

These helpful hints take the stress out of cabinet renovation.

By **GEORGE HAGLE**, Cinch Cabinet Refacing Kits Revised October 30, 2019.

3 Approaches to Cabinet Renovation . . .

WHICH IS BEST FOR YOU?



There comes a time for every apartment community when cabinets become a drag. Kitchens eventually get old, out-of-fashion, worn out or damaged. And cabinets are important. When prospective residents tour an apartment home, cabinets make a powerful impression, especially in an unfurnished space. The kitchen sets the tone for the entire apartment home (along with the window coverings, flooring and fixtures).

If cabinets aren't attractive, leasing prospects go elsewhere. Failing cabinets

cause current residents to move out. Old cabinets drag down occupancy, effective rents and cash flow. Something needs to be done. But what?

Cabinet renovation can be intimidating. Cabinets are the core of a kitchen – supporting the countertops, surrounding the flooring, entangled with the plumbing. If you start messing with the cabinets, where does it end? How long will it take? And how much will it cost? There are a lot of questions associated with cabinet renovation. All those questions are a big reason why cabinet-related projects are sometimes

delayed. Property managers don't understand their choices, and they don't have a lot of time for research.

Let's start with a big picture overview. There are three basic choices for cabinet renovation: Repaint the old cabinets (sometimes known as resurfacing), remove and replace the cabinet boxes, or reface the cabinets with new doors and drawer fronts. These three options have different strengths and weaknesses. The best solution depends on the circumstances at each community. Here is a table with an overview of each of the three options:

	Cabinet Repainting (Resurfacing)	Full Box Cabinet Replacement	Cabinet Refacing (Replacing Doors and Drawer Fronts)
Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Least expensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most expensive • Requires removal and replacement of sink, countertop, cabinets and often flooring and backsplash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half the cost of full box replacement • Twice the cost of resurfacing
Speed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fastest (can be done in one day) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slowest • Takes time to demo old cabinets, install new cabinets, reinstall countertops, paint walls and repair/replace flooring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast • It generally takes one day to paint existing cabinet boxes and half a day to install new doors and drawer fronts
Resulting Look	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newly painted surface on old cabinets • Cannot create a wood grain finish • Limited to the shape of the existing doors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wide variety of looks and quality available at a wide range of costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A variety of styles, colors, door shapes and wood grain finishes are available
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often smelly • Doesn't easily allow hinge replacement • Requires more ongoing maintenance than refacing or full box replacements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More construction waste to dispose of • Often multiple trades involved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet interiors remain unchanged, unless they are also painted
Especially Suitable When	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget is super tight • This is often determined by the rent potential of the project location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet boxes aren't structurally sound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countertops are high quality • Old hinges are face mounted or otherwise unfashionable • Existing cabinet doors are damaged or have an unfashionable shape • Cabinets are structurally sound
Less Suitable When	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Door shape is unfashionable (e.g., slab doors with j-pull) • Existing finish is peeling off (whether paint, vinyl or some other finish) • Old doors are water damaged, swollen or falling apart • A high-end look is the desired result 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countertops are high quality • Flooring or backsplash would be difficult to patch or replace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old cabinets are not structurally sound

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These basic choices in cabinet renovation have been unchanged for decades. Repainting cabinets is easy to understand, as is removing old cabinets and replacing them with new ones. Cabinet refacing is a less understood option, but it's a viable choice for many projects. And now a new door technology has the potential to make cabinet refacing a more popular choice than ever before.

For more than 20 years, many kitchen cabinets for both apartments and single-family homes were made with a vinyl coated door technology called "thermofoil." These doors are a one-piece, fiberboard core glued to a vinyl face with a heat-activated glue. The backs of these doors are generally melamine. Over the years, many of these doors have failed, with the vinyl face "delaminating" or coming loose from the core because of heat exposure or glue failure over time.

A new cabinet door technology offers property managers another option for refacing, an alternative to thermofoil. The new door technology is a five-piece foil door with four pieces of molding surrounding a center panel, the way most cabinet doors have been made for centuries. A five-piece door is constructed so the face of the door can't peel off. The critical joints are tucked in where the moldings meet the center panel, to prevent failure. And because the front of the door is the same material as the back, these doors are unlikely to warp.

This five-piece door style dominates the popular priced cabinet market in Europe and Canada and is growing rapidly in the United States. Many manufacturers offer it. Examples include some styles in the Marta Stewart Living collection at The Home Depot.

Another decision facing property managers is whether to hire a contractor for the renovation or do the work in-house. A renovation contractor generally costs more, but will have more experience. An in-house maintenance team offers a lower cost and is easier to manage. However, the work requires a maintenance team's time, there may be a learning curve, and the maintenance team may not be motivated to take on new responsibilities. An intermediate option is to buy the makeover kit from a distributor who will measure and order the kit, for installation by the community maintenance team or a contractor.

Some companies sell cabinet refacing kits directly to property managers, with all the items required for a refacing project, including doors, fronts, matching paint for cabinet boxes, hinges, pulls, screws and other accessories and tools to simplify installation. These kits simplify the management of the project. They can be installed either by a contractor or the property's maintenance team.

Although several choices must be made to choose the right approach to cabinet renovation, the payoff is big. The return on investment from cabinet renovation can be huge. For example, if you spend \$800 on a cabinet renovation in an \$800 per month apartment home, and as a result you get a \$30 amenity fee and raise occupancy from 89 percent to 91 percent, you will get \$4,676 more in rent over the next nine years. The return on your \$800 investment is \$520 per year, and it starts as soon as the apartment is leased. The annualized return is 91 percent over a nine-year period. That is a fantastic investment by any measure.

Cabinet renovation is a challenge, but it often pays off with happier residents, quicker leasing, higher rents and a great financial return.

George Hagle is the founder of Cinch Cabinet Refacing Kits, a Houston manufacturer of complete cabinet makeover kits. Cinch ships kits for refacing one apartment at a time, or 100 - in five to seven working days. For more information, visit www.CinchKit.com, call 844-4-A-Cinch, or email sales@CinchKit.com. Cinch is a member of NAA, BBB, and many local apartment associations. To see a time-lapse video of the refacing process, search for "Cinch Installation Instructions" on YouTube.