

This Old  
**House**

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LESSON ↓



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before you

# redo your kitchen cabinets

Careful cabinet selection can save you thousands on your next kitchen remodel. Shown: Victoria Ivory raised-panel cabinets, in maple, \$123 per linear foot; [cabinetstogo.com](http://cabinetstogo.com)

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**CABINETS TO GO**





These kitchen cabinets look semi-custom but don't cost it. Shown: St. James Mahogany, in maple, \$117 per linear foot\*

# Talking stock

Using ready-made cabinets will save you money without compromising on quality or looks

**KITCHEN REMODELING** is one of the most popular, and desirable, home-improvement projects. It's also one of the most disruptive and expensive upgrades a homeowner can undertake, easily topping \$50,000 when all the installation costs—including flooring, countertops, sinks, lighting, appliances, and cabinetry—are totaled up. Because new cabinets gobble up a big chunk of those renovation dollars, it makes sense to choose the kind that won't break the bank: stock cabinets.

With off-the-shelf units, prices can be as low as \$35 per linear foot and deliveries can take as little as a week. Compare that with custom cabinets, which average \$150 per foot and take up to six months to be built. Stock cabinets are available already assembled, or you can go with flat-pack kits, ready-to-assemble (RTA) units that you put together on-site. All the cabinets shown here are RTA, belying the notion that stock means limited choice and a bottom-rung appearance.

Of course, cost and turnaround times aren't the only things to consider when selecting cabinets. They also need to look good, be made of durable, easy-to-maintain materials, and be sturdy enough to withstand daily use. If they fall short on any score, that sweet purchase price will soon be a bitter reproof. On the following pages, you'll see plenty of handsome, affordable cabinetry and also learn what details to look for as you shop, as well as the best installation techniques. Follow these guidelines and your cabinets will provide years of useful service in your new kitchen.

\*All the products shown on these pages are available through [cabinetsgoto.com](http://cabinetsgoto.com)



## Vitals

### HOW MUCH DO THEY COST?

The price of stock cabinets varies depending on the quality of the materials used to build and finish them. You can find stock cabinets for as little as \$35 per linear foot. But to get top quality, expect to pay between \$88 and \$219 per linear foot. (That's still less than custom cabinetry, which can top out at \$1,400 linear per foot.)

### WHERE TO BUY THEM?

Look online for reputable retailers, such as Cabinets To Go.

### DIY OR HIRE A PRO?

Installing stock cabinets won't be a challenge for a skilled DIYer and a helper. But if speed is of the essence, consider hiring a professional carpenter. He can assemble and install your cabinets quickly and also coordinate the schedules of the other tradespeople involved in a kitchen makeover, including the plumber, electrician, countertop fabricator, flooring installer, and painter.

### HOW LONG DO THEY LAST?

Well-made cabinets that are installed properly and cared for consistently should last as long as your house. Stock-cabinet companies typically offer 10- to 35-year limited warranties on their products.

### WHAT CARE DO THEY NEED?

Not much. Wipe up spills immediately with a soft damp cloth. Avoid cleaners that contain abrasives or leave a residue; they dull the finish.



You need a variety of cabinet sizes to outfit most kitchens. Shown: Palm Beach Dark Chocolate, in birch, \$120 per linear foot

## What to look for in a cabinet company

**1> A good warranty** You want one that protects you if things begin falling apart. Read the fine print.

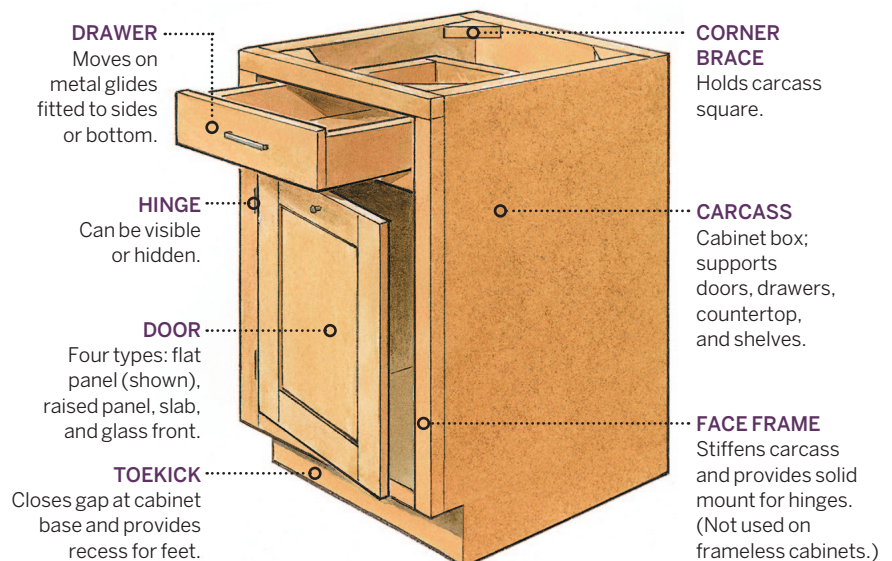
**2> Responsive customer service** Before you hand over your money, check with the Better Business Bureau and read online reviews to see how other customers were treated.

