

Ask three people how long custom kitchen cabinets take, and you will usually hear three different answers. I hear everything from “a few weeks” to “six months” from Los Angeles homeowners who call after getting wildly different timelines from showrooms and contractors.

The truth sits somewhere in between, and it depends on how custom you go, which shop you hire, and how ready the rest of your kitchen is.

For a typical custom kitchen in Los Angeles, from signed contract to fully installed cabinets, you are usually looking at about 8 to 14 weeks, sometimes longer for very complex or high-end projects. The actual installation in your home often takes 3 to 7 working days, not counting countertops and finishing touches.

To understand why, it helps to know what a cabinet maker actually does, how custom cabinets are made, and what slows a project down in a real Los Angeles remodel.

## **What a cabinet maker really does**

Many people ask, “What is a cabinet maker, and what does a cabinet maker do?” It sounds simple, but it covers a lot more than building boxes with doors.

A cabinet maker is a specialist who designs, engineers, builds, and often installs built-in woodwork: kitchen cabinets, bathroom vanities, built-ins, media units, sometimes even custom furniture. Unlike a big box store that sells stock cabinets, a true custom cabinet maker starts from your space and your needs, then creates a one-off solution.

In a typical Los Angeles kitchen project, a cabinet maker will:

They will measure the space in detail, including walls that are out of plumb, sloping floors, soffits, and quirky corners that old LA homes are famous for. Then they work with you or your designer on layout, storage needs, and style. They produce shop drawings or 3D renders, specify materials, hardware, and finishes, and engineer every cabinet for strength, clearances, and code issues like hood venting or appliance spacing.

Once you approve drawings, they mill plywood, solid wood, and MDF; assemble boxes; fit doors and drawer fronts; install drawer slides and hinges; sand and finish; and stage everything in the shop. Many custom cabinet makers in Los Angeles also install what they build, which keeps responsibility in one place and usually leads to better fit and finish.

That is the short answer to “How are custom cabinets made?” and “What is the process of making custom cabinets?” Every phase in that description takes time, and delays in any step can push your overall timeline.

## **Cabinet maker vs carpenter: who does what?**

Another common question is, “What is the difference between a carpenter and a cabinet maker?”

A carpenter is a broader trade. Carpenters frame walls, hang doors, build decks, install trim, and sometimes install factory-made cabinets. Some are excellent finish carpenters and can do beautiful trim and wainscoting.

A cabinet maker specializes in fine, often complex, built-ins. They spend their days dialing in tiny reveals, matching wood grain, adjusting hinges, and solving the puzzle of how to pack the most storage into a tight Los Angeles kitchen. They know which hinges behave well in coastal humidity, which plywood stays flatter, and how to make a 36-inch corner cabinet open without slamming into your fridge.

There are talented carpenters who can build cabinets, and cabinet makers who can handle general carpentry. But when you are spending five figures on a kitchen, it is usually worth hiring someone who does cabinets all day, not as a side task.

## Typical timelines: design, build, and install

When people ask, "How long does it take to make custom cabinets?" they usually mean the whole process. It helps to break it down into phases.

For a mid-sized Los Angeles kitchen (say 12 to 18 linear feet of cabinets on each wall), a realistic timeline looks something like this:

- Design and approvals: 1 to 3 weeks
- Engineering and ordering materials: 1 to 2 weeks
- Fabrication in the shop: 4 to 8 weeks
- Finish curing and staging for delivery: 1 week
- Installation in your home: 3 to 7 working days

If you already have a designer and detailed plans when you walk in, design can go faster. If design decisions drag on, that 1 to 3 weeks can easily stretch.

Very small projects, like a bathroom vanity or a simple galley kitchenette, can trim those numbers. Very high-end projects, with complex curves, exotic veneers, or integrated lighting and metalwork, can run 4 to 6 months, especially if the shop is busy.

