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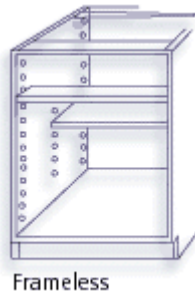
PRODUCTS & MATERIALS: THE SCOOP

CABINETS: YOUR OPTIONS

The Box



Framed



Frameless

First you should understand what lies behind the cabinet door—the cabinet box. Your response may be a smug, Duh! But cabinet construction can get complicated rather quickly. There's more going on than you might think. It breaks down by:

- Framed construction
- Frameless construction

In framed cabinets, wood joinery holds the parts together. Horizontal rails and vertical stiles secure the door to the box. In frameless cabinets, special hardware fittings do both jobs. Because no rails or stiles block the way, frameless cabinets offer slightly easier access to their interiors.

You might be surprised to learn that solid wood rarely forms the cabinet box. It's more often used in face frames and doors than in the larger side panel parts. That's because it tends to warp—a special concern in the kitchen where the moisture level changes frequently. But in the doors, using multiple strips of lumber in a variety of sizes can reduce the warp factor. A "floating" panel might also be used. The panel floats because

instead of being glued to the doorframe, its edges sit between wooden grooves, allowing the wood to move more freely with changes in the kitchen's humidity.

Box materials typically contain wood chips, other wood by-products, and synthetic additives to make them especially strong and warp resistant.

Your options for box material include:

- Plywood
- Particleboard or furniture-grade flake board
- Medium-density fiberboard

All have solid reputations for durability and screw-holding power, particularly plywood. Medium-density fiberboard has gained a following for its ability to be formed into door and drawer heads and other decorative features. Furniture-grade flakeboard offers a stronger alternative than particleboard, which you'll pay the least for.

Often the door and box will be constructed of different materials. A cabinet door might be solid maple and the sides plywood covered with a maple veneer. The same finish would be applied to both, unifying the look. Or you may decide you want different tones on the door and the sides to add contrast.

You'll want to make sure you know if the finish you like requires a certain base material, and you'll want to check out examples of your manufacturer's work. Beware of staples! Staples will pull apart. You want cabinets with thick panels that have been corner blocked and glued or fastened with screws.

How the cabinet door fits over the cabinet box determines its basic type.

Your options for door type include:

- Inset
- Lipped
- Partial overlay
- Full overlay

Inset doors sit within the rails and stiles and lay flush with the front edges of the cabinet box. Truly inset doors are only available with a framed construction, but designers can achieve the same look using vertical pilasters on frameless cabinets.

Lipped doors are routed with a slight wooden groove to fit over the face frame. Partial overlay doors somewhat conceal the frame, while full overlay doors have less than one-eighth of an inch between them. Frameless cabinets have full overlay doors but some framed cabinets have them as well. You can tell for sure whether a cabinet is framed or frameless by opening a door and checking for rails and stiles.

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CABINETS: YOUR OPTIONS

Door Styles



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Besides door type, you'll want to consider different door shapes. One cabinet manufacturer may offer hundreds of door styles in an endless array of finishes.

Your options for door style include:



Recessed panel



Raised panel



Curved panel



Beadboard panel



Flat slab

While the door's type and shape may supply the backbone, its color and decoration add rhythm and harmony. A flat slab, oak door stained with a light color, for example, will sing a much different tune than a flat slab, MDF door covered in stainless steel.

Like the finest furniture, the highest quality cabinets are finished in multiple steps, which might include hand sanding, rubbing with steel wool, and hand buffing. Compare it to painting: You want to apply several thin layers so that if it chips it won't all peel off. The multiple steps also help create a smoother texture and a deeper color.

Your options for how to decorate the door include:

- Stain
- Wood veneer
- Paint
- Polyester
- Plastic laminate
- Stainless steel
- Glass

Stain

Manufacturers use all different names for stain colors. One company's "amber" may not look anything like another's with the same name. Think in terms of tone. Choose the wood you prefer and then decide whether a stain with a light, medium, or dark tone will best achieve the effect you're after.

