

If you have ever tried to plan a kitchen project in Los Angeles, you have probably run into at least three different titles: cabinet maker, carpenter, and installer. The quotes arrive with different scopes of work, you hear conflicting advice on materials, and it is not always obvious who actually hangs the boxes on the wall.

Most Los Angeles homeowners are asking a simple question: do cabinet makers install cabinets too, or do you need a separate contractor for that part?

The short answer is that many custom cabinet makers in L.A. do handle installation, but not all. Some only fabricate, then recommend or coordinate an installer. The difference matters, because it affects cost, schedule, permits, and ultimately how your kitchen functions for the next twenty years.

What follows is a practical walk through of how cabinet makers work in the Los Angeles market, what you should expect from a solid professional, and how to decide whether custom cabinets are worth the money for your home.

What a cabinet maker actually does

A cabinet maker is a woodworker who specializes in built-in storage: kitchen and bath cabinets, closets, pantries, entertainment units, and often custom furniture pieces. Unlike a general carpenter who might frame walls, hang doors, or build decks, a cabinet maker works at a finer level of detail.

At a basic level, what does a cabinet maker do?

They translate the space you have and the way you use your kitchen into functional, dimensioned cabinets. There is design, engineering, and a surprising amount of math involved. A good cabinet maker thinks in three dimensions and millimeters, not just inches.

Day to day, that usually means:

They meet you in the space, measure carefully, and talk through how you cook, store, and entertain. They create shop drawings or 3D renderings. They select materials such as solid wood, plywood, MDF, or laminates, and choose hardware like hinges, slides, and organizers. In the shop, they cut, assemble, and finish the cabinet boxes, doors, and trim. Then, depending on their business model, they either install the cabinets themselves or coordinate a dedicated install crew.

So when you ask, "Do cabinet makers install cabinets?" the honest answer is: many do, some do not. In the L.A. Area, custom shops that serve homeowners directly typically offer both fabrication and installation as a package. Larger production shops that wholesale to contractors often leave installation to the general contractor or a separate installer.

If you are getting quotes, do not assume installation is included. Ask for it in writing as a separate line item.

Cabinet maker vs carpenter in Los Angeles

What is the difference between a carpenter and a cabinet maker in real terms?

In Los Angeles, a carpenter is often part of a framing or finish crew on larger jobs. They might trim windows, install baseboards, or frame a new wall for a kitchen expansion. They are versatile, but cabinetry is only one slice of their work.

A cabinet maker focuses on building cabinets and built-ins. They spend their days dealing with hinge alignment, door reveals, grain matching, and finish quality. They are the ones who obsess over whether the grain lines flow

across all your drawer fronts.

Many cabinet makers started as carpenters, then specialized. In practice:

A carpenter might install stock cabinets from a big-box store. A cabinet maker is more likely to build custom cabinets or modify semi-custom cabinets to fit tricky spaces, then either install them or supervise installation to protect their work.

For a straightforward condo kitchen using ready-made boxes, a good finish carpenter can do fine. For a high-end Los Angeles custom kitchen with full-height pantry walls, integrated appliances, and tricky corners, a dedicated cabinet maker is usually worth the premium.

Custom, semi-custom, or stock cabinets: what is the real difference?

Once you dig into options, you meet a few terms that matter a lot for cost.

Stock cabinets are mass-produced units in fixed sizes, styles, and finishes. Think the lines you see on the shelf or ordered from catalogs at Home Depot or IKEA. You design your kitchen around their standard sizes.

Semi-custom cabinets are factory-built but offer more flexibility. You may be able to adjust widths in 1 inch increments, choose different door styles and finishes, and order interior accessories. Many national brands sold through kitchen showrooms fall into this category.

Custom cabinets are built to order for your exact kitchen. The cabinet maker controls dimensions down to fractions of an inch, can build around awkward walls, and can match any style or color. Custom does not automatically mean ultra-expensive, but in Los Angeles it usually sits above semi-custom pricing.

Is it cheaper to buy cabinets or have them made? For simple layouts, stock will almost always be cheaper than true custom. Semi-custom can come close to some custom shops on price once you add upgrades and fillers, but you lose flexibility. If your space is difficult or you want specific features, it is often less frustrating and more efficient to have cabinets made to fit.

From a performance standpoint, are custom cabinets better than stock cabinets? They are usually better in fit, layout, and long-term adjustability. Structurally, it depends on materials and construction method. A mid-range custom plywood cabinet is often sturdier than an entry-level stock line that uses thin particleboard and stapled joints.

What custom cabinets really cost in Los Angeles

Costs in Los Angeles are driven by high labor rates, rent for shop space, and finish expectations. When people ask, "How much do custom kitchen cabinets cost in Los Angeles?" they are usually hoping for a simple number. The reality is a range.

