ATLANTA
home improvement
www.yourhomeimprovementmag.com ■ APRIL 2008
Great ideas and resources for your home and garden

Cupboard Class
A look at the latest trends in cabinetry

Clean and Green
Bathrooms with environmentally friendly flair

Ground Floor
Choose the floor coverings that are right for your home

Room with a *View*
Create a unique and usable outdoor living space

green reads >> space savers >> HD TV >> vegetable gardening >> resources and more

BEHIND CLOSED doors

by Julie Edwards

Essential elements of cabinetry

No longer just for the kitchen, cabinetry is now used throughout the home, in family rooms, home offices, media rooms and more. And from the construction to the finish, when choosing cabinetry, it's important to understand the options. "If the layout and design of your cabinets is done properly, they should become a part of the home," says Mark Spears of Living Spaces Studio in Atlanta. "Much like a classic little black dress, go with the best you can afford when replacing cabinets, and do it in such a way that no matter what your mood, the style will fit for a lifetime."

Photo courtesy of KraftMaid

Photo courtesy of Cabinet Wholesalers, USA

Cabinet categories

Cabinetry is available in three categories—stock or basic, semi-custom and custom—and each has different features.

Stock/basic cabinets are considered the economy-grade option. Usually purchased "off the shelf" of a home-improvement store or kitchen design center, the advantage of stock cabinetry is its affordable cost; the downside is limited options.

Semi-custom cabinets are currently the largest cabinetry market because they offer a good balance of price, quality and choice, notes Karen Wistrom, vice president of marketing with Dura Supreme Cabinetry. Semi-custom options include a wide range of wood species and finishes, and specialty cabinets, upgrades and accessories are usually available.

Custom cabinets are "uniquely tailored to the space and homeowner's desires," says Adam Rose, president of the Cabinet Makers Association. Though generally the most expensive option, custom cabinets are the best choice for homeowners seeking a specific style.

Money Matters

When comparing the cost of semi-custom and custom cabinetry, consider all the factors and shop around, says Adam Rose, president of the Cabinet Makers Association. Costs can be very comparable depending on the area of the country where you live. Rose also notes that each factor of the cabinetry impacts the cost, so you can save in one area (drawer construction) while splurging in another (finish).

Photo courtesy of Cabinets & Countertops

Structural style

Cabinets come in two types of construction: frameless and face-frame. The most common style of construction, face-frame cabinets rely mostly on the frame, which is attached to the front of the cabinet box, to hold together the top, sides and bottom pieces. Frameless cabinets are held together in a few different ways, with the highest-quality frameless cabinet boxes being doweled (using wood pegs to connect box panels) and glued.

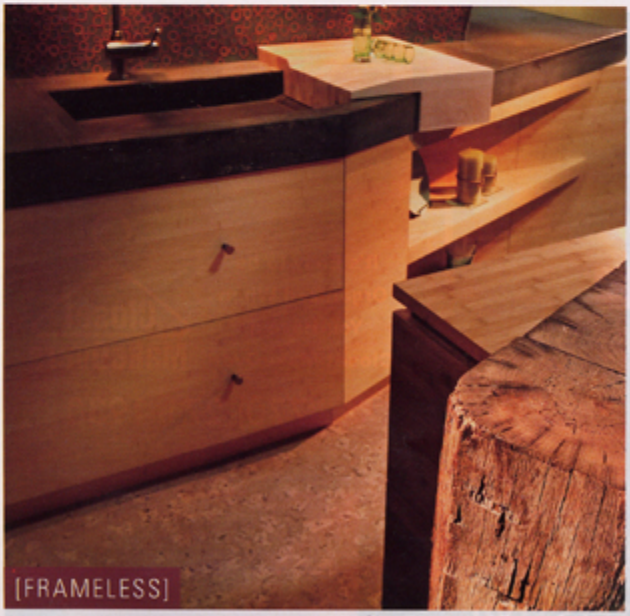

Photo courtesy of Crystal Cabinetry

Face-Frame or Frameless?

The choice is mainly personal preference, though, in general, frameless cabinets are used more in contemporary designs while face-frame construction tends to be used in traditional settings.

Photo courtesy of MasterWorks, small photos (right) courtesy of Medallion Cabinetry

Doors & drawers

The way your doors and drawers are fitted to the cabinet can affect the cost as well as the overall look of the design. There are three options for doors and drawers:

1. Full inset is reserved for custom work and often used in reproducing period-style cabinetry. Full-inset doors and drawers require precise measurement and carpentry skill because they are flush with the front of the cabinetry.

2. Partial overlay, also referred to as traditional overlay, means the door and drawer fronts rest on the surface of face-frame cabinetry and some of the frame still shows.

