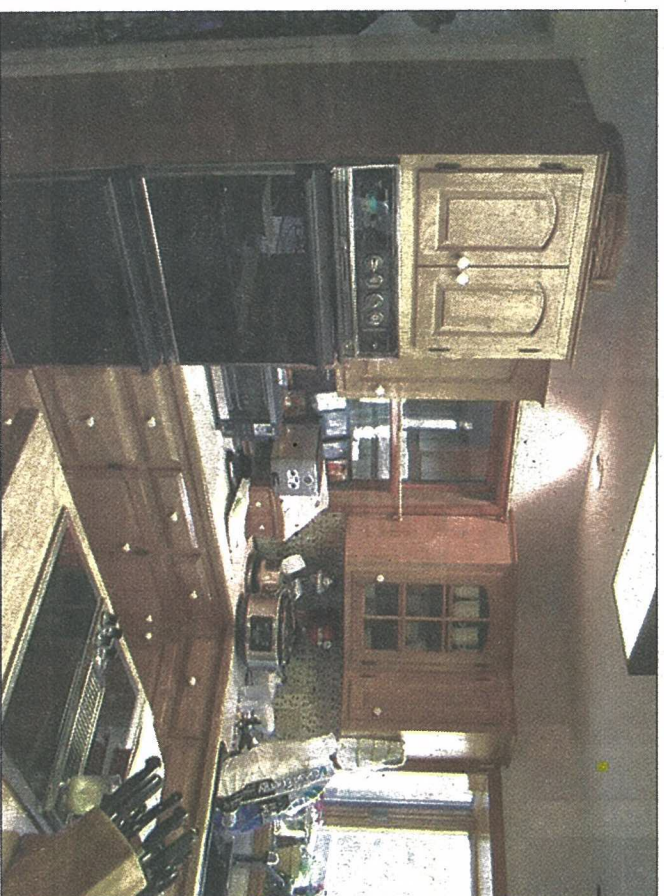




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At left, the kitchen in Abe Abuchowski's home needed updating, but he didn't want the expense of replacing the cabinets. So, he replaced the doors and covered the exposed parts of cabinets with a matching veneer, as seen above.



Refacing kitchen cabinets can save time and money

By Carole Feldman
Associated Press

The kitchen in Abe Abuchowski's Califon, N.J., home needed updating, but he didn't want the expense of replacing the cabinets. So he chose a less costly option.

"The old cabinets were in really good shape," he said. "They were high-quality cabinets, solid wood. It was the doors that really needed to be replaced."

Replacing the doors and covering the cabinets' remaining exposed parts with a matching veneer can be done for about half the cost of buying new, said Kit Selzer, the senior remodeling and projects editor at Better Homes and Gardens. The process is called refacing.

Abuchowski said there's another advantage to refacing. "There's a minimum amount of disruption," he said.

"It's a simpler and quicker installation," agreed Brett Bacho, the president of Kitchen Magic, the company that did Abuchowski's kitchen. Bacho said that refacing cabinets typically can be completed in three to five days.

For refacing to be a viable option, however, the cabinets must be in good shape.

"If we had bad cabinets, just putting the new fronts on them wasn't actually where we wanted to go," said Claudia Phelps, who had the cabinets in her Washington, D.C., home refaced about 10 years ago. She said her cabinets were "very well built" and worth saving.

Refacing also might not be a good choice if you want to do

major changes to your kitchen's layout.

"You do nothing to improve the function or the convenience of the kitchen," said David Alderman, the owner of Dave's Cabinets in Chesapeake, Va. Nor, he noted, does refacing increase storage.

It is possible, however, to add cabinets that match the refaced ones. Both Abuchowski and Phelps did that.

Many people also choose to replace their countertops at the same time the cabinets are refaced. That, obviously, adds to the cost.

Cabinet companies say it's impossible to estimate the cost of refacing cabinets without seeing the kitchen and talking to the homeowner about the job.

"We've refaced kitchens for as little as \$4,000 to \$5,000, and for as much as \$80,000," Bacho said.

Doors can be made of a variety of woods, for example, such as cherry, oak or maple, or of an engineered material like laminate, including some that look like wood.

Abuchowski chose a laminate. "It's very easily cleaned and it will stay looking newer longer," he said.

In refacing, the cabinet doors are removed, and the sides and exterior face of the cabinet are prepared for the veneer covering. After that covering is measured and applied, the new doors — made to fit the existing cabinets — are installed.

Some companies replace the full drawers, others just the front. But the inside of the cabinet usually is not changed during the refacing process. "You could definitely paint the inside to go along with

the outside," Selzer said.

She advises going with a professional unless you're a very skilled do-it-yourselfer.

For those who want to try it themselves, there are how-to videos on YouTube or step-by-step instructions on the Web.

Otherwise, many companies do refacing, from big ones like Sears to smaller ones like the one Alderman owns.

Of course, there is an even cheaper way to give the cabinets a fresh look.

"Virtually any cabinet can be painted," Selzer said. "It just takes the right product to do it."

She said there are kits on the market that provide the materials you need, from preparation to stain to glaze, along with step-by-step instructions.

"Really, what you want to do is be patient with it and give yourself time," she said. That means giving each coat enough time to dry.

When people paint cabinets, Selzer said, they are likely to choose white. "For new cabinetry," she said, "people are looking for the wood look."

A good reason to paint, she said, is for the enjoyment of a fresh-looking kitchen.

Upgrading cabinets, either by replacing or refacing them, can make your house more marketable if you're considering selling it.

"Just a few years ago," Selzer said, "people were buying houses with rundown kitchens knowing they were going to replace them. Now there's a little more conservative attitude about it. People look for a kitchen and a house that has move-in qualities."