

# KITCHEN



# SOLVERS<sup>SM</sup>

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## *Cabinet Refacing*

**A**fter living in the same house for nearly 25 years, Raymond and Susan Weiker were finally ready to part ways with their old kitchen. “The knotty pine cabinets had warped doors, some of the drawers didn’t work too well, and the laminate countertop had a burn hole in it,” says Raymond. “We liked the layout, but the room needed some serious sprucing up.” They conjured up a delightful vision of what the room could be, with new cabinets and countertops and such stylish indulgences as tile backsplashes and stainless-steel appliances. Then the remodeler handed them an estimate of more than \$40,000 to build their dream kitchen. That wasn’t the only bad news: The project would take two to three months to complete. “I thought ‘Wow! That’s expensive,’” Raymond recalls. “And to be without a functional kitchen for that length of time would be far too disruptive.” Frustrated and discouraged, the Weikers began looking for other options and happened upon, a local company specializing in cabinet refacing. They were impressed with the quality of past projects and happy with the quote; taking their bid would cut the overall cost of their kitchen makeover by almost half. “When they told us it would take just days to complete, we were sold,” says Raymond.



“Cabinet refacing works on the principle that beauty is only skin deep, and a new skin of solid wood paneling just 1/8 to 3/16 inch thick with custom-made 3/4” solid wood doors and drawer fronts is all it takes to completely update or change the décor of a kitchen”, says Suzie Crowley co-owner of Kitchen Solvers, a La Crosse, WI based cabinet refacing company. Rather than go through the mess and inconvenience of tearing out structurally sound cabinets and the considerable expense of installing new units, refacing companies replace only the old doors and drawer fronts.

## Refacing Process Before



They leave the existing face-frames and end panels in place and cover them with a matching wood or laminate facing. Improvements such as new drawer slides decorative handles and trim molding complete the transformation, which depending on the number of cabinet openings typically costs between \$6,000 and \$8,000. Homeowners can select their new cabinet faces from an array of choices ranging from solid wood doors and drawer fronts available in a variety of wood species to rigid thermo foil (RTF), a tough plastic coating that looks like paint but is actually molded over fiberboard

A top-quality refacing project begins with good surface preparation. First you refasten any loose stiles and rails. For cabinets with old paint or urethane finishes, the surface is “scuffed”. This ensures a solid bond between the old surface and the refacing panels. If necessary, existing cabinet drawers and drawer glides are replaced. Now is also the time for homeowners to make modifications by including a Lazy Susan, microwave vent hood, roll-out shelves, pantries, add-on cabinetry, additional drawers or other kitchen accessory options.

The actual installation process begins with refacing the entire set of cabinets-cabinet ends, bottoms and face-frames with a 1/8 or 3/16 inch factory-finished solid wood paneling. The factory-finished wood paneling is held in place with panel adhesive and or strategically placed finish pins. “We always use both adhesive and pinning nails to apply the paneling over the cabinet face-frame. This eliminates any chance that the facing material will warp or peel,” Suzie Crowley stated. Doors and drawer fronts usually arrive from the manufacturer with multiple coats of catalyzed varnish, a durable, low-maintenance finish. The same finish and stain is used on the wood facing. The facing material and doors and drawer fronts are finished to match.



Not all cabinets refacing contractors work to the same standards. Check references and inspect recent jobs. Before they start the project you should ask about their material and installation warranty. This will protect you from faulty materials or sub-standard installations. Not all cabinets are good candidates for refacing either. Those made of solid wood or plywood can be refaced, but some times glue has trouble adhering to cabinets made of Particleboard. In those cases the contractor should definitely be using a pinning/gluing combination.



And, of course, refacing only makes sense if the kitchen has a good basic layout or the existing cabinetry can be reconfigured to a new pattern that will work better. Refacing does allow for some modifications, such as swapping the locations of a cabinet and a dishwasher, or adding another bank of drawers, but if the workflow is inefficient or the layout requires major changes, an overhaul -not a refacing-may be required. Most homeowners will incorporate new cabinets and countertops. That's the beauty of cabinet refacing, the cost savings in many cases gives home owners an opportunity to purchase additional options and still stay within their budget.

Fortunately, Raymond and Susan Weikers' old, unappealing cabinets were solidly built on a useful footprint. The knotty pine cabinets were refaced with solid wood cherry panels to match the cherry raised panel doors they had chosen. With new decorative handles installed, the cabinets' transformation from 1960s-style to an updated look was made complete. Three years later, they're still fond of their new-old cabinets and with the refacing. "With the money we saved, we were able to get a granite countertop. And we even took a great vacation!" says Raymond.

## After

