



Cabinetry 101



For most homeowners, [kitchen remodeling](#) is the largest investment they will make aside from the home itself. With so many cabinet design sellers vying for your business, how do you make sure you get what you want at a price that will let you cook in that new kitchen? To make such a momentous decision, you must first gain a working knowledge of [cabinet construction](#) and options. As with most products, you get what you pay for. This means the best-constructed cabinets with increased design flexibility cost more. Remember however, skimping on the basics so you can afford hyped options or finishes is not the way to get value from an investment that should last 20 or more years. Here is some background to help you identify areas of concern and make those difficult

choices.

The Box

The box component of bathroom or [kitchen cabinet designs](#) is more complicated than its simple name suggests. As a general rule, the more real wood used in the construction of a cabinet box, the better. Quality plywood is a good material that holds up the best over time. The face frame should be constructed of premium-quality, solid wood for extra rigidity. How the wood is joined together is just as important. Does the box include stronger engineered, mechanical joinery using rabbets and dados, or are abutting pieces held together with staples and glue only? Plywood is good for larger surface areas such as sides, tops, bottoms, backs and toe boards. Exposed end panels should be covered with stained wood veneer or melamine that closely matches the exterior finish. On the interior, boxes ideally should be easy to clean and light colored for maximum light reflection and ease of viewing. This is easily achieved through the application of a light-colored (sometimes birch or maple wood grain or white) melamine over the plywood. If your design calls for open or glass-doored cabinets, make sure the line you choose offers a stained wood veneer interior to match the outer finish. Better quality cabinetry offers adjustable shelving as a standard feature. It's worthwhile to ask about this, since some lines offer only fixed shelves. Adjustability gives you more flexible storage options, especially where shelves and roll-out trays are concerned. Extra features, such as a fully enclosed space under the bottom drawer in base cabinets, help to protect cabinet interiors

and their contents from dust, bugs and rodents. Seems pretty obvious, but believe it or not, some cabinet boxes are made without a back or enclosed bottom or even a melamine interior.

The Drawer System

The drawer is yet another box to be considered when buying cabinetry. Because it is highly visible, it should be made of real wood for the best appearance. Ideally, the drawer box is held together with dovetail joints on all four corners. Interlocking dovetail joints are attractive and stronger than pinned or doweled joints. And since drawers often bear heavy loads, the box should be built to include a captive plywood bottom (surfaced with melamine for easy cleaning). The drawer "system" includes not only the drawer, but also the glide(s) on which it rolls. Drawers should roll easily and stop automatically so they don't fall out, while allowing easy access to contents. Full-extension glides allow the drawer to be pulled out completely for access to the back of the drawer. Better drawer glides include a spring-loaded, self-closing feature. And where the glides are mounted, under or on the sides of the drawer box, is really a combination of personal preference and current trend. When the glides are mounted underneath, they allow for a wide drawer box and they don't catch dirt the way side mount glides do.

Cabinet Line

When considering a collection of cabinetry, look beyond door styles and finishes to specific cabinet types (SKUs), modifications and flexibility. By choosing a cabinet line, you are dictating the options your designer may use when piecing your kitchen together. Better custom or semi-custom lines offer more upgrades and modifications for a more uniform, appealing design and appearance in the finished product. For example, doors in the StarMark Custom and StarMark Collection product line are automatically scaled to fit cabinets that have been modified. For cabinet lines without this feature, pre-sized doors are matched as closely as possible to modified cabinets. Less flexibility in this case can result in a reveal of as much as three inches surrounding the undersized door, causing the modified cabinet to stick out like a sore thumb.

Doors, Finish and More

Having a wide selection of door styles, finishes and wood species from which to choose is great, of course. However, the quality of these ingredients is of the utmost importance to guarantee a lasting investment. Doors of all solid wood are preferable to veneered panels, which may not accept stain the same as solid wood. Be careful not to judge a finish by its sheen or feel. Ask about the finishing process. The best finishing process carefully prepares high-grade wood through hand sanding and staining and is sealed with an oven-cured, catalyzed conversion varnish. The resulting satin finish is impervious to liquids and stains from everyday use, along with being easy to clean.

Should there be a problem with your bathroom or [kitchen cabinets](#), you'll want to make sure the manufacturer will stand behind its products with a warranty. Another reliable mark of quality is KCMA Certification. This means cabinets meet at least the minimum

standards for quality set by the Kitchen Cabinetry Manufacturers Association. But you'll still want to find out the warranty offered on each component.

Kitchen Cabinet Designs

Finally, investing in a kitchen involves a balance of decisions, all made within budgetary limits. You weigh your priorities, then decide on something that will meet your wants, fit your budget and stand the test of time. Here's where a [kitchen designer](#) can help. These are the people who transform your concept into a beautiful reality. A good reputation for on-time, quality service is vital. Ask for references and see their designs and installations. You should trust only experts in [kitchen cabinet designs](#) and installation with such a considerable investment.