The question "How long does a custom kitchen take to install?" specifically refers to the on-site portion. For a typical kitchen in Los Angeles, cabinet installation takes less than two weeks once the space is prepared: walls done, floors in, rough plumbing and electrical complete. Countertops are usually templated after cabinets are installed, then arrive 1 to 3 weeks later.

## What slows a cabinet project down in Los Angeles

If you ask a cabinet maker why a job took longer than expected, the answer almost never starts in the shop. It usually starts on site.

Here are the most common timeline killers I see around Los Angeles:

First, incomplete remodel work. Cabinets can only be installed after framing, rough plumbing and electrical, drywall, and flooring (or at least subfloor) are complete. If the general contractor is behind, the cabinets sit in the shop or a warehouse. That is how "8 weeks" becomes "14 weeks."

Second, design changes mid-stream. Changing door style, cabinet color, or appliances after drawings are approved forces redraws. Changing appliance sizes after fabrication starts can mean rebuilding entire sections.

Third, permitting or inspection delays. Which leads straight into a question I hear often: "Do I need a permit for kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles?"

## Permits for kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles

Purely replacing cabinets with no layout changes, no new plumbing locations, and no new electrical circuits is often considered non-structural work. The cabinet swap itself may not trigger a permit, but the moment you move a

sink, reroute gas, add outlets, or open a wall, you are in permit territory.

In the City of Los Angeles and most nearby jurisdictions, kitchen remodels with mechanical, plumbing, or electrical work require permits. The permitting is usually handled by your general contractor, not the cabinet maker.

Why does this matter for lead time? Inspectors must sign off on rough work before walls are closed, and final inspections come after everything is installed. If rough inspections fail, or scheduling gets backed up, your cabinet installation can be pushed out. Always coordinate your cabinet maker's schedule with your contractor's permit and inspection timeline.

It is worth asking both, in writing, how they plan to sequence work so the cabinets do not arrive months before the kitchen is ready.

## **What does custom really mean? Custom vs semi-custom vs stock**

Lead time is tied closely to how "custom" your cabinets actually are. People ask:

What is the difference between custom and semi-custom cabinets?

Are custom cabinets better than stock cabinets? Is it cheaper to buy cabinets or have them made?

Stock cabinets are mass-produced in fixed sizes and finishes. You can often get them in days, and installers can have them in within a couple of weeks [Luxury Kitchen Design Los Angeles Bradco Kitchens](#) if schedules line up. They are the quickest solution and often the cheapest upfront.

Semi-custom cabinets use a catalog of cabinet boxes and door styles, but you can tweak dimensions and finishes within a range. Lead times usually run 4 to 10 weeks because orders are batched in a factory, but you are still limited by standard sizes.

Truly custom cabinets start from your space and design. A good custom shop can build to the quarter-inch, integrate that awkward niche next to the chimney, or hide your washer and dryer behind tall doors. You choose the wood, the finish, and often the hardware. That flexibility costs more and usually takes longer, but the fit in older or high-end Los Angeles homes is often dramatically better.

Are custom cabinets better than stock cabinets? It depends what you value. For tight budgets, stock or semi-custom from a reputable brand, installed correctly, can serve you well. For long-term durability, maximum storage, and a bespoke look, custom usually wins.

## **Why custom cabinets cost what they do in Los Angeles**

The next set of questions usually comes fast:

How much does a custom cabinet maker cost? How much do custom kitchen cabinets cost in Los Angeles? How much should I pay for custom cabinets?

Pricing is very specific to your space, materials, and level of detail, but there are some realistic ranges for the Los Angeles area.

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For a typical custom kitchen in Los Angeles, cabinets alone often fall somewhere around:

- Basic custom (painted or stained, quality plywood boxes, standard hardware): roughly \$800 to \$1,200 per linear foot of cabinetry
- Mid-range custom (upgraded hardware, some interior accessories, more complex finishes): roughly \$1,200 to \$1,800 per linear foot
- High-end custom (exotic veneers, high-gloss finishes, integrated lighting, custom metal or glass work): often \$1,800 to \$3,000+ per linear foot

For a mid-sized kitchen with 20 to 30 linear feet of cabinets, that can translate into something like \$18,000 on the low side to \$60,000 or more on the very high end, just for cabinets. Hardware, pull-outs, trash systems, and other upgrades add to that.