For a typical L.A. Kitchen, custom cabinet pricing often falls within these ballparks, cabinet boxes and installation only, not including countertops, appliances, or major construction:

Small to mid-size condo kitchen, straightforward layout: around \$18,000 to \$30,000.

Average single-family kitchen: roughly \$25,000 to \$45,000.



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High-end custom kitchen with full-height cabinets, panels for built-in appliances, and specialty storage: \$45,000 to \$80,000 or more.

Those numbers assume decent plywood construction, soft-close hardware, and a professional-grade finish. Cheaper options exist, but you will generally sacrifice material thickness, interior finish, or hardware quality.

So how much should you pay for custom cabinets? A good rule in Los Angeles is that a realistic but not extravagant budget for cabinets alone sits at roughly 15% to 25% of the overall kitchen remodel cost. For a \$120,000 remodel, allocating \$25,000 to \$35,000 for cabinets is common.

Custom cabinet makers often work on a cost-per-linear-foot basis when estimating. For full custom work in L.A., a rough range might be \$800 to \$1,500 per linear foot of installed cabinetry, depending on finishes, interior fittings, and complexity.

As for the cabinet maker's own economics, what is the markup on custom cabinets? Many shops need a gross margin in the 35% to 50% range on their work to stay healthy. That margin covers rent, machinery, insurance, finish materials, employee wages, and warranty service. If a quote looks unrealistically low, it often means corners will be cut on labor, materials, or both.

Some Los Angeles shops, especially those serving larger projects, do offer financing either through third-party lenders or in-house payment schedules. If you see "zero interest" offers, read the fine print; it is usually built into the contract price.

Why custom cabinets cost what they do

Custom cabinets feel expensive because the costs are mostly labor. You are paying for skilled people touching your project at every stage.

Why are custom cabinets so expensive compared with a warehouse option?

First, the process is not automated. Every job requires careful measurement, drafting, setup of machines, hand assembly, sanding, and finishing. Second, in L.A., labor and shop space are costly. A small shop might pay a premium for industrial space in the Valley or South L.A., and they need to recover that overhead. Third, a proper kitchen finish is a multi-step operation with primers, sealers, and topcoats, whether the final look is paint or clear finish. The equipment and materials are not cheap.

You are also buying risk management. If a wall in your 1920s Los Feliz bungalow turns out to be out of plumb by an inch, a good cabinet maker will adjust on site, modify cabinets as needed, and still deliver a tight, level installation. That adaptability is baked into the price.

Are custom cabinets worth the money? In many Los Angeles homes, yes, if you plan to stay at least five to seven years or if the kitchen is a major driver of resale value. Well-built custom cabinets can last 25 to 40 years with normal use. Stock cabinets with modest hardware often start to show wear earlier, especially at hinges and drawer slides.

Materials: plywood, MDF, and the best choices for L.A. Kitchens

Two questions come up constantly: What is the best wood for custom cabinets, and what material is best for kitchen cabinets overall?

For structure, most L.A. Cabinet makers use a combination of sheet goods and solid wood. The cabinet boxes are typically plywood or MDF, while the doors and face frames (in framed cabinets) are often solid hardwood.

For the boxes, are plywood cabinets better than MDF? In a kitchen, generally yes, especially in a coastal or humid environment. Plywood holds screws more securely, resists sagging over long spans, and handles minor moisture better. Good cabinet-grade plywood with a hardwood veneer is the usual choice for mid- to high-end custom work.

MDF has its place, though. It machines very smoothly, so for painted shaker doors, MDF panels are extremely common. Many makers use a combination: plywood boxes, hardwood frames, and MDF center panels in doors. The key is sealing and finishing the MDF properly to avoid swelling.

Typical thickness for custom cabinet wood in L.A. Shops is around 3/4 inch for cabinet sides, tops, and bottoms, with 1/2 inch or 5/8 inch backs depending on construction details. Drawer boxes are often 1/2 inch or 5/8 inch solid maple or birch with dovetail joints.

If you care about longevity, ask your cabinet maker specifically about box material, thickness, and joinery method, not just the door style.

Framed vs frameless and how it affects installation

Most Los Angeles shops build in one of two systems: framed or frameless.

Framed cabinets have a face frame on the front of the box. Doors mount to that frame. This style is traditional in many American homes, especially with shaker or raised-panel doors.

Frameless cabinets, often called European-style, skip the face frame. The door covers almost the entire front of the box, giving a cleaner, more contemporary look. Many modern L.A. Kitchens use frameless systems.

Are framed or frameless cabinets better? It is more about preference than absolute quality. Frameless cabinets offer slightly more accessible storage because there is no frame intruding on the opening. They also pair well with

minimalist, flat-panel designs. Framed cabinets tolerate minor wall irregularities a bit better and can feel appropriate in older Spanish, Craftsman, or traditional homes.