**3> Easy return policies** Ask what happens if a cabinet is damaged en route. Are you on the hook for return shipping and restocking fees? Also, see if you can get the name and phone number of a person to contact if any parts are missing.

ILLUSTRATION: RODICA PRATO

## CABINET ANATOMY

Knowing your cabinet's parts smooths communication



# Hallmarks of cabinet quality

Look for these features when comparing products

**1> Plywood carcasses** Plywood holds screws more securely and resists moisture better than less expensive particleboard or MDF. Look for a thickness of at least ¾ inch. Plywood also makes the best drawer bottoms and panels for flat-panel doors, and, inch for inch, the most sag-resistant shelves.

**2> Solid-wood doors and drawers** Sturdy and easy to repair, wood allows the use of strong, glued joinery, like the dovetails in the drawer box at right. Avoid wood drawers with joints that have been glued and stapled.

**3> Metal hardware** For hinges, drawer slides, and shelf supports, metal offers the greatest strength and longevity. The best slides extend fully, mount underneath the drawer, and close softly.

**4> Durable finishes** Cabinets need tough, easy-to-clean finishes inside and out to guard against dirty hands, airborne grease, scratches, and drips and spills. (See “Finish Choices,” below.)



## FINISH CHOICES

Three ways to protect your cabinet investment

### 1 > PAINT

This is the finish to choose if you want color in your kitchen. It hides the underlying materials but highlights the profiles and shapes of doors and drawers. Easy to clean, especially if it has a protective clear coat.

### 2 > LAMINATE

Comes in two varieties: low-pressure (shown), also known as melamine, and high pressure. Both types show a dark line at the edges and are highly resistant to dirt and stains. Most laminates are applied over particleboard or MDF.

### 3 > CLEAR COAT

A catalyzed varnish or lacquer finish lets the natural beauty of stained wood shine through. Nearly as tough and cleanable as paint.



# Choose your style

The look that cabinets create carries beyond the kitchen into the entire house



*TRADITIONAL*

Celebrates woodworking details, such as raised-panel doors surrounded by intricately detailed frames. Shown: St. Moritz Cherry, in cherry, \$219 per linear foot



*SHAKER*

Sometimes called Craftsman style, its simple, understated look has a modern sensibility that also goes well with traditional decor. Shown: Montauk Cherry, in cherry, \$216 per linear foot



*MODERN*

The sleek, unadorned surfaces have a cool, urban feel. Shown: Metro upper cabinets, in lacquered plywood, \$88 per linear foot; Noce base cabinets, in wood veneer, \$104 per foot

## DOOR STYLES

And nothing does more to define a cabinet's look than its doors and drawers

### 1 > FLAT PANEL

A square-edged frame surrounding a flat, unadorned panel is the hallmark of traditional Shaker- and Craftsman-style cabinets. Best suited to wood and MDF construction and any finish but laminate. Shown: Montauk Cherry, in cherry

### 2 > RAISED PANEL

It also has a frame surrounding a panel, but in this case both elements are adorned with profiles that catch the light and the eye. The result: a rich, elegant look reminiscent of 18th-century Georgian paneling. Best suited to wood or MDF construction and any finish but laminate. Shown: Palm Beach Dark Chocolate, in birch

