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## CHANGE YOUR CABINETS

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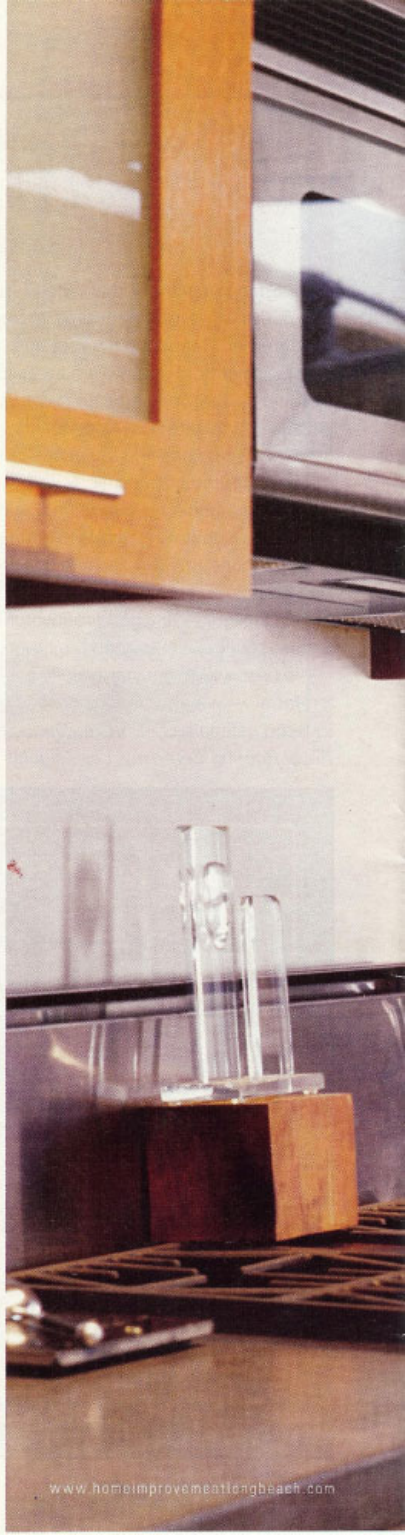
Changing cabinets makes  
a dramatic difference




Photos courtesy of Reborn Cabinets

by **India Powell**

If you are looking to make a big change in the kitchen, you need look no further than your cabinets. Cabinets — perhaps more than any other element — can determine the look of the entire kitchen. And with so many styles and options available, simply switching out (or just refreshing) your current cabinets could totally transform your kitchen.





A photograph of a kitchen featuring light-colored wooden cabinets with frosted glass doors. A microwave is mounted under the upper cabinets on the left. A lamp with a dark shade is visible on the countertop to the right. The text of the article is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box in the lower half of the image.

## Tips from the Experts

**Jeff Dixon** of **I&E Cabinets Inc.** in **Paramount** recommends sitting down with your spouse and talking about your long- and short-term plans before starting any big project. Are you going to stay in the house for a while or sell in a few years? This will help determine the right amount of investment and customization.

Before changing your cabinets, **Bill Leisy** of **Masterworks Construction Services Inc.** in **Signal Hill** says you should think about how you use your kitchen. Do you cook often? How much storage do you need?

**Delia Perez** of **The Kitchen and Bath Factory** in **Signal Hill** says if you are

installing new appliances along with new cabinets, the choices should be made hand in hand. The size and style of the appliances will affect the layout and choice of cabinets.

Don't dismiss the idea of custom cabinetry because you have a limited budget. **Perez**, **Dixon** and **Leisy** say. Most custom cabinet makers offer choices to accommodate varying budgets, and a good designer will work with you to meet your needs.

Think about the entire layout of the kitchen and how the cabinets will work in the space, **Leisy** says. Make a list of things that you do not like about your existing kitchen, such as, traffic flow, storage, size of the room and colors.

If you are on a tight budget, determine which components are most important to you and work with your designer to choose the appropriate items, **Dixon**

says. For example, you may be willing to choose a melamine drawer box in order to have a cherry frame and doors.

Don't make the mistake of skimping on hardware quality when choosing items such as drawer slides and hinges, **Leisy** says. Though it's not usually seen, lesser quality hardware can cause poor operation, which can mean daily frustration.

When considering cost, **Dixon** says, make sure you look not just at the price of the cabinets, but also the overall budget for all items involved, including new appliances, flooring, hardware and permits.

Make sure you choose a reputable, licensed contractor to do the job, **Dixon** says. You can research a company by checking with the Contractors State License Board, [www.cslb.ca.gov](http://www.cslb.ca.gov), as well as the Better Business Bureau.



## Cabinet Construction

Here are some specifics to look for when checking cabinet quality.

**Box:** Look for a 3/4-inch or thicker face frame of solid wood, and plywood cabinet sides, which generally are stiffer, lighter and stronger than particleboard. Thicker sides (1/2- to 3/4-inch) are best, and a box with finished sides will help prevent warping and water damage. The best base cabinets also will have full dust tops or corner gussets, which are triangular pieces of wood that brace the uppermost corners of the box.

**Drawers:** Look for drawers with full extension hidden, under-mounted metal ball-bearing glides with a 100-pound rating. Three-quarters extension, side-mounted metal glides running on nylon rollers with a 75-pound load rating also are acceptable. To test the drawer, open it about an inch; it should close on its own. A solid wood face, 5/8-inch or thicker sides, a plywood bottom panel and strong corner joints that are either doweled or dovetailed also are signs of quality drawer construction. Avoid sides that are simply stapled and glued together.

**Doors:** If the door has frame-and-panel construction, look for a solid frame with doweled or close-fitting tongue-and-groove joinery. The center panel should float inside grooves in the doorframe and be tightly braced by rubber balls or cylinders ensuring the panel can't shift or rattle. Panels that are stapled to the back won't accommodate the natural expansion and contraction of the wood and are more prone to splitting.