"How much does it cost to remodel kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles?" depends on whether you are replacing them, refacing, or refinishing.

Refinishing (stripping and repainting or restaining existing cabinets) is typically the cheapest, provided the cabinets are structurally sound. Many Los Angeles homeowners can expect a range of a few thousand dollars to the low five figures, depending on kitchen size and whether doors are sprayed in a shop or in place.

Refacing means replacing door and drawer fronts and applying a new veneer to the cabinet boxes. "Is cabinet refacing worth it?" It can be, if your layout is good and the boxes are in great shape. In LA, refacing often runs more than simple refinishing but less than full custom, so mid-four to low five figures for a typical kitchen. "How much does it cost to reface kitchen cabinets?" depends on whether you choose inexpensive thermofoil or high-end solid wood doors.

Full replacement with custom cabinets is the most expensive and also gives you the most flexibility to change layout, improve function, and upgrade materials.

Why are custom cabinets so expensive? Labor and time. Good cabinet makers in Los Angeles pay skilled workers, invest in equipment, and absorb high rents and insurance. They use higher-grade plywood, better hardware, and finishes that cure properly and resist daily abuse. Each small choice adds cost but also adds years of life.

"What is the markup on custom cabinets?" varies significantly between shops. You will see everything from modest overhead and labor margins in small owner-operated shops to much higher markups in large showrooms with sales staff and high marketing budgets. That is one reason quotes for seemingly similar projects can differ by tens of thousands of dollars.

Some custom cabinet makers offer financing, often through third-party lenders. If you see an offer, read the fine print carefully, especially deferred interest clauses.

## **Are custom cabinets worth the money?**

When people ask, "Are custom cabinets worth the money?" or "Are custom cabinets a good investment?" what they really want to know is whether the long lead time and higher price will pay off in daily use and resale value.

From a functional standpoint, custom cabinets almost always win when:

You have an older Los Angeles home with odd walls, tight corners, or non-standard ceiling heights.

You cook a lot and care about storage: deep drawers for pots, built-in spice storage, tray pull-outs, and trash/recycle systems. You plan to stay put for 10 or more years and want something that will age well.

"What is the average lifespan of custom cabinets?" With quality plywood boxes, good hinges and slides, and a professional finish, 20 to 30 years is a reasonable expectation, and I still see 40-year-old custom kitchens in LA that function perfectly and look good with minor touch-ups.

"Do custom cabinets add value to a home?" Yes, if they are well designed and fit the price range of the neighborhood. Appraisers rarely assign a separate line item just for cabinets, but buyers in Los Angeles absolutely pay more for a move-in ready kitchen with high quality, timeless cabinetry.

## **Materials and construction: what you are really paying for**

Material choice affects both cost and how long fabrication takes. It also ties into several of the questions people ask when they start researching.

What material is best for kitchen cabinets?

What is the best wood for custom cabinets? Are plywood cabinets better than MDF? How thick should custom cabinet wood be? What is the best finish for kitchen cabinets?

In most quality custom shops, cabinet boxes are built from plywood, often 3/4-inch thick for sides, floors, and shelves, and sometimes 1/2-inch for backs. Thicker, void-free plywood resists sagging and holds screws well.

Are plywood cabinets better than MDF? For boxes, plywood is usually better. It is lighter, holds fasteners better, and resists moisture swelling. MDF, however, can be excellent for painted doors and flat panels, because it machines smoothly and resists grain telegraphing through paint. Many high-end painted kitchens in Los Angeles use MDF for door centers or entire shaker doors.

