

Finding a genuinely good cabinet maker in Los Angeles is harder than it looks from a quick Google search. The photos all look great, everyone has 5 stars, and quotes can range from “are they serious?” cheap to “are they out of their mind?” expensive. Somewhere between those extremes is the professional who will build cabinets that work, last, and actually fit your life.

This guide comes from the way projects really play out in LA: tiny bungalows with zero storage, canyon homes with crooked walls, Westside condos with strict HOAs, and older houses in the Valley that have seen three generations of DIY. The goal is to help you spot genuine skill, understand the pricing and process, and recognize the red flags before you sign anything.

What a cabinet maker actually does

People often start with a basic question: what is a cabinet maker, and what does a cabinet maker do that is different from a generic contractor?

A cabinet maker is a specialist who designs, builds, and usually installs custom cabinets and built-ins. That can include:

- Kitchens and pantries
- Bathroom vanities and linen storage
- Built-in media units and bookshelves
- Closets, mudrooms, and laundry rooms

A good cabinet maker combines design, engineering, and fine carpentry. They are thinking about how a drawer slide will feel in 10 years, how your plates fit into the uppers, how the dishwasher door clears the island, and how all of it ties into your electrical, plumbing, and flooring.

Many people mix up the terms carpenter and cabinet maker. There is overlap, but in practice, a carpenter usually frames walls, installs doors and trim, maybe builds simple built-ins. A cabinet maker is focused on detailed casework, joinery, finishes, and factory-level precision. In Los Angeles, plenty of remodelers say they “do cabinets” when in reality they order stock or semi-custom boxes and install them. That is not the same as a true custom cabinet shop that cuts and assembles everything to fit your space.

Custom, semi-custom, or stock: what are you actually buying?

Before you even look for names, it helps to be clear about the type of cabinets you want.

Stock cabinets are pre-made boxes in fixed sizes, usually assembled overseas or in large domestic factories. You choose from a catalog, work within their dimensions, and fill in gaps with fillers or panels. They are the cheapest option, and for a simple flip or a rental, they often make sense. This is typically cheaper than having cabinets made, at least up front.

Semi-custom cabinets are built off a standard line, but with more size options, door styles, and finishes. You might be able to tweak widths, depths, or interior options. The difference between custom and semi-custom cabinets is that with semi-custom you are still largely constrained by a manufacturer’s catalog, while true custom is built from scratch for your exact space. Semi-custom can be a smart compromise if your layout is fairly standard.

Custom cabinets are designed and fabricated specifically for your home. The cabinet maker measures your walls, checks for out-of-square corners and uneven floors, and designs every box to fit. You can choose virtually any

door style, wood species, finish, and interior hardware. You are paying for problem-solving and precision as much as for materials.

Are custom cabinets better than stock cabinets? From a durability, fit, and long-term satisfaction standpoint, usually yes. Are custom cabinets worth the money in every situation? Not necessarily. If you are remodeling a modest rental kitchen that will get heavy abuse, a durable semi-custom or quality stock line might be a better investment than a fully custom walnut showpiece.

What custom cabinets really cost in Los Angeles

Everyone wants to know: how much does a custom cabinet maker cost, and how much do custom kitchen cabinets cost in Los Angeles specifically?

Pricing always depends on materials, finishes, accessories, and layout complexity, but for LA projects as of recent years, rough ranges look like this for full custom, including installation:

- Modest galley or small L-shaped kitchen: roughly \$18,000 to \$30,000
- Average sized kitchen in a typical LA house: usually \$28,000 to \$55,000
- Large, high-end kitchen with an island, tall cabinets, and internal organizers: often \$55,000 to \$90,000 or more

Those numbers are for the cabinets only, not countertops, appliances, flooring, or electrical. If a quote for “custom” cabinets on a full kitchen is \$9,000 installed, one of three things is usually true: you are not really getting custom, the materials or hardware are bargain-basement, or the installer is skipping essential steps.

How much should you pay for custom cabinets in honest terms? Enough that the cabinet maker can afford quality plywood or similar grade material, reliable hardware, proper shop time for finishing, and at least a few days of careful installation. For a typical LA kitchen, if you are under roughly \$800 per linear foot for full custom, ask pointed questions about materials and hardware. On the other side, if you see pricing in the \$1,500 to \$2,000 per linear foot range, you are either in ultra high-end territory or paying for a very expensive brand name.

For partial projects, such as a set of custom bathroom vanities, built-in entertainment unit, or office built-ins, cabinet makers in Los Angeles often quote those as individual pieces. Simple vanities might start around \$3,000 to \$6,000, while a large living room wall unit can easily reach \$10,000 to \$25,000 depending on design.

Why custom cabinets cost what they do

Once you understand the moving parts, the pricing starts to make sense, even if it still stings.

