

Walk into almost any renovated home in Los Angeles and you can usually tell, within a few seconds, whether the cabinetry was pulled from a catalog or designed for that specific room. The same is true of built-in benches, wall units, and media centers. They either feel like part of the architecture, or they look like an afterthought.

That is where a good cabinet maker comes in, and where the line between “cabinetry” and “furniture” starts to blur.

For homeowners in Los Angeles, especially in neighborhoods with tricky floor plans, older bungalows, or luxury high rises with strict rules, it is natural to wonder: can a cabinet maker also build custom furniture, or do you need a separate furniture maker?

The short answer is that many cabinet makers absolutely can, but it helps to understand what they actually do, how they differ from a general carpenter, and what that means for cost, quality, and your overall project.

What a cabinet maker really does

At its core, cabinet making is a specialized branch of woodworking focused on built-in and fitted storage. A cabinet maker is trained to design, build, and often install items that have to do more than just look good. They must fit precisely into a space, carry real loads, open and close smoothly, and keep functioning for decades.

When clients ask, “What is a cabinet maker?” or “What does a cabinet maker do?” the day to day answer looks something like this:

A cabinet maker measures, designs, and builds custom cabinets, vanities, closets, and built-ins to fit specific spaces and uses. They select materials, engineer joinery, manage hardware choices, finish surfaces, and usually coordinate with contractors, designers, and installers to make sure everything lines up.

In practice, that can include:

A full set of custom kitchen cabinets for a Hollywood Hills renovation.

A modern floating vanity and linen tower for a West Los Angeles bathroom. A wall-to-wall entertainment unit for a Downtown loft. Custom closet systems in a Brentwood condo where every inch matters.

The key distinction is precision and integration with the space. Unlike most standalone furniture, cabinets and built-ins have to work around plumbing, electrical, appliances, and occasionally out-of-square walls from the 1920s.

Cabinet maker vs carpenter: why the difference matters

Clients often ask, “What is the difference between a carpenter and a cabinet maker?” since both work with wood and both might show up on a remodeling job.

A carpenter, in residential work, typically focuses on the structure of a building: framing walls, setting doors and windows, installing baseboards and crown moulding, doing rough and finish carpentry. They are indispensable on the job site, and some finish carpenters are excellent at building simple built-ins.

A cabinet maker focuses on detailed, precise, typically shop-built pieces. Instead of working mostly in the field, they spend much of their time in a workshop with table saws, edge banders, CNC routers, and finishing equipment, then bring finished or semi-finished units to the site for installation.

There is overlap. Some carpenters develop strong cabinetry skills and some cabinet makers started as carpenters. But if you want high end custom kitchen cabinets or an intricate media wall with integrated LED lighting and hidden storage, a dedicated cabinet maker is usually the safer bet.

So, can a cabinet maker build custom furniture?

Yes, many cabinet makers can build custom furniture, and they do it all the time in Los Angeles. The important nuance is the type of furniture you need.

Cabinet makers are especially well suited for:

Built-in or wall anchored furniture such as media walls, bookcases, window seats, mudroom cubbies, banquettes, and daybeds integrated into alcoves.

Storage heavy furniture such as dressers, credenzas, sideboards, file cabinets, and wall beds. Architectural furniture such as room dividers, bar units, headboards with integrated storage, and office workstations designed to fit a specific room.

These pieces live right on the border between furniture and millwork. They often require the same skills and tools as kitchen cabinets: precise casework, durable hardware, veneering, and finishing that can handle daily use.

Where a cabinet maker may or may not be the right fit is highly sculptural or heirloom furniture, like a hand carved rocking chair, a live edge slab dining table, or an experimental lounge chair. Some cabinet makers absolutely have that skill set, especially if they came from a fine furniture background, but many focus on casework and built-ins.

In Los Angeles, it is common for one shop to handle both custom cabinets and items like dining tables, floating benches, or matching coffee tables so that all the wood tones and finishes in an open concept space feel cohesive. If you care about that consistency, a cabinet maker who will design the kitchen, the island, and a matching built-in banquette can be a strong choice.

When a cabinet maker is the right choice for custom furniture

A good way to decide is to look at how the furniture interacts with the room.

If the piece is going wall to wall, floor to ceiling, or needs to wrap around an odd corner, a cabinet maker is usually the right professional. They already think in terms of scribing to out-of-level floors, hiding wiring, coordinating with HVAC, and anchoring securely to studs.