As for “What is the best wood for custom cabinets?” it depends on whether you plan to stain or paint. For stained cabinets, North American hardwoods like maple, white oak, and walnut are popular in LA. For painted cabinets, maple or MDF doors over plywood boxes make a lot of sense.

Finish is its own world. The best finish for kitchen cabinets is one that balances durability, appearance, and repairability. Catalyzed lacquer and conversion varnish are common in custom shops, providing a hard, durable surface. High-end waterborne finishes have improved dramatically and are often used where low VOCs are a priority. If your cabinet maker still uses basic oil-based polyurethane on cabinet doors, ask why.

## **Styles, colors, and resale value**

Trends affect both what you choose and how long you will be happy with it.

“What is the most popular kitchen cabinet style?” In Los Angeles, shaker style remains the default for many homeowners and designers: simple, square-framed doors that work with modern or traditional details. Flat-panel (slab) doors dominate very modern and mid-century homes. More ornate raised-panel doors are less common in new LA projects but still appear in larger, traditional homes.

“Are white cabinets going out of style?” White is not disappearing, but there is a clear shift. Many clients still choose white upper cabinets because they keep spaces bright, then pair them with contrasting lowers: greige, deep blue, charcoal, or stained oak. All-white kitchens have started to feel a bit flat unless they have texture somewhere else, like natural wood accents or interesting stone.

“What is the best cabinet color for resale value?” Neutral, non-trendy colors age best. White, off-white, warm greige, and light to medium wood tones typically appeal to the widest range of Los Angeles buyers. Bright colors can be stunning, but they narrow your audience.

“The most expensive kitchen cabinets” tend to be high-gloss or specialty-finished European-style cabinets, often frameless, with exotic veneers, integrated lighting, and automated hardware. Fab shops that specialize in these install them in high-end LA homes and condos, and the price tag reflects that.

## **Framed vs frameless cabinets**

“Are framed or frameless cabinets better?” This is half design, half engineering.

Framed cabinets have a face frame at the front of the box. Doors can be inset into the frame or overlay it. This is the traditional American style and works well when you want a classic look. It can be very strong and allows for slightly easier tweaks on site, because the frame can hide small irregularities.

Frameless cabinets, also called European style, have doors that cover the entire front of the box. You see tight, clean lines and full access to the interior, since there is no frame getting in the way of pots and pans. Many Los Angeles modern and contemporary homes use frameless. It demands precise fabrication, since any misalignment is obvious.

Neither is strictly “better.” A good cabinet maker can make either one strong and beautiful. Your choice should follow your home’s architecture and your storage needs.

## **Who installs, and what else do cabinet makers do?**

“Do cabinet makers install cabinets?” Most custom shops in Los Angeles either install their own work or use a dedicated installation crew they partner with regularly. Installing custom cabinets correctly is as important as

building them. It is not simply screwing boxes to a wall. Installers scribe cabinets to walls and ceilings that are rarely square, adjust reveals, and coordinate with plumbers, electricians, and countertop fabricators.

“Do cabinet makers also do countertops?” Some shops do. Many coordinate with separate stone fabricators or solid surface specialists. In either case, your countertop timeline is tied directly to when your cabinets are installed and stable. For stone, templates are taken after cabinets are fastened permanently, then fabrication and install add another week or three.

“Do cabinet makers do bathroom vanities?” Most do. Vanities follow similar construction, with additional attention to moisture, plumbing cutouts, and sometimes furniture-style legs or open shelving.

“Can a cabinet maker make furniture?” Many can, and some love doing it. Built-ins, benches, media walls, and even standalone tables or hutches are common requests. Just know that freestanding furniture can be priced differently from cabinet work, and not every shop wants to split focus.

## **Finding and evaluating a good cabinet maker in Los Angeles**

“How do I find a good cabinet maker?” and “How do you know if a cabinet maker is good?” come up on nearly every initial call.

