

YOUR HOME

Refacing Kitchen Cabinets

By JAY ROMANO

WHEN Shirley L. decided it was time to do something about the 30-year-old kitchen cabinets in her house in White Plains, her first inclination was to rip out the old ones and install new ones in their place.

But then she realized that while the outsides of the cabinets were scratched and scuffed, the insides were nearly as good as new. And that set Shirley to thinking about refacing them.

"I was a bit skeptical at first," she said, explaining that the initial image she had of refaced cabinets was a cheesy plastic laminate material printed to resemble wood. "But I want to tell you that what I ended up with was way beyond my expectations. I now have an absolutely drop-dead-beautiful kitchen and I saved thousands of dollars getting it."

Cabinet makers say that because older cabinets were often built with greater care and better materials than the mass-produced cabinets available today, it would be difficult and expensive to replace old cabinets with new mod-



Tom Bloom

Dealers say a facelift is better than a transplant because of the high cost of cabinets.

els of equal quality. And since even inexpensive cabinets can cost thousands of dollars to buy and install, it often makes sense for homeowners to keep well-built, functional cabinets in place and update them with a facelift instead of a transplant.

Paul Bookbinder, president of DreamWork Kitchens, the cabinet-refacing company retained by Shirley, said that the term refacing is really a misnomer.

"We actually replace the doors and fronts of the drawers with new ones and cover the cabinet in a matching material," Mr. Bookbinder said. Of three types of materials (laminate; thermofoil and wood), the most expensive is real wood.

"We offer oak, maple, cherry, etc. and all of them come in a variety of colors," Mr. Book-

binder said. "When we do a real wood job we put on solid wood doors and drawer-fronts and wood veneers on the sides and fronts."

A refacing job, he said, will typically cost about 50% of what it would cost to remove existing cabinets and replace them with new high-quality cabinets.

It is also possible to have cabinets refaced with a material called Rigid Thermo Foil, also known as RTF. "It's kid-proof," Mr. Bookbinder said, explaining that Thermo Foil is a vinyl coating about 1/16 of an inch thick that is bonded to wood or particle-board core. "Thermo Foil comes in solid colors and in wood-grains" he said.

The third way to reface cabinets is with laminates that are either solid color or printed to simulate wood grain. "We're moving away from the laminates because they don't really have the resiliency of Thermo Foil," Mr. Bookbinder said. "But laminates are the cheapest way to reface your cabinets."

"Generally speaking, Mr. Bookbinder said, a refacing job in an average-size kitchen would run anywhere from \$3,500 to \$7,000 depending upon the material used.

"In most cases, a kitchen cabinet built 30-years ago is going to be as good as or better than the highest-end cabinets being sold today," said David Hare, the owner of Custom Kitchen Cabinet Refacing, a cabinet maker and refacing company based in North Tonawanda, NY.