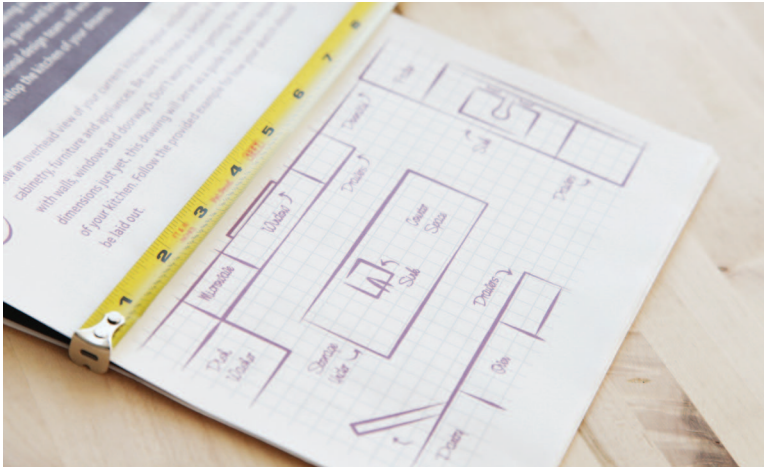
### 3 > SLAB

Typically mounted on frameless modern cabinets. With no crevices to hide dirt, cleaning is a breeze. Shown: Modern Frameless, in Graf (melamine over particleboard)

### 4 > GLASS FRONT

On upper cabinets, a pane of glass allows you to see at a glance what's in a cabinet while displaying objects to maximum advantage. In kitchens with flat- and raised-panel doors, the glass pane simply replaces the wood panel inside the frame. For slab-door cabinetry, the glass is anchored to a unobtrusive metal frame. Shown: Victoria Ivory, in maple





## MAKE A PLAN

A detailed layout allows you to figure out the best arrangement for the available space and serves as the basis for placing your order

**STEP 1: MAKE A SKETCH** If you plan to stay within your kitchen's existing footprint, draw an overhead view (plan) of the perimeter walls on a piece of graph paper. Include the location of doorways, windows, receptacles, and plumbing. Next, using a measuring tape, get the actual width and height (to within  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch) of all the elements on your sketch. Record these measurements on your sketch, as well as which way the doors swing. Also, sketch each wall in front view (elevation) to make it easier to record the heights of windows, doors, and such. If you'd rather not do this yourself, some cabinet companies will take these measurements for you—for a fee.

**STEP 2: MAKE A DESIGN** Armed with these sketches, and any clippings of ideas from magazines or the Internet, make an appointment with a kitchen designer in a store that sells the cabinets you'd like to use. The designer can develop, with your input, a detailed final plan and elevation view showing where each cabinet, appliance, and fixture will go, along with a price and an estimated delivery time. These days, most designers can also provide a 3-D perspective rendering to help you see more clearly exactly what your kitchen will look like when finished.



## Cabinet rules of thumb

Use these guidelines to help your planning

- 1 > Countertop height: 36 inches
- 2 > Countertop to upper cabinets: 18 inches
- 3 > Lower cabinet depth: 24 inches
- 4 > Upper cabinet depth: 12 inches
- 5 > Clearance in front: 42 inches minimum
- 6 > Countertop overhang:  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 inch
- 7 > Kickspace: 4 inches high, 3 inches deep

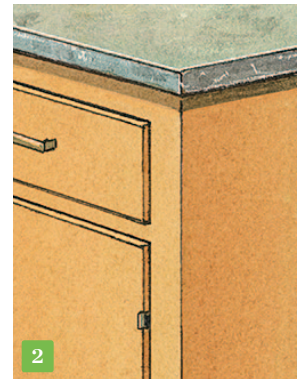
**TIP** For maximum cooking efficiency, the three legs of the work triangle between fridge, sink, and range should add up to between 12 and 26 feet.

## How doors and drawers are mounted



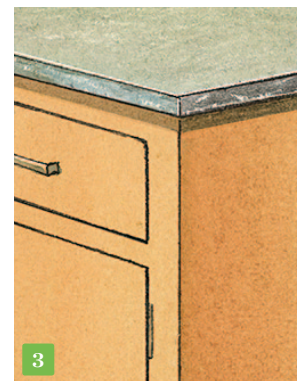
### 1 > FULL OVERLAY

The edges of the doors and drawers line up with the cabinet's side. Typically used with frameless cabinets.



### 2 > PARTIAL OVERLAY

On face-frame cabinets, the lips of the doors and drawers overlap the face frame slightly.



### 3 > INSET

The doors and drawers sit flush within the face frame. Common in vintage-look cabinets.



# Prep the kitchen

## What to do before the new cabinets arrive

**OUT WITH THE OLD** Remove all the appliances, old cabinets, and any trim or molding that will interfere with the installation of the new cabinets. If new flooring is going in, rip out the old floor now.

**IN WITH THE NEW** With the kitchen more or less bare, take the opportunity to add or upgrade receptacles, install wiring for new fixtures, and relocate plumbing pipes. If your kitchen will be getting a new floor, install it now.