**Finish:** The door finish should look and feel smooth and even, without any chips or scratches. (If it's not a distressed finish, but shows dings in the showroom, it probably will show wear in your home.)



## Pick your style

The first step in selecting cabinets is to choose the style you prefer. While two general styles, traditional and contemporary, are predominant, there are countless combinations of woods, stains and glazes. Various door designs, including full and partial overlay, cathedral, square, Shaker and V-groove, add to the possibilities.

It's best to choose a cabinet style that complements the overall design of your house. A few ways to define your style are browsing through cabinet showrooms, flipping through design magazines and visiting builders' model homes. And keep in mind that custom options offer even more choice. You may want to include a couple of cabinets with mullion (glass) doors, or consider a furniture-style cabinet reminiscent of a hutch or buffet piece. One way to make a unique piece like this stand out while blending with the rest of the kitchen is to use a color that is complementary or contrasting to the rest of the cabinets.

## A look at wood

The type of wood you choose is extremely important to the overall look of the room. All woods exhibit color changes over time, and every species has a specific grain, color and density, all of which affect the look of decorative finishes. Here are a few characteristics of some of the more popular woods for cabinetry.

- **Maple** has a tight, smooth, even grain that is predominantly off-white, making it popular for contemporary decor.
- **Cherry** is an elegant, multi-colored hardwood. In its raw state, it has a pinkish-brown hue with occasional shades of white, green, pink or gray. Cherry will darken or "mellow" over time, which is one of its attractions. It is good for traditional and formal decors.
- **Birch** is a medium-density hardwood with a distinct, moderate grain pattern that ranges from straight to wavy or curly. The predominant sapwood color is white to creamy yellow, while the heartwood varies in color from medium or dark brown to reddish-brown. This range in color makes a distinctive statement in cabinets.
- **Hickory** is a strong, open-grained wood and is known for its flowing grain pattern and dramatic color variation. Darker stains will mildly tone these color variations, but these characteristics make hickory a good choice for natural and country decors.



• **Pine** is a close, straight-grained softwood with shades of white, yellow and pink. Pine contains numerous solid knots of varying sizes that contribute to color changes within the wood and make it ideal for country decors.

• **Oak** has a prominent open grain with colors from white to yellow to reddish-brown. Oak is great with casual or country decor, and it mellows as it ages for a soft, seasoned look.

## Quality counts

You can be assured that your cabinets will suffer a lot of wear and tear, so quality is critical. The weight of your dishes alone can cause poorly made shelves and doors to warp and sag, so to avoid this type of damage, thoroughly inspect your cabinets by the following guidelines before you buy.

More low-end pieces and systems are made from particleboard and usually contain no solid wood at all. A slightly higher-quality cabinet will have a solid wood door and a particleboard box. The highest quality can be found in custom-made cabinets that have plywood boxes and doors of any wood.

## Replace vs. reface

If you're happy with the overall layout of your kitchen, then refacing might be an option to consider. Refacing gives your existing cabinet fronts a "facelift" by removing existing doors and drawer fronts and replacing them with new ones.

However, refacing is an option only if the basic cabinetry and drawer boxes are in good shape. Also look at the hinges and drawer glides for wear and tear. In cases where permanent water or physical damage is substantial and repairs become costly, gutting the space and starting from scratch probably is the best solution.



Photos courtesy of Reborn Cabinets

## On the inside

Innovative storage options abound in the form of internal cabinet accessories designed to maximize space and allow for truly customized kitchens. Consider rollout drawers or trays, vertical dividers, or hidden storage next to the stove for cooking utensils—making the "junk drawer" a thing of the past. Many manufacturers offer pull-down cookbook racks, in-drawer knife blocks, hidden trash and recycling bins, corner cabinet lazy Susans, glass-front doors and drawers and other clever storage units.

Cabinets are all about designing your space to suit your specific lifestyle. With the array of options available, it's important to do your research and find the right choice for your kitchen.

For information on cabinets from the Kitchen Cabinet Manufacturers Association (KCMA) and a listing of KCMA members, visit [www.kcma.org](http://www.kcma.org).

Editorial Resources begin on page 42.

## Trend Spot

**Jeff Dixon** of **I&E Cabinets Inc.** in **Paramount** says decorative accents in kitchen cabinets such as fluted columns, rosettes, corbels and crown molding are very popular now.

**Bill Leisy** of **Masterworks Construction Services Inc.** in **Signal Hill** says current hardware trends are European hinges and full ball-bearing drawer slides.

According to **Della Perez** of **The Kitchen and Bath Factory** in **Signal Hill**, plate ledges above the cabinets are waning in popularity; the current trend is to take the cabinets all the way to the ceiling to maximize storage space.

Currently, lighter colored woods such as alder, maple, birch and beech are popular, with maple being the most popular for kitchen cabinets, Dixon says.

Cherry and mahogany also are popular wood choices but tend to be more expensive than other species. Dixon says one way to get the look of a darker wood for less money is to choose a lighter wood with a darker stain.

Matte black, oil rubbed bronze or brushed silver pulls and knobs are hot right now, says they coordinate with black and stainless-steel appliances, Perez says.

Leisy says organization features are hot right now, such as pullout shelves, tilting bins, lazy Susan corner units, special spice storage units and slide-out cutting boards.

A new trend in glass insets for kitchen cabinets is seedy glass, Perez says. It allows light to come through with limited visibility.

Leisy says growing trends for cabinets include using wood from "green" sources, as well as using wood and finishes with low VOCs and off-gassing (such as water-based finishes that don't emit harmful fumes).