Labor in Los Angeles is expensive. A real cabinet shop will have skilled workers who know how to square a carcass, tune hinges, and spray a clean finish. That takes years to learn. That labor also covers design meetings, shop drawings, ordering materials, handling change orders, delivery, and installation.

Materials are not just “wood.” There are differences between cabinet-grade plywood, prefinished plywood, MDF, particleboard, and solid hardwood. Hardware such as hinges and drawer slides can swing the price significantly. A soft close undermount slide from a reputable brand like Blum costs far more than a generic side-mount track, but the difference in feel and lifespan is huge.

Finishing is another major cost driver. Sprayed lacquer or conversion varnish requires equipment, a spray booth, and skill. It costs more than rolling on a basic paint in your garage, but it also holds up much better to kitchen abuse.

People also ask: what is the markup on custom cabinets? A healthy, legitimate cabinet business typically needs enough margin to cover rent, insurance, equipment, taxes, and warranty work. If someone is “barely marking up” their materials, they are either desperate for work or cutting corners elsewhere. Excessive markups, on the other hand, usually show up in big brand showrooms, not in small local shops.

So why are custom cabinets so expensive? You are paying for a mix of customized design, skilled labor, materials that will not fall apart in two years, and a finish that can handle humidity, heat, and cleaning. Spread over a 20 to 30 year lifespan, decent custom cabinets often look a lot more reasonable.

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

Materials are where a lot of contractors quietly save money, and where homeowners can accidentally overpay for things they do not need.

For cabinet boxes, the big question is often: are plywood cabinets better than MDF? For most kitchen carcasses, a high quality plywood is the gold standard. It is stiffer, handles moisture better, and holds screws more reliably. This is especially important in sink bases and lower cabinets, which see more water and more weight.

MDF still has a place. It is very stable, has a smooth surface, and takes paint beautifully, which is why many painted doors and panels are MDF or an MDF core with a hardwood frame. You would not want MDF shelves for very heavy loads or in wet areas, but in many applications it performs well.

For doors and face frames on higher end work, the best wood for custom cabinets depends on the look and budget. Some common choices in LA:

Oak for visible grain, especially in modern white oak kitchens.

Maple for a smooth, light, consistent look that stains evenly. Walnut for rich, dark, expressive grain in higher budget projects. Alder or poplar for painted doors, depending on shop preference.

When people ask what material is best for kitchen cabinets, a good rule is plywood boxes with hardwood or MDF doors, decent drawer boxes in solid wood or high-grade plywood, and name-brand hardware. The exact combination depends on budget and style.

Thickness matters too. How thick should custom cabinet wood be? Typical standards:

Cabinet boxes: 5/8 inch or 3/4 inch material, with 3/4 inch preferred for durability.

Shelves: 3/4 inch, sometimes thicker for long spans.

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Doors: usually around 3/4 inch. Drawer bottoms: at least 1/4 inch, preferably 3/8 inch or 1/2 inch for wide drawers.

If a quote is vague about materials and thickness, insist on specifics. You want "3/4 inch cabinet-grade plywood with 3/4 inch shelves" in writing, not just "high quality wood."

Framed vs frameless: which is better?

Los Angeles has a mix of styles. On the Westside and in newer builds, frameless cabinets are common. In older traditional homes, framed construction still shows up.

Frameless cabinets (often called European) do not have a face frame on the front of the box. The doors cover most of the box, giving a sleek, modern look and full access to the interior. They are great for contemporary and modern kitchens and work especially well with full overlay doors.

Framed cabinets have a face frame attached to the box, and the doors mount to that frame. They can be partial overlay or inset. Traditional and transitional styles often favor framed construction, especially if you want that classic inset door look.

Are framed or frameless cabinets better? It comes down to style and execution. A poorly built framed cabinet is worse than a well built frameless cabinet, and vice versa. Frameless offers slightly more storage and a cleaner line, framed can be more forgiving in older, wavy LA houses where nothing is square.

How long custom cabinets really take

Timelines are the other big shock for homeowners. How long does it take to make custom cabinets, and how long does a custom kitchen take to install?

For a typical LA kitchen with a busy cabinet shop, count backward from your hoped-for completion date and expect:

Design and revisions: 1 to 4 weeks, depending on how decisive you are.

Shop drawings and approvals: about 1 week. Fabrication and finishing: usually 4 to 10 weeks, depending on shop load and complexity. Installation: for a full kitchen, 3 to 7 working days is common.

So from "yes, let us do it" to fully installed cabinets, 8 to 14 weeks is normal. If countertops are templated after cabinets go in, add another 1 to 3 weeks before your kitchen is functional.

If someone promises full custom cabinets fabricated and installed within 2 weeks for a full kitchen, you are either getting pre-finished imported boxes labeled as "custom," or quality and attention to detail are not part of the deal.