**MARK THE WALLS** Using your final elevation plan and a level, draw out in full scale exactly where each cabinet, appliance, and countertop will be placed. Label each of the drawn-out spaces. Find and mark the locations of the studs.



## INSTALLATION BASICS

The process will go faster and your cabinets will look better and hold up longer when you follow these steps

### 1. INSTALL UPPER CABINETS FIRST

That way you have a convenient place to stand or place a stepladder without the base cabinets getting in the way. Use at least four screws per cabinet, with washers, driven into the studs.

### 2. FIND THE FLOOR'S HIGH SPOT

Measure down to the floor from a level line on the wall. Make a mark at the spot where the measurement is shortest. This is where to start installing the base cabinets. The rest of the cabinets will be shimmed up to match.

### 3. DRILL BEFORE SCREWING

Always drill a pilot hole in a cabinet before driving a screw. Doing so helps the screw go in easier and prevents the wood from splitting.

### 4. SCRIBE, DON'T CAULK

If there's an uneven gap where the cabinets meet the wall, don't try to hide it with caulk. Instead, scribe a filler piece to fit exactly. A caulk job will fail eventually; a scribed piece will not.

**TIP** Before installing upper cabinets, fasten a level cleat to the wall where you want their bottom edges to land. The cleat will support the cabinets' back edges as you mount them to the wall. Once the cabinets are hung, simply unscrew the cleat and remove it.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

### TOOLS

#### DRILL/DRIVER

For drilling pilot holes and driving screws.

**LEVEL** For checking each cabinet to make sure it's level and plumb. Also makes a great straightedge to ensure that cabinet faces align flush. A 2-foot level is essential; a 6-footer is best for long spans.

**BAR CLAMPS** For holding cabinets together as they are being fastened. The more, the better.

#### TAPE MEASURE AND PENCIL

No project moves forward without these necessities.

**JIGSAW** For scribing the exposed ends of cabinets and filler strips to match uneven walls and the toe-kicks to match the floor.

### MATERIALS

#### 2½-INCH DECK SCREWS

For mounting the cabinets to the studs.

#### CUP WASHERS

For increasing the load that the deck screws can carry.

#### 1¼-INCH SCREWS

For attaching cabinets to each other. On face-frame cabinets, drive flat-head wood screws through the face frames' edges. On frameless cabinets, drive pan-head screws through the cabinets' sides.

**SHIMS** For making cabinets plumb, level, and square to each other. (If shimming more than ½ inch, rip down strips of lumber instead of using multiple shims.)

**ADHESIVE CAULK** For anchoring the countertop to the base cabinets.

**SANDPAPER** For smoothing edges cut by the jigsaw; 80-grit will do the job.

### WATCH A PRO

See how TOH general contractor Tom Silva installs kitchen cabinets at [thisoldhouse.com/cabinet-install](http://thisoldhouse.com/cabinet-install)



1

## More cabinet options

A kitchen changes completely when cabinets are moved off the wall, topped with wood, or given crowns



2



3

**1 > Islands** Freestanding base cabinets add lots of counter and storage space, even a spot for a sink. Just be sure to leave enough room on all sides—42 inches is ideal—for people to circulate easily around it. Shown: Buckingham Sienna Rope, in birch, \$138 per linear foot

**2 > Butcher-block counters** These counters provide a warmer, more forgiving alternative to granite. (A glass is likely to survive being dropped on wood.) And it's easy to trim to fit against uneven walls. A monthly coat of mineral oil on the top and edges seals the wood against water and stains. Protect it from knife nicks by always using a cutting board. Shown: 1½-inch-thick birch, 36 by 76 inches, \$250

**3 > Crown molding** This classic accent dresses up the square top edges of traditional and Shaker-style cabinets. Shown: Victoria Crown Ivory, \$110 per linear foot

## Useful Accessories

Here are a few of the many ways that cabinets can be customized for maximum utility



### PULL-OUT WASTE BASKET

Two bins, one for garbage and one for recycling, slide out on hidden full-extension glides. \$130



### CUTLERY INSERT

This drop-in organizer, made of solid maple, keeps fingers safe from sharp blades. \$20



### DOOR-MOUNT SPICE RACK

Placed near the food-prep area, this steel-and-maple holder puts your collection of herbs and spices within easy reach. \$35



# The Value OF A Kitchen Remodel

Presented by: **CABINETS TO GO**  
...Premium Quality Cabinets FOR LESS!!



\*The national average for associated costs and return on investment when remodeling your kitchen.

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