If you need a media unit that spans 14 feet in a Los Feliz living room, with a mix of open shelving, doors, drawers, sound bar integration, and removable panels for wiring, a cabinet maker is ideal.

If you want a simple but well built walnut dining table that matches the kitchen cabinets, a cabinet maker can often build it and finish it to match, or coordinate with a furniture specialist to do so.

If you are commissioning a sculptural chair that belongs in an art gallery, a dedicated furniture maker or studio might be a better fit.

The overlap is wide, but the mindset is different. Cabinet makers prioritize precise fit, function, and efficient fabrication. Furniture makers often prioritize tactile experience, proportion, and detail on every visible edge. The best shops in Los Angeles know where they excel and are honest about that.

Stock vs semi-custom vs custom cabinets: what you are really choosing

Before you decide how far to push the “custom” side, it helps to clarify the difference between stock, semi-custom, and fully custom cabinets, especially for kitchen projects.

Here is a simple comparison that reflects how these options usually play out for Los Angeles clients:

- Stock cabinets
 - Pre sized, mass produced boxes ordered from a catalog. Limited door styles, colors, and dimensions.
 - Lowest cost per linear foot, often used in rental units or quick flips.
 - Short lead time if in stock.
 - Fit issues are handled with fillers and compromises.
- Semi custom cabinets
 - Based on standard cabinet lines but with some flexibility in widths, depths, and finishes.
 - Good middle ground on cost and customization.
 - Popular with mid range remodels and many design build firms.
 - Still constrained by the manufacturer’s catalog, so tricky spaces may require workarounds.
- Fully custom cabinets
 - Designed and built from scratch to your dimensions and layout. Any style, material, or special feature is possible within your budget.
 - Typically highest cost, but can solve problems stock options cannot.
 - Ideal for narrow galley kitchens, older homes with odd walls, or high end residences where fit and finish matter.
 - You are working directly with a cabinet maker or custom shop, not a catalog.

When people ask “Are custom cabinets better than stock cabinets?” the honest answer is that they can be, if you value flexibility, long term durability, and a tailored layout. But you can still get very good quality from thoughtful semi custom lines, especially when paired with a skilled installer.

What custom cabinets cost in Los Angeles

Costs in Los Angeles run higher than many other markets, mostly due to labor, overhead, and finish expectations. So questions like “How much does a custom cabinet maker cost?” or “How much do custom kitchen cabinets cost in Los Angeles?” always require some context.

For a rough ballpark, for a full custom kitchen in Los Angeles:

A small to mid sized kitchen with decent quality custom cabinets might start in the range of about \$800 to \$1,200 per linear foot of cabinetry, including design, fabrication, finishing, and basic installation.

For larger kitchens, premium hardwoods, specialty finishes, and a lot of internal accessories, it can climb to \$1,500 per linear foot or higher.

That means a modest condo kitchen might see cabinetry costs in the \$18,000 to \$30,000 range, while a larger high end kitchen in areas like Pacific Palisades or Beverly Hills can easily land between \$40,000 and \$80,000 just for cabinets, sometimes more.

A question that often follows is, "How much should I pay for custom cabinets?" The realistic answer is that you should pay enough to get the build quality and design support you need, without spending money on features that do not matter to you. If you do not cook much, but care about clean lines and durability, you might focus on high quality boxes and hinges, and keep the finish simple.

For smaller projects such as a bathroom vanity, a wall unit, or a single built in, many Los Angeles cabinet makers will quote by project rather than linear foot. A custom bathroom vanity may be in the range of \$3,000 to \$8,000 depending on size, material, and finish. A wall to wall media unit with integrated lighting might range from \$8,000 to \$25,000 or more.

Regarding the cabinet maker's own fees, some charge a separate design fee or retainer that is later credited toward the build. Shop time might effectively work out at \$100 to \$200 per labor hour when you factor overhead, finishing, and installation, although this is usually wrapped into a project price rather than billed openly.

Why custom cabinets are expensive, and whether they are worth it

"Why are custom cabinets so expensive?" is a fair question. The answer has several layers.

First, labor in Los Angeles is not cheap. Skilled cabinet makers, finishers, and installers command good wages. A single kitchen can represent hundreds of shop hours, plus finishing and installation.

Second, material quality makes a difference. High grade plywood, solid hardwood face frames and doors, quality veneers, and reliable hardware like Blum hinges and slides all cost far more than economy materials.

