

What's smarter: replacing or refacing your cabinets?

Want to refresh your kitchen and bathroom without breaking the bank? Here's one cost-effective solution to consider: refacing your cabinets.

If you're not exactly sure what refacing means, we've talked with an expert to get the low down on this cost-effective and eco-friendly way to update your home's look, which involves replacing only the doors of your cabinets instead of the entire cabinet box.

So if your cabinet boxes are in great shape, but simply don't fit your taste anymore, keep reading for answers to the most common questions about cabinet refacing and how it can give your home a facelift.

What is refacing?

When you hear the word "refacing," it might be difficult to imagine what that entails. But it's actually fairly simple - not to mention smart.

Refacing your cabinets means covering the existing cabinet boxes with a thin veneer (which could be vinyl or real wood) and completely replacing the doors and drawer faces. This allows you to radically change the look of your kitchen while maintaining quality workmanship, says Lynda Lyday, a home improvement expert and author of *The Homeowner's Manual*.

So, before you think about completely replacing your cabinets, make sure to inspect the cabinet structure and see if refacing is a viable option.

"A lot of times in older homes, the actual workmanship on the cabinets is really good," Lyday says.

If this is the case for you, you'll be happy to know that your refacing options abound. You could take your kitchen from traditional to sleek and modern, or from "builder's grade" bland to French provincial. The opportunities are endless!

How does the cost of refacing cabinets compare to the cost of replacing cabinets?

It's probably fairly obvious that with refacing you'll be spending quite a bit less than if you completely replace all of the cabinets. But don't take my word for it. Here are some numbers:

According to Consumer Reports, the average budget for a kitchen remodel in 2012 was \$30,325. And replacing cabinets, they note, is typically the priciest part of a kitchen remodel. But when you reface, you're only buying new doors and drawers instead of the entire cabinet.

And as Lyday notes, "Really what you're seeing on any cabinet are the doors." So why not put your money where you'll get the biggest bang for your buck?

So what might you expect to pay for refacing your cabinetry? About \$150 to \$300 per door opening, according to Consumer Reports. In regards to how much money you'll save by refacing vs. replacing, that will depend on the size of your kitchen, the style of doors you choose, and the materials you select for refacing.

How can refacing change the look of my home?

Wherever you have a cabinet - whether it's in the kitchen, bathroom, or even your living room - you can use refacing to update the style.

"The change could be subtle or dramatic, depending on the look you're going for," says Lyday.

For example, maybe you have builder's grade cabinets (typically wood with a stain and lacquer) in your bathroom, kitchen, and laundry room - all the same tired oak color.

You could reface the bathroom cabinets one way, the kitchen cabinets another way, and the laundry room cabinets another way, giving each room a unique look.

Or you could maintain a similar look between all of them - but update it to better reflect your personal taste.

What types of materials should I consider?

The great thing about tackling a project like this is you have the freedom to consider everything.

For example, when it comes to the veneer that will be covering your cabinet boxes, "That veneer could be a laminate or a wood veneer," says Lyday. "You have different choices there." And which one you choose will depend on the look you're trying to achieve.

But, as Lyday mentioned earlier, the real dramatic differences are going to show up in your choice of doors.

And if you've been living with bland cabinet doors for years, then you might be amazed to see the variety of interesting options that exist to give your space some new life.

Would you rather give your kitchen a more personal touch? Try playing up something special and turning it into a focal point.

Need some ideas? Lyday offers an example:

"If you have decorative china you love, you can replace a solid cabinet door with a glass cabinet door and put lights in your cabinets to show the china off," Lyday says. "It could become the core of your kitchen."

Is this something I can do myself or should I hire a professional?

There are a lot of ways you can change the look of your kitchen on your own, but cabinet refacing probably isn't one of them.

"There are too many ways you can mess this up," Lyday says. That's because applying veneer to cabinets takes special skills, and you probably don't want to try to learn them while you're redoing your kitchen.

Even as a DIY guru, Lyday notes that for cabinet refacing projects, "Most people probably want to hire a professional."

Are there any other pros of refacing cabinets instead of replacing them?

Okay, we now know that refacing cabinets instead of replacing them can save you big money and still give you dramatic results.

But if you need one more "pro" to add to the list, think about this:

When you reface instead of replace your cabinets, you'll be keeping a lot of waste out of landfills.

And if being environmentally responsible is important to you - you'll understand why this can be a much more earth-friendly option than replacing the whole cabinet.

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