



Kitchen & Bath Cabinetry – Things to Consider –

Whether you are planning to build a new home or remodel your current one, it is very likely that cabinetry will be part of your project. Cabinetry is the only “furniture” you’ll buy that will be permanently affixed to your home. The quality, style, and longevity of your cabinetry will affect your family’s lifestyle and the value of your home for years to come. The following is an overview of cabinet construction, component materials, finishes, and distribution which you should consider as you plan your project.

Frameless or Face frame cabinets:

- Frameless (European Style) cabinets were developed in Europe following World War II as a less expensive alternative for the reconstruction effort. Due to a shortage of hardwood, this style of cabinetry was engineered to use very little solid wood. Frameless cabinet construction consists of doors attached directly to a particle board or MDF (Medium Density Fiberboard) box. The cabinet box material is usually lined with melamine or vinyl. Doors are full-overlay, meaning that they completely overlap the cabinet box.
- Face-frame cabinets use a hardwood frame at the front of the cabinet. All hardware is secured into the hardwood face-frame instead of a particle board box. Frame profiles can be adjusted to easily accept crown molding, any variation of angles or cabinet depths, as well as accommodate flush toe kick or furniture toe kick applications. Face-frame cabinets are stronger, more durable, and easier to install than frameless cabinets.

Standard Stock vs. Custom Cabinets:

- Mass-produced stock cabinets are manufactured in standard 3” increment widths and in predetermined depths and heights. Fillers and panels are used to fill exposed gaps which are inevitable with the 3” increment system. Wood, door and finish selections are also limited to a predetermined list of options.
- Custom cabinets are made to order and in the specific sizes needed to optimize layout, design, and function. Depending on the manufacturer, custom cabinets are generally of better quality, offer a wide selection wood species, door styles, and furniture-grade custom finishes. Custom cabinets typically are more expensive and carry longer lead-times than “stock” cabinets.

Component materials & cabinet construction:

- Hardware (hinges & drawer guides) vary in quality and performance. The amount of weight a drawer glide can support when fully extended is more important than if it is a side or under mount style. Entry level cabinets typically use guides rated for 45 pounds, while nicer ones offer 75 pound ratings. Also, how the guides are mounted to the cabinet box greatly impacts the longevity and function of the mechanism. Full length hardwood supports are superior to plastic attachments. A three way adjustable door hinge is important for fine adjustments to the door during installation as well as in future use and maintenance.

– Things to Consider (cont.) –

- Component materials impact the strength, performance, and installation of the finished product. The following should be considered:
 - Cabinet doors made of solid wood are superior to MDF, veneer over core, or back panel plywood doors.
 - Full depth, fully adjustable, and ¾” thick shelves offer the best support for heavy loads and the most flexibility in configuring storage options. Entry level cabinets use 1/2” or 9/16” thick shelves; often only half depth, fixed shelves (instead of adjustable) in base units.
 - Corner blocks at the top of base cabinets provide strength and help keep cabinet boxes square. Either plastic triangles or wood corner blocks are usually used. Wood blocks are more rigid and afford a solid platform for attaching counter tops.
 - Real wood veneer should be used on all exposed side panels and open cabinets. Some cabinet manufacturers use “wood grain look” plastic laminate or PVC on exposed side panels to cut material cost.
 - Full depth & height drawer boxes: Often cabinet companies use standard size box sizes. For example a 19” deep drawer box can be used in both a 21” vanity as well as 24” kitchen base cabinets. Drawer boxes should be built to optimize the drawer box size.

The Finish:

- A hand-rubbed stain is superior to a sprayed stain. While sprayed stains can give a plastic-like appearance and hide the grain, the hand-rubbed process allows the finish to be “worked in” to the grain bringing out the beauty of the wood. When considering the topcoat, catalyzed products are superior to non-catalyzed because they offer a harder, more durable finish.
- Glazes, distressing, and custom painted finishes have become very popular for higher-end homes. These finishes will often, however, add 20% or more to the price of the cabinet package.

The Warranty:

The length of the manufacturer’s warranty is usually a direct indicator of the product’s quality. Be sure to be aware of the warranty of the product you intend to buy. Quality custom cabinets will usually carry a minimum of a 5 year warranty. In addition, references of past customers of the product can be obtained to find out how responsive and helpful the manufacturer is when handling warranty issues.

Cabinet distribution:

The majority of cabinets are sold through kitchen design showrooms, home improvement centers, and lumber yards. These dealers work as middlemen who purchase, mark up, and sell the cabinets to the end user. Custom cabinets are sold primarily through local cabinet makers. Buying direct from the cabinet manufacturer, when possible, can save you time and money, and provide you with a superior product, fit, and finish. A local manufacturer will also be much more capable of provide fast and easy service after the sale.

In conclusion, cabinets are one of the most important and permanent decisions you will make when planning your new home or remodeling project. Be sure to choose quality cabinetry for your home; both for your own enjoyment and convenience, and to protect your long-term investment.

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