From an installation perspective, frameless cabinets demand very precise alignment. A good cabinet maker who also installs knows how to shim and adjust to keep all the lines perfectly straight, even when old plaster walls wander.

How custom cabinets are made and installed

Homeowners rarely see what happens between signing a contract and seeing boxes appear on site. Understanding the process helps you set realistic expectations for timing and communication.

What is the process of making custom cabinets?

A typical L.A. Workflow looks like this:

Initial meeting and measurements in your kitchen, followed by a design phase where the cabinet maker produces plans or renderings. Refinement of layout, materials, finish color, and hardware. Once you approve the drawings and a deposit is paid, the shop orders materials and schedules your project. In the shop, they cut panels, drill for hardware, assemble boxes, build or order doors and drawers, and apply finish. Finally, they deliver and install, then handle final adjustments and any service items.

How long does it take to make custom cabinets? In Los Angeles, fabrication alone is usually 4 to 10 weeks once drawings are approved, depending on shop load, [Kitchen Remodeling Services In Los Angeles](#) finish complexity, and supply chain issues. Lead times can extend during busy seasons or if you choose specialty materials.

How long does a custom kitchen take to install? Actual cabinet installation is often 3 to 7 working days for an average kitchen. That does not include demolition, electrical, plumbing, flooring, or countertop templating. Your overall remodel timeline will be longer.

This is where the original question returns: do cabinet makers install cabinets too?

Many L.A. Shops send their own crew to install. Others sub out installation to a trusted carpenter. A smaller shop owner may be the person who both builds your cabinets and physically installs them. What matters is that someone takes responsibility for both fit and finish. If your cabinet maker does not install, insist on coordination between the maker and the installer, ideally with clear drawings on site.

Permits, codes, and Los Angeles specific issues

Do you need a permit for kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles?

If you are simply replacing or upgrading cabinets in the same layout, with no structural or layout changes, the work often falls into cosmetic improvements that do not require a separate permit. However, most meaningful kitchen projects involve electrical, plumbing, or wall changes that do require permits under LADBS rules.

A smart approach in L.A. Is to discuss your entire project with a licensed contractor or architect. They can tell you whether your remodel triggers permits even if the cabinets themselves are not the direct cause. If you are only refacing or refinishing existing cabinets, you usually stay out of permit territory, but always verify current local requirements.

Some high-rise or HOA properties have their own rules. In those buildings, even cabinet delivery and installation might require approval and proof of insurance from your cabinet maker.

Refacing, refinishing, or replacing: which makes sense?

Not every Los Angeles kitchen needs new cabinets. For many homes, the question becomes: is it cheaper to refinish or replace kitchen cabinets, and is cabinet refacing worth it?

Refinishing keeps your existing cabinets, strips or sands the old finish, and applies new stain or paint. It works best when your cabinet boxes are structurally sound and made of decent material. Cost in L.A. Can range from roughly \$6,000 to \$15,000 or more for an average kitchen, depending on the number of doors, the prep work, and whether you change hardware.

Refacing replaces the doors and drawer fronts and applies new veneer or panels over the existing box faces. This is more invasive than simple repainting, but cheaper than full replacement. In Los Angeles, many refacing projects fall in the \$10,000 to \$25,000 range, depending on materials and whether you add new drawers or interior hardware. So how much does it cost to reface kitchen cabinets? It is typically 50% to 70% of a full custom replacement, but much faster.

Replacing with new custom cabinets is more expensive but gives the opportunity to improve layout, add storage, and address long-term issues like sagging shelves or poor-quality boxes. Whether it is “worth it” depends on how long you will stay and how much frustration your current layout causes.

Styles, colors, and what sells in Los Angeles

“What is the most popular kitchen cabinet style?” is mostly a moving target, but there are patterns. Throughout Los Angeles, from the Valley to the Westside, you see a lot of clean-lined shaker doors. They work in both traditional and modern settings, which helps their staying power.

Are white cabinets going out of style? Pure white, everywhere, is starting to soften. Warm whites, greige tones, light woods, and two-tone schemes are gaining ground. That said, white still photographs beautifully and makes smaller L.A. Kitchens feel larger.

For resale, what is the best cabinet color for resale value? Neutrals and restrained palettes still win. White, soft off-white, light gray, and light natural oak or rift-cut white oak are safe bets for appealing to a broad audience. Bold colors can be fantastic for personal enjoyment but can limit your buyer pool.

In very high-end neighborhoods, some of the most expensive kitchen cabinets are full-custom rift-cut oak or walnut with integrated pulls and highly durable factory finishes, often paired with premium hardware and custom-organized interiors. Costs in these kitchens can rival a small car.