Third, there is not much scale. Your project might be the only one of its exact type that shop ever builds. That means setup time, engineering, and one off problem solving.

So, are custom cabinets worth the money? For many Los Angeles homeowners, yes. Well designed custom cabinets can:

Make a difficult kitchen work smoothly.

Unlock storage in small spaces where stock cabinets fail. Elevate a home's overall perceived quality, which helps at resale. Last decades longer than cheaper alternatives.

A well built custom kitchen can realistically last 20 to 30 years with proper care, sometimes longer. That goes directly to the question, "What is the average lifespan of custom cabinets?" There is no fixed age where they suddenly fail, but quality custom work often outlives countertops and appliances.

From a financial perspective, "Are custom cabinets a good investment?" and "Do custom cabinets add value to [Luxury Kitchen Design Los Angeles](#) a home?" depends on your market segment. In higher end neighborhoods, buyers expect cabinetry that matches the price point. In mid range neighborhoods, tasteful, functional cabinets can help a home sell faster and reduce buyer objections. You might not recoup 100 percent of every dollar, but you usually avoid the discount that buyers apply when they see cheap or worn out cabinets.

Is it cheaper to buy cabinets or have them made?

If you are purely chasing the lowest up front price, buying stock cabinets is almost always cheaper than having them made. Big box stores and national lines benefit from mass production and standardized designs.

The better question is total cost of ownership and fit. Is it cheaper to buy cabinets or have them made when you factor wasted space, potential rework, and longevity?

If stock cabinets leave big dead zones, require lots of fillers, or force you into an awkward layout that makes the kitchen less pleasant to use, the “savings” might not feel worth it. On the other hand, if your kitchen is simple and standard, good quality semi custom might be the smartest value choice.

The cheapest way to get custom cabinets is usually to simplify choices. Keep to a straightforward door style, avoid exotic veneers, focus on a clean painted or stained finish, and minimize complex internal accessories. Some Los Angeles cabinet makers also offer financing or staged payments, so if you ask, “Do custom cabinet makers offer financing?” the answer is sometimes yes, especially for larger projects. Often, they partner with third party financing rather than carrying it themselves.

Regarding markup, “What is the markup on custom cabinets?” often sits in the range of 30 to 50 percent over raw material and subcontractor costs once you account for design, shop overhead, equipment, rent, and profit. That may sound high until you factor how many hours and hidden costs go into each job.

Materials: plywood, MDF, and the best wood for custom cabinets

Most clients focus on door styles and colors, but what you do not see matters more.

When they ask, “What material is best for kitchen cabinets?” the reality is that a well built cabinet box generally uses either high quality plywood or MDF (medium density fiberboard), sometimes a combination.

Plywood cabinets use layers of wood veneer glued in alternating directions, creating a strong, relatively light, and stable panel. Better shops use plywood with minimal voids and high quality face veneers. Plywood tends to hold screws well and is more forgiving of moisture.

MDF is denser and smoother, ideal for painted finishes. It can be heavier and more vulnerable to water if not properly sealed, but it resists warping and provides a very uniform surface. Many cabinet makers use MDF for painted doors and panels.

So, “Are plywood cabinets better than MDF?” depends on the application. Plywood is usually preferred for cabinet boxes, especially in kitchens and bathrooms. MDF is a strong choice for painted doors, side panels, and decorative elements. A mixed construction often performs best.

For visible wood, “What is the best wood for custom cabinets?” is partly aesthetic and partly practical. Common choices in Los Angeles include:

White oak (especially rift or quarter sawn) for modern projects with subtle grain.

Walnut for rich, darker, high end looks. Maple for smooth, light toned cabinets, very common under painted finishes. Alder or cherry for warmer traditional or transitional kitchens.

Most doors are not solid slabs of these species throughout. Instead, you may have a solid frame with a panel that is veneered plywood or MDF, which keeps the door more stable across the seasons.

Regarding thickness, “How thick should custom cabinet wood be?” usually translates to box construction. Quality cabinet boxes often use 5/8 inch or 3/4 inch plywood or MDF for sides and shelves. Some budget lines drop to 1/2 inch. In custom shops serving the Los Angeles market, 3/4 inch is common for strength and perceived quality, especially on shelves that carry heavy dinnerware.

Framed vs frameless, finishes, and style choices

Two structural styles dominate cabinet construction: framed and frameless.

