



A Practical Guideline in Recognising Kitchen Quality

Cabinets are the key element in kitchen storage. They set the tone of the room's decorative personality and form the backbone of its organisation. For this reason – and because they represent the largest single investment in a new kitchen it is important to study the many options available before making a decision.

Framed Vs Frameless Cabinets

Framed Construction (Exposed Hinges)

Traditionally cabinets mask the raw front edges of each box with a 1-by-2 'face-frame'. Doors and drawers then fit in one of three ways: flush, partially offset, with lip or completely overlaying the frame.

The outer edges of the face-frame can be planed and shaped (called 'scribing') according to individual requirements.

Since the face frame covers up the basic box, thinner or lower-quality wood can be used in its sides.

But the frame takes up space and reduces the size of the openings, so drawers or slide-out accessories must be significantly smaller than the full width of the cabinet – somewhat decreasing storage capacity.

Face frame hinges do not have any adjustments and can therefore fall out of alignment. The hinges are also basic and do not have 'soft close' capabilities and the doors will close by snapping to a magnetic keep.

Frameless Construction (Concealed Hinges)

Modern cabinet construction uses a frameless method where raw edges butt directly against one another. Each cabinet is constructed as an individual solid box. Doors and drawers often fit to within 1/8inch of each other, revealing a thin sliver of the trim. Interior components, such as drawers, can be sized practically to the full dimensions of the box.

Another big difference: frameless cabinets typically have a separate toe space pedestal or plinth. This allows you to set counter heights specifically to your liking.

Frameless construction uses concealed hinges. Modern concealed hinges are more sophisticated in their engineering. Good quality hinges have soft close and adjustment capabilities. The hinge is bored and fixed into the cabinet as well as the door to provide extra strength.

Custom Vs Stock Cabinets

Cabinets are manufactured and sold in different ways. The type you choose will affect the cost, overall appearance, and workability of your kitchen.

Stock cabinets

Buy your kitchen 'off the shelf' and save – if you're careful. Mass-produced, standard-sized cabinets are the least expensive way to go, and they can be a good choice if you clearly understand the cabinetry you need for your kitchen. As the name implies, the range of sizes is limited.

You may see stock lines heavily discounted at some home centres but buying such cabinets can be a lot like doing your own tax returns: you may find you're lacking the knowledgeable help that could clarify the possibilities and save you money.

Custom Stock Cabinets

This type of kitchen cabinetry can often combine the best of both worlds. The cabinets are mass produced similarly to stock cabinets and in this way maintain a lower price bracket but are of a higher quality than standard stock cabinets and offer more design flexibility. In most instances you can vary almost any element of these cabinets to customise them to your specific design. In this way with good quality design you can have a bespoke kitchen customised from stock cabinets.

Custom cabinets.

Truly custom or bespoke kitchen cabinets can create any sized cabinetry with any finishes and fittings and accommodate complexities that can't be handled with stock or semi-custom cabinets. A skilled craftsman can create kitchens that look like fine furniture. Such jobs, however, may cost more than medium-line stock or semi-custom cabinets.



Judging quality

To determine the quality of a cabinet, first look closely at the drawers. They take more of a beating than any other part. You'll pay a premium for such details as solid-wood drawer boxes, dovetail joints, or full-extension soft closing runners. However, this premium will pay dividends long term.



Door hinges are also critical hardware elements. European or 'concealed' hinges are most trouble-free.

Check for adjustability; invisible hinges should be able to be reset and fine-tuned with the cabinets in place.

When looking at melamine cabinets ensure that the edges are 3mm thick Poly Propylene. This will ensure that the edges don't chip and board expand if you have water damage. Melamine comes in a vast range of colours and in a custom kitchen one can choose the melamine interior to match the top, drawers, floors etc.

Most cabinet boxes are made from Melamine Faced Chipboard (MFC). MFC is used for its hardy surface which will withstand years of use as well as its resistance to moisture.

European cabinets will usually be constructed with 15mm thick melamine sides, top and bottom – with 3mm hardboard back. With good quality bespoke cabinets an 18mm thick melamine is used all round to construct the cabinet. The range of melamine colours and timber effects are usually large.

Veneer cabinets are usually available with bespoke cabinets only, however they are sometimes available with customised from stock cabinets. Veneer gives the feeling of luxury, however is less practical than melamine as is less hardwearing. This should be taken into consideration when the kitchen has heavy use.

Design

A quality kitchen will not only look beautiful but stand the test of time. Another element to consider in a quality kitchen is the design. A well designed kitchen, by qualified designers, who will spend the time to understand your needs and wants and create a kitchen that will satisfy these needs, will also be a pleasure to use for many years to come.