

To Reface or Not to Reface?

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of a full renovation, or to take the less troublesome path and merely modify your physiognomy. Well . . . I'll tell you! The number of companies offering replacement fronts for refacing has increased dramatically this year, which reflects the growing trend of people opting to reface their kitchen cabinets rather than replacing them. While it's true that refacing can reduce *the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to* during a complete remodel, it's not the solution for everyone.

In the past, refacing, (or resurfacing as it is also called), used to conjure up a less-than-beautiful kitchen, where the material covering the cabinets and doors would peel off in a few years. While this may have been true in Shakespeare's time, the materials and adhesives used today have improved dramatically. Most contractors who offer this service now completely replace the door and drawer fronts and then cover the cabinet with the same material the new fronts are made of.

The new adhesives, used with thermofoil laminates, are odorless, non-toxic and actually strengthen as they age. It's best to avoid the old technique of adhering high-pressure laminate (mica) to the cabinets. This material must be glued to the cabinet with contact cement, which has three inherent problems. It is extremely flammable and the manufacturer recommends turning off the pilot light for your hot water heater (in the basement) before using the cement in the kitchen! This type of cement also has toxic fumes and it is only designed to last 10-15 years. Although water based contract cements have been developed, they haven't come up with a formula that can hold as well as the original product yet.

Today, a custom refacing job can look as good as new, and last just as long. The main advantages of refacing are: a) it takes much less time to complete than installing a new kitchen; b) it's much less stressful than a total renovation; and c) it's usually much more economical than a new kitchen.

But, here's *the rub*. I say "usually much more economical" because there are factors that can increase the costs of refacing. When you select thermofoil (laminated) replacement fronts, the cost is about half that of buying and installing new, all-wood cabinets. However, if you choose special shapes, or wood fronts with custom stains, the savings can diminish substantially. Another factor that can add to the expense of refacing is changing the layout of your kitchen. You realize the greatest saving when no alterations are made to the floor plan. If you intend on changing more than 10% of the cabinets in the kitchen it makes more sense to think about new ones.

You should consider refacing when . . .

- a) Your cabinets are in good shape and you want an exciting, new look, without changing the layout.
- b) You don't want the hassle of a complete remodeling job.
- c) You want the job to take a minimum amount of time.
- d) You may want to keep the kitchen floor and/or countertop.
- e) You want to save money.

If you *perchance to dream* about renovating your kitchen, it certainly would be worthwhile to investigate all the possibilities. Visit showrooms that offer both new cabinets and refacing so you can see what your options are. With the wide range of replacement fronts available, (oak, maple, cherry, ash, glazed stains, and thermofoil), you may finally be able to answer the great Bards' question, "*To reface, or not to reface*".

(My apologies to Mr. Shakespeare. If you're like me, and have a child in high school, you're probably relearning his great works, and global history, and earth science, etc., etc. Look for next month's article about financing: "*Neither a borrower nor a lender be!*"). Until then, I want to take this opportunity to wish all of you a very joyous holiday season and a happy and healthy New Year.