Beyond the kitchen: vanities, furniture, and countertops

Most Los Angeles cabinet makers are not limited to kitchens. Many also build bathroom vanities, laundry room storage, and entertainment centers.

Do cabinet makers do bathroom vanities? Almost always yes. Vanities are just another form of cabinet, but the moisture exposure is higher, so a smart cabinet maker will focus on materials and finish that can handle humidity.

Can a cabinet maker make furniture? Many can. Built-in benches, window seats with storage, custom wardrobes, and even freestanding tables or bookcases are common add-ons. If you like your cabinet maker’s style and craftsmanship, asking about a dining banquette or media wall is reasonable.

Do cabinet makers also do countertops? Some do, especially for wood or butcher-block tops. For stone, quartz, or porcelain, most Los Angeles cabinet shops partner with a dedicated countertop fabricator. The sequence typically

goes: cabinet installation, countertop templating, then after the stone is installed, final cabinet adjustments.

How to find a good cabinet maker in Los Angeles

The L.A. Market is crowded. The question is not “Who is the best cabinet maker in Los Angeles?” but who is the best fit for your project, budget, and communication style. One shop might excel at ultra-modern European-style kitchens in Beverly Hills; another might be perfect for a modest Eagle Rock bungalow.

Here is a straightforward checklist of what to look for in a cabinet maker and how to know if a cabinet maker is good:

1. Clear, detailed drawings and written scope that show they understand your space.
2. Transparent discussion of materials, hardware, and construction methods.
3. Photos of completed jobs that resemble what you want, plus local references you can actually call.
4. Patience in answering questions and explaining trade-offs instead of pushing you into one option.
5. A realistic timeline and a written process for handling changes, delays, and punch-list items.

When you first meet a potential cabinet maker, pay as much attention to how they listen as to what they show you. If they cut you off, ignore your daily routines, or downplay building conditions you are worried about, that behavior tends to carry through the project.

Questions to ask before you sign

Since so much of your experience hinges on the right match, it helps to go into your first conversation prepared.

Practical questions to ask a cabinet maker in Los Angeles include:

1. Do you also install, or do you work with a separate installer, and who is responsible for final fit?
2. What materials do you use for boxes and doors, and how thick are the panels?
3. What is the best finish you recommend for kitchen cabinets in my situation, and how is it applied?
4. How long will fabrication and installation take, and how does that fit into my contractor’s schedule?
5. If I want to modify custom cabinets after installation, what is realistically possible and what is not?

That last point is critical. Can custom cabinets be modified after installation? Some adjustments are easy: moving shelves, tweaking door alignment, even replacing doors or hardware. But changes that alter box dimensions, move appliances, or affect structural elements are usually time-consuming and costly once the cabinets are in place. It is better to invest time in the design phase than to rely on “we will fix it later.”

Lifespan, value, and long-term investment

What is the average lifespan of custom cabinets? With good materials and a proper finish, 25 years is a fair expectation, and 30 to 40 years is not unusual if the kitchen is respected. Hardware sometimes gets replaced earlier, but box structures can outlast trends.

Do custom cabinets add value to a home? In Los Angeles, yes, when they are part of a coherent, well-designed kitchen. Kitchens photograph well and strongly influence buyer perception. Appraisers may not line-item your cabinet cost, but homes with solid, well-finished cabinets and layout often sell faster and with fewer concessions.

Are custom cabinets a good investment? They are rarely a pure financial play. Think of them as a combined lifestyle and value investment. If you cook daily, entertain, or simply want to open doors and drawers that glide

smoothly for the next two decades, the daily satisfaction can be worth far more than the difference in upfront cost over mid-range stock.

If budget is tight, what is the cheapest way to get custom cabinets? Often it is to keep the layout simple, avoid exotic finishes, choose a single, durable paint or stain, and limit special organizers. Let the cabinet maker spend time on structure and finish quality, not on complicated shapes or unique but rarely used features.

When a cabinet maker is the right partner

By the time you sign a contract, you should be clear on three things: what your cabinet maker will build, who will install it, and how the work fits into your larger remodel. In Los Angeles, the best experiences usually come when a cabinet maker is brought into the conversation early, alongside your contractor or designer.

If your project demands precise fit, a specific style, or you simply value solid, long-term craftsmanship, a cabinet maker who both builds and installs can feel less like a vendor and more like a partner. They are the ones in your kitchen, level in hand, making sure every door lines up and every drawer clears the range handle.

When you ask, “Do cabinet makers install cabinets too?” you are really asking whether one team can take responsibility for that whole piece of your remodel. In L.A., many of the most reliable pros do exactly that - and if you choose carefully, you will feel the difference every time you step into your kitchen.