Framed cabinets use a face frame attached to the front of the box, with doors mounted to that frame. This is traditional in American construction and can allow slightly more forgiveness on less than perfect walls. It also provides a particular look around door gaps.

Frameless cabinets, sometimes called European style, skip the face frame. Doors mount directly to the box, creating a cleaner, typically more modern look with slightly better access inside the cabinet. Many Los Angeles modern kitchens use frameless construction.

Are framed or frameless cabinets better? Neither is inherently superior. Frameless often gives you a bit more interior space, especially on drawers, and smoother lines. Framed can be more forgiving in older houses with wonky walls and can support certain historic or classic styles better.

The question, "What is the best finish for kitchen cabinets?" is also nuanced. Popular options include:

Conversion varnish, which is very durable and common in higher end shops, but harder to touch up on site.

High quality lacquer systems, which give a beautiful finish but require a controlled spray environment. Oil or hardwax finishes for certain natural wood looks, more common on furniture than heavy use kitchen cabinets.

Painted cabinets remain extremely popular in Los Angeles, especially whites, off whites, and soft greys. People often ask, "Are white cabinets going out of style?" White as a pure trend may ebb and flow, but a well executed white kitchen tends to age gracefully because it reads clean and bright. The real risk is not the color, but low quality paint or poor prep that chips and yellows.

"What is the most popular kitchen cabinet style?" shifts with time, but right now in Los Angeles, flat panel and simple Shaker remain dominant, often with cleaner, slimmer rails for a more contemporary feel.

If you are thinking ahead to resale and wondering, "What is the best cabinet color for resale value?" neutral tones generally win: white, warm whites, light grey, and wood tones that are not too orange or too dark.

How custom cabinets are made, from measure to installation

The process of making custom cabinets is one of the best reasons to work with a local cabinet maker, especially if you also want custom furniture pieces tied into the same design.

Here is what the process typically looks like in Los Angeles:

First, the cabinet maker (or their designer) measures the space, often more than once, and notes plumbing, electrical, and structural constraints. If walls are not yet built, they may work from architectural plans, but final measurements usually wait until framing is in place.

Second, they create drawings or 3D models. This stage answers practical questions like how drawers clear door casings, where trash pull outs go, and how appliances integrate. It also sets door style, finishes, and hardware.

Third, once drawings are approved, fabrication starts in the shop. Full sheets of plywood or MDF are cut, edges are banded, joinery is cut, and boxes are assembled. Doors and drawers are built, sanded, and prepared for finishing.

Fourth, finishing happens, often in a spray booth. Painted and stained finishes receive multiple coats with sanding in between. This stage is critical for both durability and appearance.

Fifth, installation begins on site. Boxes are leveled, attached to walls, and joined together. Doors and drawers are hung and adjusted. Crown, fillers, and panels are put in place. A skilled installer can make average cabinets look good, and a poor installer can ruin even the best custom shop's work.

For timing, “How long does it take to make custom cabinets?” depends on shop workload and project size. In Los Angeles, a typical lead time from final approval to delivery can run from 6 to 12 weeks, sometimes longer in busy seasons.

Then, “How long does a custom kitchen take to install?” often ranges from several days for a small kitchen to a couple of weeks for a large, complex one. That does not include countertop templating and installation, which usually add at least another 1 to 3 weeks.

Regarding modifications, “Can custom cabinets be modified after installation?” Minor adjustments are expected, like tweaking hinges or adding an extra shelf. Significant changes, such as altering cabinet widths or adding new sections, can be more complicated. Once cabinets are scribed to floors and walls and permanently installed, changes usually require new parts or rework back in the shop, which can be costly.

Kitchen permits, remodeling, and refacing in Los Angeles

Homeowners often ask, “Do I need a permit for kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles?” The answer depends on scope.

Simply replacing cabinets in the same layout, without moving plumbing, gas, or electrical, may not require a building permit in some jurisdictions, but local rules and condo HOA rules can differ. The moment you move walls, change electrical circuits, alter gas lines, or significantly rework plumbing, permits are almost always required. Many general contractors will handle this for you.

As for overall remodel costs, “How much does it cost to remodel kitchen cabinets in Los Angeles?” can vary widely. If you keep your layout, choose mid range semi custom cabinets, and avoid moving utilities, you might see cabinetry replacement and related work in the tens of thousands. Full gut renovations with custom cabinets, new floors, lighting, and high end appliances can easily run into six figures.