3. Full overlay is the same method as partial overlay, but with a greater overlap. Full overlay gives a clean look since no face frames are visible.

Expert Q & A

Q: I don't want to change the configuration of my kitchen, but my cabinets need an update. Should I try refacing?

A: If you want a new look in your kitchen and are comfortable with the current layout of the kitchen, then refacing is the least expensive way to go. Since you already own your cabinetry, you can cover the exposed surfaces and add new matching doors to give you a complete, new-kitchen look. Any extras, such as roll-out drawers, cookie racks, etc. can be added to your existing cabinetry. This can all be done in a 3- to 5-day time frame, and cost-wise, you'll save about 40 percent.

—Allan Apple, Kitchen Fronts of GA

Photos courtesy of (L to R clockwise) Cabinet Wholesalers, USA, CSI Kitchen & Bath Studio, Brady's Kitchen & Bath Designs, Decora Cabinetry

Material matters

What you can't see in cabinetry may be the most important element—the base material. Two types of engineered wood are used in base cabinetry construction: wood composites and plywood.

Wood composites are fairly strong, but can warp and swell when exposed to water. Visible elements with wood composite are usually covered with wood veneer or vinyl coatings. Plywood offers the durability of solid wood; however, it can be considered an upgrade. Visible elements with plywood are often solid wood.

Other important construction elements include reinforcements (the best option is wood corner braces), drawer construction (look for solid-wood sides with doweled or dovetail corners) and drawer guide hardware (metal ball-baring guides that carry at least 75 pounds have the smoothest tracking).

Eco Option

If you're looking for an environmentally friendly cabinet option, check out lyptus, a fast-growing, renewable hardwood produced by Weyaeuser. Lyptus is ready for harvest in 14 to 16 years, and it has a beautiful look, similar to mahogany in its grain pattern. Bamboo is another very popular and accessible choice. Also, most companies use medium-density fiberboard (MDF), which uses waste wood products to create a door with wood veneers that use a thin sheet of wood, using less wood product than solid-wood doors.

Sources: David DiCristina, Timberland Cabinets; Amy Aenchbacher, Living Spaces Studio

Photo courtesy of Small Carpenters at Large

Final finish

The final appearance of your cabinetry sets the tone for your room's design. If you choose semi-custom or custom cabinetry, your first choice will be wood species. Door style also plays a role in the final look, with options including elements such as molding and recessed panels.

Finishes, which can include paint, stain, glaze or a combination of these elements, create the biggest impact when it comes to appearance. "The effects you can create are almost endless," says Heather Argo, design education coordinator with KraftMaid.

A popular trend in Atlanta right now is combining dark and light finishes in one space. "White cabinets with dark islands to accent are huge right now, as are cherry cabinets with a white or cream island," says David DiCristina of Timberland Cabinets. Sheila Calderbank, of Cabinets & Countertops in Conyers, adds, "Dark, rich cherry cabinetry is the trend for those wanting a traditional look, while maple cabinetry with a chocolate glaze can be the answer for those looking for a soft, contemporary look."

Species Selection

When choosing semi-custom or custom cabinetry, you'll have a choice of wood species, each with a specific grain and color, which affect the look of decorative finishes. Here are a few characteristics of some of the more popular woods:

Maple has a smooth, even grain, making it popular for contemporary decor.

Cherry darkens over time, and is a good choice for traditional or formal decors.

Hickory is known for its flowing grain and dramatic color variation, making it a good choice for country decors.

Oak has a prominent open grain and is great with casual decor since it "seasons" as it ages.

"Maple is by far the most popular wood in cabinetry right now, and coffee-toned glaze finishes are among the most demanded," says Brandon Huber of Decora Cabinetry in Atlanta.

Photos courtesy of (large) Wellborn Cabinet Inc., (small) KraftMaid

Accents & accessories

Functional details are one of the biggest trends in cabinetry, including items such as built-in drawer inserts and roll-out shelves. "Interior storage solutions to better utilize cabinet space are one of the biggest trends right now," says Kevin Kremer of Cabinet Wholesalers, USA. Wistrom adds that accents such as crown molding, furniture-type feet and decorative glass insets also are extremely popular. Though the options seem endless, the positive aspect is that you can make your cabinetry as unique as the room it's in and as functional as you need it to be!

Editorial Resources begin on page 132.

Trend Alert:
Cabinetry design trends

- sleek, streamlined construction
- unusual and exotic wood species such as beech and zebra
- letting the natural wood grain show
- hand-detailing and distressing
- molding to add interest
- furniture-like accents including feet and legs
- functional storage
- golden-red and black-brown finishes
- door inserts such as glass, stainless steel, louvers and rattan

Source: Karen Wistrom, Dura Supreme Cabinetry; Heather Argo, KraftMaid