Your choice of wood will have the most impact on the cabinet's ultimate look. If you want a light look, for example, you might start with a light wood like ash, beech, birch, elm, oak, maple, or chestnut. In the mid-range, consider cherry with a natural finish. Or you can stain maple to be darker than its natural color.

For a dark kitchen, you'd want to start with a wood that has a little color to it. But don't start with a dark wood like walnut and try to lighten it. You can always darken the color of lighter woods, but it's hard to go the other way.

You can also consider clear finishes rather than stains on cherry, walnut, and other woods rich in color, such as butternut, mahogany, rosewood, and teak.

A stain shouldn't be confused with a finish. A finishing coat is applied over the stain to protect it. Typically, a stain will be coated with a catalytic-conversion varnish to give it durability and sheen—whether matte or high-gloss or anything in-between. When it's baked on, the varnish catalyzes into a hard, protective finish. You don't want to top the stain with oil, lacquer, or wax because those substances won't hold up and will yellow over time. Glazes can be used as an overcoat to achieve certain effects, such as an antique look.

Wood veneer

Wood veneer is made from peeling strips of wood off a tree like you pull paper towels off a roll. As a result, it's much thinner than solid wood and is typically applied to plywood or particleboard to give it strength. It has two main advantages over solid wood: It can cost less and its grain can be more consistent.

You can stain wood veneer to match a solid wood door and use it on the side panels. Make sure both the veneer and the door are made from the same wood species.

Wood veneer also makes an attractive option for cabinet interiors visible through glass doors.

Paint

With paint you certainly have an endless palette of colors to choose from. You can also achieve a range of special effects. Paint can look smooth and glossy or it can be sanded, rubbed off, or dented with rocks to look distressed. But you should be aware up front that hairline cracks will appear at the joints of solid wood doors as the wood expands and contracts. You can avoid cracking if you apply paint to MDF, a solid material that doesn't move with humidity changes.

Polyester

It isn't that big of a leap to cabinets from cars, on which this finish has been commonly applied. The same durability and quality needed on the road is also appreciated in the kitchen. There, polyester can be found on appliances as well as modern-style cabinets, in a glossy or matte finish. It fills the pores of the door more fully than paint, giving it a solid look and feel.

The technique might involve more than 20 steps of sanding and finishing. There's even a step where a special topcoat is applied in a dust-free (!) room. The finish goes through numerous oven curings and hand sandings with extremely fine abrasives. Special glazes and polishes applied at the end help achieve the final, mirror-like sheen.

Perhaps not surprisingly, all that elbow grease makes this one of the more expensive finish choices.

Plastic laminate



Plastic laminate comes in all kinds of colors, patterns, and textures. It's durable, stain-resistant, and easy to clean. But it can be hard to repair if it chips because it's made of layers—sheets of kraft paper (like that used in grocery bags), a decorative paper, and a plastic coating. The layers are all pressed together under high heat.

The kraft paper leaves a brown edge that can be covered and dressed up with a stainless steel, brass, or wood trim. Solid-color laminate offers a slightly more expensive alternative that uses plastic sheets of the same color throughout so that no dark edges show.

Stainless steel

Stainless steel can be found on just about every design element in the kitchen these days. On cabinets, it's typically formed around an inner core material to give it substance and keep it from sounding tinny. While you can get a very sleek look from stainless steel, it shows fingerprints and scratches.

Glass

Glass presents yet another option for the look of the cabinet door. Mixing glass in with other door fronts in the kitchen can add interest to any design, particularly to stock cabinets that might otherwise lack unique touches. Some glasses are ribbed or etched so that the colors—not the messy details—of the dishes or cereal boxes sitting behind them show through. The ribbing may be vertical, horizontal, or diagonal. Other glass doors may be clear or colored

Drawers

The drawers will likely be made of solid wood or MDF; have framed or flat slab fronts; and be held together with either dovetail, mortise-and-tenon, or butt joints.

Your options for drawer slides include:

- Full extension
- Ball bearing
- Track and roller
- Wood

Full-extension slides attach to the bottom or the sides of the drawer and provide full access to the drawer interior. Their ball-bearing system adds stability and strength. Stronger versions can be used to store heavier items, such as files or cookware.



