock particleboard cabinets in a rental unit might only feel solid for 10 to 15 years before swelling, chipping, or hardware failures appear.

## **Permits, regulations, and practicalities in Los Angeles**

Do you need a permit for kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles? If you are simply refacing or refinishing and not altering walls, plumbing, or electrical, you generally do not need a building permit. You are essentially performing cosmetic

work. Once you start moving walls, reconfiguring appliances, or adding circuits, permits come into play. Even with replacement cabinets, if layouts and systems stay the same, many projects fall into the “no permit required” category. Always verify with the city or a knowledgeable contractor, because codes and enforcement can vary over time.

Do cabinet makers also do countertops? Some custom shops fabricate and install wood tops or even certain solid surfaces, but most coordinate with separate countertop fabricators for stone, quartz, and porcelain. It is common for the cabinet maker to prepare the substrate and support, then the stone fabricator templates and installs once cabinets are in.

Can a cabinet maker make furniture or bathroom vanities? Many can and do. Built-in bookcases, floating vanities, media walls, and banquettes often come from the same shops that build kitchens. If you like their work, it can be efficient to have one team handle multiple elements of your home.

## **What it costs and how cabinet makers charge**

How much does a custom cabinet maker cost in Los Angeles, and how much should you pay for custom cabinets? Custom shops typically price either per linear foot or per job based on material, complexity, and finish. For a full kitchen, it is common to see cabinetry fall in that \$35,000 to \$80,000 zone for mid to higher end custom work, as mentioned earlier. More elaborate projects can go beyond that.

What is the markup on custom cabinets is a question homeowners rarely ask out loud but often wonder. Markup covers overhead, shop rent, equipment, labor, finishing materials, insurance, and profit. On the retail side, cabinet markup might range from 20 percent to 50 percent over raw costs, and sometimes higher for small specialty jobs. Slightly higher markup with a well run shop can be worth it if they stand behind their work and manage the project smoothly.

Do custom cabinet makers offer financing? Some larger companies and showrooms partner with financing providers or offer in-house payment plans. Smaller shops are less likely to, and instead work with deposits and progress payments. If financing is important, ask directly during your initial conversations.

What is the cheapest way to get custom cabinets is almost a contradiction in itself. You can control cost by simplifying the door style, using more paint grade materials instead of exotic veneers, limiting glass and specialty inserts, and keeping the layout efficient. But truly custom work will always cost more than buying mass produced stock units.

## **How to find and evaluate a good cabinet maker in L.A.**

With so many contractors and shops in Los Angeles, knowing how to find a good cabinet maker matters almost as much as deciding what to do with your existing cabinets.

You can start by visiting showrooms, asking local designers or contractors for referrals, and reading reviews with a critical eye. Look for detailed reviews that mention communication, problem solving, and schedule adherence, not just star ratings.

What should you look for in a cabinet maker? A few core indicators: clear drawings and proposals, a portfolio of real projects, familiarity with your type of home, and transparent explanations about materials and finishes. When you speak with them, pay attention to how they answer questions about construction details like plywood versus MDF, hardware brands, and finish systems.

If you are not sure how to structure the conversation, use a short question list to guide you:

- Can you walk me through your typical process, from measurement to installation?
- What materials do you use for boxes, doors, and finishes, and why?
- Who actually installs the cabinets, and how do you handle site issues or surprises?
- Can you show me recent projects similar to mine, and provide references?
- How do you handle changes, warranty issues, and scheduling conflicts?

How do you know if a cabinet maker is good? One sign is how they talk about limitations. Someone experienced will tell you what will not work, not just what you want to hear. They will raise red flags about water exposure, ventilation, tight clearances, and finish expectations. Another clue is their shop. If you can visit, look for organized tools, labeled parts, and finished work waiting for delivery. Chaos in the shop can translate to chaos in your project.

## **Planning details, measurements, and future flexibility**

How do you measure for custom cabinets? At a basic level, you measure wall lengths, ceiling height, window and door locations, and existing appliance sizes. The cabinet maker will usually do a detailed site measure before finalizing plans. Still, it helps if you understand your own room. Measure twice, question anything that seems tight around doors, windows, and walkways.

Do cabinet makers do bathroom vanities as well as kitchens? Most do, and the design process is similar, just on a smaller scale. Pay attention to sink types, plumbing locations, and clearances in tight bathrooms.

Can custom cabinets be modified after installation? Within reason, yes, but it can be tricky and sometimes expensive. Changing door styles after the fact usually means new doors. Adjusting box sizes is rarely practical once everything is installed. Adding interior pull-outs or organizational inserts is more feasible. If you anticipate future changes, discuss that ahead of time so your cabinet maker can leave access and modularity where it makes sense.

## **Putting it all together: what is actually cheaper for you?**

If you are purely comparing numbers, the answer is straightforward: in Los Angeles, refinishing is usually cheaper than refacing, refacing is usually cheaper than replacing, and stock or semi-custom replacement is cheaper than custom. But cost alone is a narrow lens.

If the layout works, boxes are solid, and you are mainly tired of the finish, refinishing is often the best value. You can spend in the low to mid thousands instead of tens of thousands and still enjoy a dramatically fresher kitchen.

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If you want a new door style and upgraded hardware, but your boxes are good and you do not plan to move walls, refacing hits a sweet spot. It is less invasive than replacement and can be kinder to your budget than a full custom build, while delivering a big visual change.

If your cabinets are failing, your layout wastes space, or you are creating a kitchen that will define your home for decades, replacement is the honest choice. That opens the conversation about stock, semi-custom, and custom, and what level of investment matches your home and priorities.

For Los Angeles homeowners, where property values are high and kitchens matter more than almost any other room, money spent wisely on cabinets tends to come back in both resale value and quality of life. The key is matching the solution to the actual problems in front of you, with eyes open on costs, materials, and the capabilities of the cabinet maker you choose.

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