

Hot Topic 3 cont'd: A Great Kitchen Project! Part I: Understanding Kitchen Cabinet Construction

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Once a client develops a written list of objectives and assigns priorities to them, we meet. At the meeting, I make sure I understand their objectives and goals. It is at this point that I differ from the order that many kitchen design books use to approach a kitchen remodeling project. They go directly into the subject of design; I start with cabinet construction. Before the design phase, I want to make sure that my clients have a basic understand of the advantages and disadvantages of the different ways that cabinets are made and how the construction method may affect price. My point is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to design anything unless you know the basics of the materials that you are working with. In this case it's a kitchen; the cabinets are the foundation that the design will be built upon.

At this early stage I do not go into the selection process in detail with clients as it relates to door styles and finishes. That is done later. The main purpose is to help them develop a basic foundation for understanding cabinets. Doing this now will help simplify the choosing of cabinets and other elements during the kitchen design and specification phase later on. As part of their education, I go with them to several wholesale distributor's showrooms where they can see and touch products as we talk about cabinet construction, compare brands, finishes and cost points. I always recommend to them that they take a camera and note pad as well as a bag to hold manufacturers brochures. This is all about gathering information and not decision making. Remember my position as their coach is to give them the guidance and knowledge to make the best decisions for themselves.

Throughout the project, there is no financial incentive for me to increase



the cost of the project because I am paid on a per hourly as needed. This doesn't change whether I work with the owner side-by-side, work with my tools myself, or coordinate and oversee subcontractors. There is no markup or profit added on to any product or service, because everything is decided and paid for directly by the owner. My position is that of a trusted and knowledgeable employee, advising and carrying out the directions of my client. I am ethically bound to what is in their best interests. I'm mentioning this so that you, the reader, understand from what point of view I'm writing this article.

Appliances are an important part of creating a kitchen and the type of each individual appliances that will go into the kitchen needs to be determined early. Either before or after our cabinet tour, I give my clients a few years of back issues of a magazine published by a non-profit organization that tests, rates, and reports on appliances and many other products.

They then go to stores, not to purchase, but to see what they like and to get prices and information. This field research

gives them a foothold on what they will need to know during the design stage so that the appliances can be seamlessly integrated into the kitchen plan.

Now that you have a little idea of the beginning of "The Do It Yourself Coach" process, let's talk cabinets. Having personally built cabinets (you can view my shop on the website under "More About the Founder), I often describe them as a boxes built out of various materials that give you access to filling them through the use of doors and draws. There are two ways that make the mounting of doors and draws possible. This is what defines the two major categories of cabinets.

Eighty percent of the kitchens installed in the United States are known as "face framed". This type of construction requires that a solid wood frame is attached to whichever sides that require access. It is this frame that the hinges for doors or the drawer tracks (draw glides) are attached to. The frame is attached to the box to any side that requires access.

The second type is known as "frameless" or "European" style cabinets. The

directly to the insides of the box without the need for a frame. The same holds true for the newly designed draw glides. These innovations simplified the construction of cabinets by eliminating the need for face frames. Each face frame requires a minimum of four parts, but depending on the number of draws required in a particular cabinet, you can easily double that number or more. The building of cabinets requires accuracy, so eliminating parts lessens cost as it simplifies construction. However, the cost of the hardware is somewhat more expensive for frameless cabinets than that used for faced framed cabinets. There are also other factors that affect cost. Therefore a reasonable consideration will have to include all of the following construction facets.

Both types of construction have their advantages and disadvantages. Framed cabinets, along their face, are inherently stronger and more rigid by the very nature of their construction method. When the frames are attached to the box they overhang the sides

about an eighth of an inch. This allows the installer to adjust for any unevenness in the wall that they are attached to. The installer is also able to attach adjacent

cabinets to each other through their frames, which add to their strength. In wider cabinets, a center vertical rail can be added that also strengthens the unit. In addition, attaching crown molding or moldings that hide under-counter lighting is simpler.

Face framed cabinets have a traditional look and give the home owner a choice to expose various portions of the frame as a style feature or almost completely hide them. This is done by the manufacturers offering various amounts of the doors and draws overlaying the frame. Another option is to have the doors and draws inset into the frames so that they are flush.

This is the same construction method used in fine furniture. Because the accuracy of construction is so critical for inset doors and draws to work properly, the inset option is usually seen in cabinets in the higher price ranges. Hinges can be exposed or hidden based on the type of look the buyer wishes to achieve. And finally, they

offer the option of adding additional architectural millwork details such as fluted pilasters, turned posts, half posts, corbels and many others.