Ball-bearing slides attach to the bottom of the drawer sides. Usually standard on high-end cabinets, they offer smooth, quiet operation. Their concealed runners mounted to the bottom of the drawer don't get as dirty as those mounted on the

side. They allow for a wider drawer box with a more usable interior space.

Track-and-roller slides attach to the drawer sides. Their epoxy-coated steel tracks and nylon rollers offer quiet operation but are less stable than ball-bearing ones.

Wooden slides work as slots in the drawer sides or bottoms and move the drawer along a wood runner. This option has fallen out of favor because the drawers tend to stick as the wood expands and contracts

Pulls & Knobs

Even the most beautiful, most expensive cabinets won't be worth much if you can't get into them. That's where the hardware comes in. But it doesn't have just a practical value. Regarded as the jewelry of the cabinets, it's a detail that can make a strong statement.

You'll find hardware in all different kinds of materials and finishes, from brushed chrome to plastic to ceramic to glass to forged iron, and in all shapes and sizes. You'll want to decide if you want your pulls to blend in with the cabinets or become a decorative accent. Or you can make them virtually disappear: You can select a touch-and-release style or doors that hang slightly below the cabinet so that all you do is pull on the lower edge to open them.

Practically speaking, make sure your choice:

- Doesn't pinch your fingers
- Attaches firmly to the cabinet
- Is in proportion with the size of the cabinet doors
- Is easy to grasp, especially if located above the refrigerator or vent hood



Accessories

You don't have to be an organized person to have an organized kitchen. The right interiors and shelving accessories can do most of the work for you.

Spending some time up front thinking about how you use your kitchen and what space and storage needs you have can save you time not only during the installation of your new kitchen but also during the preparations for your first dinner party in the new space.

With a little planning now, you won't have to think twice about where to find the ice tongs or the corkscrew. Consider everything that's in your kitchen now and where you would put it in your newly configured space. Note on your new-kitchen blueprint what you plan to store in each cabinet and drawer.

Don't be content with just adding rollout shelves in your base cabinets. Check out the growing number of options for how to make drawers give you more storage space. They're being used now to store plates, pots and pans, and snacks—not to mention all the appliances, including refrigerators, wine chillers, and dishwashers, that now come as drawer units.

You can also gain storage space with the narrow, 4-inch-to-10-inch wide slide-in shelves that look like posts when they're pushed in. They can give you extra room without taking up whole sections of the cabinets. They can hold spices or soups by the range, cleaning supplies by the sink, or wine bottles by the glassware.

And remember that the standard dimensions for cabinets are becoming less and less so. Find out from your designer or cabinetmaker how much you can push it. Maybe you can add 6 inches of storage to your base cabinets, making them 30 inches instead of the standard 24 inches deep. Or you could make your upper cabinets a foot taller and add 3 to 4 inches to their standard 12- to 13-inch depth.

Your options for storage solutions include:

Shelves

- Rollout shelves
- Foldout banks of shelves
- Swingout shelves

Baskets

- Pullout wire baskets
- Under-the-sink pullout wire baskets

Bins

- Pullout trash and recycling bins



- Trash receptacles under butcher blocks with cutout holes
- Grain storage bins

Drawer dividers

- Cutlery compartments
- Spice drawers
- Utensil dividers

Other

- Tiltout panel in front of sink
- Lazy Susan shelving
- Corner wall cabinet with open shelving
- Diagonal wall cabinet with rotary shelves
- A spice door rack
- Vertical slots for trays and baking sheets
- Open shelving for decorative or commonly used items
- Undercabinet wine rack
- Plate rack over sink

Cabinetmakers

Once you get some ideas for the style of your cabinets, look for a manufacturer that can deliver your dream door. The main types are:

- Custom
- Semi-custom
- Stock

The decision often comes down to:

- Your design requirements
- Your time frame
- Your budget

Perhaps not surprisingly, you'll wait longer and pay more for special sizes, finishes, and decoration. Custom offers the most choices; semi-custom provides some flexibility in the cabinets' dimensions and finishes; and what you see is what you get with stock.

Be sure to consider who will be using the kitchen. As one cabinet expert noted, "When the kids pull the drawers out and use them as a ladder to the cookie jar, they won't last long whether they're custom or stock."

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