Permits, LA rules, and what cabinet makers actually handle

People are often surprised to learn that in many cases, you do not need a permit for kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles if you are only swapping cabinets in the same locations without moving plumbing, gas, or electrical. The moment you start changing walls, relocating plumbing or gas lines, or significantly altering electrical, you are in permit territory.

Most cabinet makers focus on fabrication and installation. They do not pull permits, coordinate city inspections, or redesign your mechanical systems. That is usually the role of a general contractor or architect. A responsible cabinet maker will tell you when your plans clearly cross into work that needs a permit and will ask who is handling that.

It is fair to ask: do cabinet makers install cabinets themselves? Many custom shops in LA both build and install. Some smaller shops or designers outsource installation to trusted installers. Either way, you want clarity on who is doing the install and their experience.

You can also ask if the shop handles related elements like countertops. Do cabinet makers also do countertops? Some do, especially if they have in-house stone or solid surface capabilities. Others coordinate with stone fabricators or leave it to your general contractor. Central coordination helps, but do not assume it is included. Get it in writing.

How to actually find a good cabinet maker in Los Angeles

There are dozens of cabinet shops scattered from the Valley to Gardena, plus independent makers working out of smaller spaces. The challenge is not availability, it is filtering for quality and fit.

Referrals from contractors, designers, or friends with similar quality expectations are still the best starting [Cabinet Maker Los Angeles bradcokitchen.com](#) point. Online reviews help, but in LA they are often inflated, and gorgeous photos do not show how doors hang after 3 years of use.

When you start looking, ask yourself: what should I look for in a cabinet maker, and how do you know if a cabinet maker is good?

A few signs stand out:

Clean, detailed drawings. A competent cabinet maker provides clear plans or shop drawings before building. Vague sketches or “do not worry, we will make it nice” is a warning sign on anything beyond a simple vanity.

Material and hardware transparency. They should be able to tell you exactly what they use for boxes, doors, drawer boxes, and which hardware brands they spec. If they dodge the question or just say “solid wood” for everything, be careful.

Realistic schedules. Anyone promising full custom in a couple of weeks is either installing pre-made stock or overbooking themselves. A good shop protects their schedule and does not overpromise.

Portfolio that matches your taste. If you want a super minimal frameless oak kitchen and their website is full of ornate raised panel work, they might be skilled but not aligned with your style.

Communication. You want someone who answers questions plainly, explains trade-offs, and documents decisions. Custom cabinetry has many small details. Lack of clarity now becomes conflict later.

Quick red flags to avoid

When you are collecting bids and meeting shops, watch for these common warning signs:

1. Extremely low bids that undercut others by thousands without a clear explanation.
2. Refusal to put material specs, hardware brands, or finish type in writing.
3. Only cash or Zelle accepted, with no formal contract or proposal.
4. No physical address, no shop visit possible, and only a cell phone as contact.
5. Defensive or vague answers when you ask how cabinets are built and installed.

Any one of these does not automatically mean disaster, but when you see several together, walk away.

What to ask before you sign

By the time you have one or two finalists, you should have a detailed proposal in hand. This is the moment to ask pointed questions, not after the cabinets are in your garage.

Here is a concise set of questions to ask a cabinet maker in Los Angeles:

1. What box material and thickness do you use for sides, backs, and shelves, and is that in the contract?
2. Which hardware brands do you use for hinges and drawer slides, and are all drawers soft close?
3. Is finishing done in your shop or on site, what type of finish do you use, and how easy is it to touch up?
4. Who will install the cabinets, how long will installation take, and what is included or excluded in install?
5. What is your warranty on materials and workmanship, and what does service look like if something fails?

Listen carefully not just to the content, but to how directly and confidently they answer.

Styles, colors, and what actually holds value in LA

Trends matter in a city like Los Angeles, but resale buyers are also practical. People often worry: are white cabinets going out of style, and what is the best cabinet color for resale value?

White shaker has dominated Southern California for a long stretch. It is not “over” so much as no longer special. In entry-level flips it can look generic, but in a well detailed kitchen with quality hardware and lighting, it still feels clean and safe for resale.

Right now, the most popular kitchen cabinet style combinations in LA tend to be:

Simple shaker or flat panel doors with clean lines.

Warm white or soft off-white on uppers, with natural wood or a deeper color on lowers or islands. Integrated or low profile pulls instead of heavy, ornate hardware.

In higher end projects, rift cut white oak, walnut, and very minimal flat panels are common. The most expensive kitchen cabinets are usually a mix of exotic veneers, fully custom interiors, and integrated appliance panels, often from boutique European brands or top tier local shops.

For resale value, solid, neutral choices win over risky trends. Quality matters more than fashion. Buyers notice smooth drawer slides and solid doors more than whether you chose the exact paint color that was hot last year.

