

August 2007

How to pick perfect kitchen cabinets

Their style might catch your eye, but it's the construction features you can't see that will keep your cabinets looking good year after year. Most manufacturers offer a similar range of door styles whether they sell ready-made, semicustom, or made-to-measure custom cabinets.

Remember that even if your contractor or architect does the measurements, make sure the cabinet supplier signs off on them. That way you'll avoid finger-pointing should there be any mistakes.

What separates a well-made cabinet from a cheap imitation? Here are the quality features to look for, and some flimsy ones to avoid:



1

Drawers. Best have solid-wood sides, dovetail joinery, and a plywood bottom that fits grooves on four sides. Avoid stapled particleboard.

2

Drawer hardware. Full-extension guides are better than integrated side rails or undermounted double-roller designs. Some premium models have a "soft close" feature that stops drawers from slamming shut.

3

Doors. Best is a solid-wood frame surrounding a solid-wood or plywood panel. Veneered particleboard or a medium-density fiberboard (MDF) panel is OK. Avoid laminate or thermofoil over particleboard. We didn't find any differences between types of door hinges.

4

Cabinet box. Best is 1/2 to 3/4-inch, furniture-grade plywood. MDF is OK, but avoid 3/8-inch coated particleboard.

5

Shelves. Best is 3/4-inch plywood or MDF. Lesser-quality 5/8- and 1/2-inch particleboard shelves might sag.

Mounting strips. Best is 3/4-inch hardwood or metal with bolt holes. Medium-density fiberboard (MDF), particleboard, or wood that's thinner than 1/2 inch can be a concern for heavily loaded wall cabinets. Ask your installer to use stronger stuff.