When budgets get tight, clients often ask, “Is it cheaper to refinish or replace kitchen cabinets?” and “Is cabinet refacing worth it?”

Refinishing keeps existing boxes and doors, and involves sanding, priming, and painting or staining what you already have. It is usually cheaper than replacement if the underlying cabinets are structurally sound and decently constructed. You keep the same layout and door style footprint.

Refacing keeps the cabinet boxes but replaces doors and drawer fronts and applies new veneer or panels to visible surfaces. It can transform appearance without the cost of full replacement. “How much does it cost to reface kitchen cabinets?” depends heavily on door style and material, but in Los Angeles it is common to see refacing projects in the low to mid tens of thousands for an average kitchen.

Refacing is worth considering when your layout works well, your boxes are solid, and you simply dislike the style. If boxes are particleboard and failing, or the layout is poor, that money may be better put toward new cabinets.

Related work: countertops, vanities, and more

“Do cabinet makers also do countertops?” The answer is: sometimes. Many Los Angeles cabinet shops coordinate closely with stone fabricators or solid surface specialists. Some have in house teams that can handle wood tops or butcher block, but most will bring in specialized partners for quartz, natural stone, or porcelain.

“Do cabinet makers do bathroom vanities?” Almost all custom cabinet makers do. Vanities, linen cabinets, and medicine cabinets are a natural extension of kitchen work, and many clients prefer having one shop handle all of it so finishes match.

That circles back to the original question, “Can a cabinet maker make furniture?” When the cabinet maker controls the overall interior millwork, it becomes straightforward for them to build matching floating shelves, a bench at the dining table that ties into the island finish, or a media console in the living room that echoes the kitchen doors.

How to find a good cabinet maker in Los Angeles

The question “Who is the best cabinet maker in Los Angeles?” does not have a single answer. The best for a sleek Hollywood Hills modern might not be the best for a Craftsman restoration in Pasadena. Quality, style, and communication matter as much as raw skill.

When clients ask, “How do I find a good cabinet maker?” and “What should I look for in a cabinet maker?” I suggest focusing less on online rankings and more on work you can actually see.

First, ask to see recent projects similar to yours, in person if possible. Photos help, but they hide a lot. In a real kitchen you can feel the door action, inspect corners, and see how the cabinets meet the walls and ceiling.

Second, pay attention to how they talk about materials and construction. Someone who can explain the trade offs between plywood and MDF, framed vs frameless, and specific finishes likely understands their craft.

Third, ask about their process from design through installation, and who handles each step. If they outsource installation, make sure the installer is experienced with their product.

Fourth, ask for references and actually follow up. A past client can tell you how the shop handled delays, change orders, and small issues after installation.

Clients often wonder, “How do you know if a cabinet maker is good?” A few signs include consistent gaps and reveals in photos, clean interiors, robust hardware, and clear explanations of why they build the way they do.

Here are thoughtful questions to ask during your first or second meeting:

- What materials do you use for cabinet boxes and doors, and why?
- Can you walk me through how my cabinets will be finished and how I should maintain them?
- Who will be installing the cabinets, and how do you handle site conditions like uneven floors or out of plumb walls?
- How long will my project take from final approval to installation, and what could delay that timeline?
- What kind of warranty or service do you provide if something goes wrong in the first few years?

Their answers will tell you as much about their professionalism as their shop tour.

Measuring, planning, and working together

Many homeowners like to pre measure before talking to a shop. “How do I measure for custom cabinets?” Practically, you want wall to wall dimensions, ceiling height, window and door locations, and depths of any obstacles. Measure from several points, because walls are rarely perfectly straight. A rough plan helps guide early conversations, but a reputable cabinet maker will always do their own detailed measurements before fabrication.

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As you refine your scope, talk early about budget. If your goal is fully custom cabinets that integrate with custom furniture pieces like built in seating or a media wall, be upfront about what you are comfortable investing. A good shop can help prioritize where custom work adds the most value and where you might pair it with semi custom or stock solutions.

A cabinet maker who understands the Los Angeles market can also advise on permits, coordination with general contractors, and realistic lead times given local conditions and supply chains.

Finally, do not underestimate the value of fit between you and the professional. You are trusting this person or team with a large, visible part of your home. When communication is clear and expectations match, the end result is far more likely to feel not only beautiful, but truly tailored to the way you live.