Refinishing, refacing, or full replacement

Not every LA kitchen needs brand new cabinets. Sometimes the best answer is to keep what you have and improve the finish or doors.

Homeowners often weigh: is it cheaper to refinish or replace kitchen cabinets, and is cabinet refacing worth it?

Refinishing means keeping the cabinets and doors, then sanding, repairing, and repainting or re-staining them. If the boxes and doors are structurally sound and the layout works, this is usually the cheapest way to refresh a kitchen. In Los Angeles, professional refinishing for a medium kitchen might range from about \$4,000 to \$10,000, depending on preparation, number of coats, and on-site conditions.

Refacing means keeping the cabinet boxes but replacing doors and drawer fronts and adding a new veneer or skin to exposed box faces. It costs more than simple refinishing because you are buying new doors and sometimes new drawer boxes, but less than full replacement. Typical LA costs to reface kitchen cabinets often land in the \$8,000 to \$20,000 range for an average kitchen, depending on door style and finish.

Full replacement is justified when the layout is bad, boxes are particleboard that have swollen or failed, or you want a completely different style and interior layout. In many older LA homes with original, well built plywood boxes, a skilled refinisher and refacer can save a fortune compared to full custom replacement. In cheaply built 90s or early 2000s kitchens, replacement may be the smarter long term move.

Installation, modifications, and lifespan

Good cabinet makers do not just drop off boxes. They fit them to your walls, scribe panels to floors and ceilings, adjust doors and drawers, and check reveals. Installation is where careful planning and fabrication show up, or fall apart.

People often ask if custom cabinets can be modified after installation. The honest answer is: it depends. Small changes, such as adjusting shelves, changing hardware, or swapping a few doors, are usually possible. Major changes, like moving cabinets, changing appliance sizes, or adding large new sections, are more complicated and can undercut the custom fit. It is better to work through these questions before production starts.

As for durability, what is the average lifespan of custom cabinets in a typical LA home? Well built cabinets in decent conditions can easily last 20 to 30 years or more. Some original mid-century and 70s plywood kitchens are still structurally sound, even if the style is dated. Cheap stock cabinets with thin boxes and low grade hinges often start sagging or failing in under 10 years.

Do custom cabinets add value to a home, and are custom cabinets a good investment? When they are well designed and executed, yes. Buyers notice quality kitchens and bathrooms. Appraisers often assign more weight to updated, high quality cabinetry in these rooms than to fancier but less functional features elsewhere. That said, there is a ceiling: you rarely get a dollar-for-dollar return on ultra luxury cabinets unless you are in the very top of the LA market.

The money question: financing and “cheapest custom”

Some cabinet makers in Los Angeles, particularly larger shops or those tied to showrooms, do offer financing. Others leave that to third party lenders or expect payment according to milestones: deposit at contract signing, progress payment at start of fabrication, and balance on installation or completion. If you need financing, ask directly at the beginning, because it may narrow your pool of options.

What is the cheapest way to get custom cabinets without hating the result? A few practical strategies come up often:

Keep the layout close to existing to avoid moving plumbing and gas, so you save on other trades and avoid permits.

Use plywood boxes and good hardware, but choose a simpler door style and a standard paint color. Skip elaborate interior organizers and add aftermarket inserts later if needed. Combine custom work in tricky areas with semi-custom for straightforward runs.

Is it cheaper to buy cabinets or have them made? If you compare pure stock cabinets from a big box store to full custom made in LA, buying stock is almost always cheaper. But when you start looking at higher quality semi-custom lines, the gap narrows. At a certain level of quality, a local custom shop can sometimes match or beat the total cost of premium branded semi-custom, especially when you include install and customization.

Picking the right partner, not “the best cabinet maker in Los Angeles”

People often ask who is the best cabinet maker in Los Angeles, as if there is a single name that fits every project. The reality is more nuanced. The “best” for a \$35,000 modest family kitchen is not the same as the best for a \$200,000 architectural showcase in the hills.

The right cabinet maker for you is the one whose work quality, communication style, design sensibility, and pricing align with your specific project. Some tiny shops produce extraordinary work but have long waits and minimal hand-holding. Larger shops may be more systematized, with designers on staff and clear processes, but you are working with a team, not the owner.

When you meet potential partners, pay more attention to how they think than to how loudly they advertise. Ask them how they would handle your tricky corner, or your desire for extra-deep drawers, or your sloped ceiling. Listen for concrete, practical answers rooted in experience.

Custom cabinets sit at the intersection of design, craft, engineering, and project management. If you take the time to understand the basics of materials, pricing, and process, and if you watch for the red flags, you can find a cabinet maker in Los Angeles who delivers a kitchen, vanity, or built-in that feels like it belongs in your home, not just in a showroom photo.

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