Los Angeles has everything from one-person garages to large production shops and design-build firms. The trick is not just finding a talented craftsman, but finding one whose process, pricing, and communication style fit you.

Here is a short checklist of what to look for and what to ask once you have a few candidates:

- Ask to see real, recent projects, not just glossy manufacturer photos. Ideally in person, or at least detailed close-up photos that show seams, corners, and inside the cabinets.
- Ask, “What material is used for boxes, backs, and shelves?” Listen for specifics: 3/4-inch plywood, type of plywood, and whether backs are full-height and captured, not thin nailed-on panels.
- Clarify who measures, who designs, and who installs. You want a single point of responsibility. If they subcontract install, ask how long they have worked with that crew.
- Ask for a clear written scope: materials, hardware brands, finish type, and what is included or excluded (demo, haul-away, touch-up after countertop install, etc.).
- Ask about their typical lead time right now, and what could change it. A realistic answer that includes possible delays is more trustworthy than an optimistic promise.

“What questions should I ask a cabinet maker?” extends beyond this list, but if a shop cannot or will not answer these clearly, or you hear vague answers like “We use good wood” without detail, keep looking.

As for “Who is the best cabinet maker in Los Angeles?” there is no single answer. There are excellent small shops that never advertise and high-end firms that work only with architects and designers. “Best” is the one whose work you respect, whose prior clients are happy years later, and whose process fits your budget and timeline.

## **Custom cabinets vs refinishing and refacing**

“Is it cheaper to refinish or replace kitchen cabinets?” Almost always, refinishing is cheaper than full replacement, provided the existing cabinets are high enough quality to keep.

If your kitchen layout works, and your current cabinets are solid wood or at least good plywood with sound joinery, refinishing or refacing can buy you another decade or more at a lower cost and shorter timeline.

"Is cabinet refacing worth it?" It can be when you hate the look but like the layout. The boxes stay, so there is less demolition and less disruption. Lead times are usually shorter too, because you are building doors and drawer fronts, not entire boxes. Just be realistic: refacing does not fix poor layout or flimsy construction.

Sometimes people ask, "What is the cheapest way to get custom cabinets?" Strictly speaking, true custom is never the cheapest path. To save money but still get something tailored, you can use semi-custom lines strategically and supplement with a few truly custom pieces where you need them most, like a tricky corner or a built-in pantry.

## **Measuring and modifying: before and after install**

"How do I measure for custom cabinets?" If you are hiring a custom cabinet maker, you should not be responsible for final measurements. They should field-measure your kitchen themselves. For early budgeting, you can measure wall lengths, ceiling heights, and window and door locations. Even rough measurements help a shop give you an initial range.

"Can custom cabinets be modified after installation?" Minor tweaks are normal. Doors can be adjusted, shelves moved, and sometimes a cabinet can be trimmed or modified slightly if something changed on site. But major changes, like new appliance sizes or moving a sink, usually mean building new cabinets. That is why locking down appliances and key dimensions before fabrication is so important.

When you sign off on drawings, double-check appliance specs, sink size, and clearances. A 1-inch difference in fridge depth or oven height can snowball into serious rework.

## **Managing expectations about time**

The core question of this article is about time: How long does it take to make and install custom kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles?

A realistic overall answer for a typical custom project is:

Design and approvals: 1 to 3 weeks

Fabrication and finishing: 6 to 10 weeks Installation: 1 to 2 weeks Countertops and final touches: 1 to 3 additional weeks

So, door to door, you are commonly in the 8 to 14 week range once design is underway, as long as the rest of the remodel stays on track.

Set your expectations accordingly. If a shop promises full custom cabinets in 3 weeks during the busy season without an obvious reason, or if a quote is dramatically lower than the others, slow down and ask more questions. Quality custom work takes time, and in a city like Los Angeles, good cabinet makers are rarely sitting idle.

The payoff for patience is a kitchen that works every day, looks like it belongs in your home, and will still be doing its job a couple of decades from now.