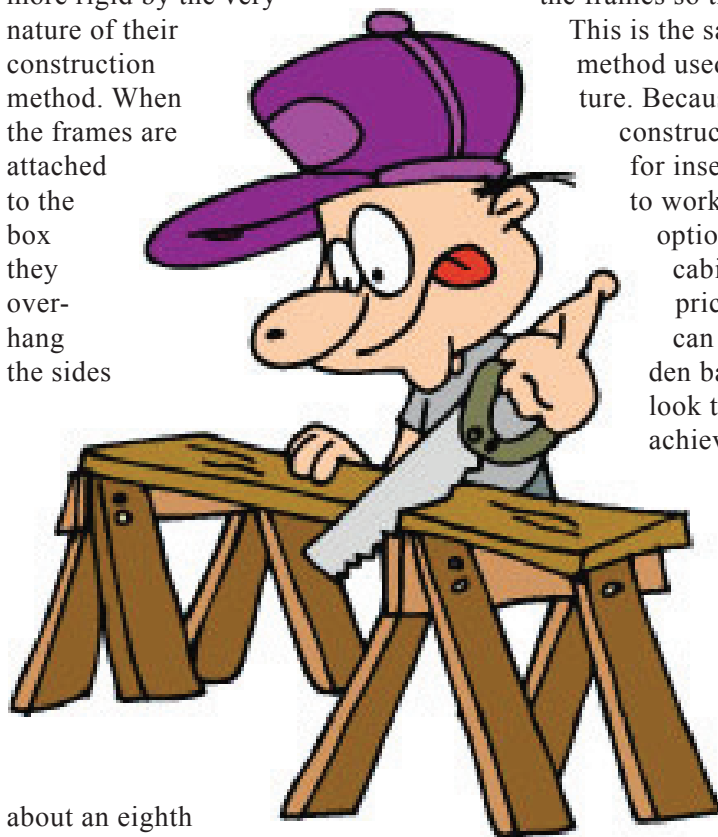
Because they are so popular, this group will give you the greater door and draw front selection.



The disadvantages of using face framed cabinets is that you will lose a small amount of interior space; the frames cause a slight limitation and access interference internally because they limit the door opening about an inch on each side. If you wish a sleek modern look, these may not be the cabinets for you.

Frameless cabinets are made in the United States as well as in Europe and the rest of the world. Because they do not have frames the doors are mounted with special hinges that attach to the right or left internal side of the cabinet box. The same holds true for draws in that glides are also mounted internally to the sides. Instead of the face frames covering the front edge of the cabinet box, the covering of the edge is achieved with close fitting doors and draws. This provides a very clean look and makes it easier for buyers to have more choices for a contemporary look. The hinges are always hidden from view behind the door. There is normally less trim and moldings involved with these type of cabinets, but many manufactures offer some traditional door styles and trim options. One of the biggest advantages is that when doors are opened, you have one hundred percent access to the contents inside the cabinets.

From an installation perspective frameless cabinets have several challenges during installation. Because



they don't have a face frame, the box can be easily racked (pushed out of square) before or during installation. The cabinets are attached to each other through their sides with screws that have to be short enough so as not to go through into the adjacent cabinet. When attaching the face frames of two adjacent cabinets, the screws can be twice as long. When attaching adjacent frameless cabinets to each other through the sides, an alternative to screws is the use of panel connecting screws. This is my preferred fastener for this purpose because it literally bolts the cabinets together, doesn't rely on the thread of a screw into material of the cabinets' side for holding power, and has a rounded screw head on each adjacent side of the connector. In addition, face frames hang over the sides of the cabinets, as mentioned earlier, allowing for easy correction of wall problems; faceless don't allow for this. Therefore, it can be more difficult to install these cabinets when walls aren't square to each other in corners or not straight.

I mentioned the items above not to influence which type you use, but rather to let you know that there are differences in the way each type needs to be installed. However when you have purchased the right cabinet for your project, made with the right materials, both types can be installed properly by a knowledgeable and skilled craftsmen. If you go to thedycoachusa.com website and go to "Projects", you will note several



kitchen projects and the use of horizontal blocking (under the sheetrock) to provide for an exceptional cabinet installation. I highly recommend this method, even though it's used seldom by other builders. Which style will you use? This decision, for most of my clients, is based on the look they are trying to achieve at a price that is compatible with their budget. There are other things that I look for in

cabinet construction which are the techniques that are used to assemble the parts. They include: pocket hole screws, biscuits, mortise and tenon, doweling, dovetails, dados, cams, joinery fasteners, and others. This is called joinery. Some joinery methods are better than others, some are just more costly. I'm not going to go into this in great detail except to say the best construction, as it relates to your price point, is an important consideration as well as the quality of hinges and draw guides.

This becomes even more important if the kitchen will get a lot of use over the time you stay in your home. Low quality kitchen cabinets don't hold up and quality may not always relate to cost.

Even if you use the best joinery methods, the quality of your cabinets will also be dependent upon the actual material that they are made of. This will be the subject of my next article: Part II - What Cabinets Are Made Of.

May the coach be with you,
Coach Jerry

