

CABINET MAKING — COST REVIEW & BENCHMARKING

Joinery package — cost review, benchmarking & value engineering

Sample joinery package — a London home (anonymised)

A construction-led review of a joinery supplier's design and quotation — reading the drawings, finding the real cost drivers, benchmarking the units against one another, and pressing the questions that turn a lump sum into a fair, itemised price. The aim is a better package for less: savings from spec and benchmarking, not from cutting the visible quality.

PREPARED FOR

Private client

CONSULTANT

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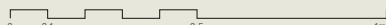
BASIS

Detailed-design drawings &
supplier quotation

REFERENCE

E.L_B — sample / extract

Illustrative extract. These three pages are an anonymised sample of how E.L_B reviews and benchmarks a joinery package — the cost drivers, the questions to put to the supplier, and the value engineering. The project, parties and figures shown are indicative only and do not describe any real project or advice.



01 WHERE THE COST SITS — THE DRIVERS

Before the itemised breakdown returns, the drawings already show where the money is. The point is not to strip quality out, but to make each expensive choice a decision rather than a default.

Veneer throughout, vs sprayed MDF COST DRIVER

OBSERVED. The cabinetry is specified as veneer across the whole package.

COMMENT. Veneer is a meaningful uplift over the sprayed MDF used on several comparable schemes, and on a package this size the material is one of the largest single levers. Current sheet-material pricing — including MDF fabrication overseas — can be markedly cheaper. Veneer may well be right for the visible pieces; it should be chosen against a benchmarked cost, not carried by default across units that aren't doing design work.

RECOMMENDATION. Benchmark the veneer build-up (species, quality, exact construction) against a sprayed-MDF alternative, unit by unit, so the uplift is spent only where it shows.

Handle, rebate & concealed-bracket details COST DRIVER

OBSERVED. Finger-pull / rebate handles to the pantry and island, and a freestanding desk on concealed brackets.

COMMENT. Rebate and finger-pull details generally need hardwood lipping and extra labour, and concealed-bracket details are nearly always expensive — more so than the surface-mounted or push-to-open systems used previously. Individually small, together they add up, and they are easy to leave vague in a headline price.

RECOMMENDATION. Confirm whether hardwood lipping is included for the finger-pull details, price the concealed-bracket items separately, and use simpler handle systems where the detail isn't seen.

Drawer quantity, runners & boxing-out COST DRIVER / SCOPE

OBSERVED. A large drawer count (notably a media unit), and shelving that needs boxing-out and surrounding framing.

COMMENT. Drawer supply and install add up quickly, especially on concealed premium runners; and boxing-out around shelving is exactly the kind of item that slips out of a lump sum. Both need confirming as in or out of the price.

RECOMMENDATION. Confirm the runner system (concealed vs side-mounted) and that all boxing-out and framing to the shelving is included in the number.

02 QUESTIONS FOR THE SUPPLIER — BEFORE THE NUMBER IS ACCEPTED

- Hardwood lipping included for the pantry and island finger-pull details?
- Veneer specification — species, quality and exact build-up, so the material cost can be benchmarked.
- Drawer runner systems — concealed premium runners, or side-mounted?
- Anticipated installation timeframe — a real proportion of cost sits in programme length.
- LED specification, lighting plan and switch type / location.
- Hardware schedule — any specialist push-to-open or premium ironmongery included?
- VAT position confirmed.

03 BENCHMARKING THE ITEMISED COSTING

Once the breakdown returns, the kitchen — the largest, most complex unit — is taken as the benchmark data set and the other units read proportionally against it. Units that price simple additions heavily, or that look inflated against like units, are challenged; missing or duplicated items are flagged.

UNIT	READ AGAINST THE DATA SET	ACTION
Kitchen (benchmark)	Efficient — priced well, and uses a standard carcass board rather than a bespoke one	Adopt as the reference rate
Living unit B vs A	Near-identical spec, yet $\approx$ £1,800 more for what is effectively a simple cabinet plus shelving	Challenge — reprice against A
Utility & hidden units	Priced at bespoke, on-show rates although the material is never seen	Value-engineer the carcass
Omitted unit	Appears absent from the schedule against the drawings	Query — confirm in or out
Pocket-door unit	Unclear whether the pocket doors are manufactured within this package	Confirm scope

04 VALUE ENGINEERING — WHERE THE SAVING COMES FROM

- **STANDARDISE THE CARCASS.** Use the efficient board the kitchen is priced on across the non-bedroom units — the single biggest saving, and a useful reference rate for future schemes.
- **CHEAPER CARCASSING ON HIDDEN UNITS.** Utility and back-of-house units don't need an on-show material.
- **REPRICE THE OUTLIERS.** Bring the units that benchmark high back in line with their like-for-like equivalents.
- **SIMPLIFY WHERE IT ISN'T SEEN.** Plainer handle and edge details on unseen units; keep the expensive details where they do design work.
- **CONFIRM, DON'T ASSUME.** Lock the runner, hardware and LED spec so the price matches the specification, not an allowance.

Outcome. Applied to a real package, this exercise returned a substantial saving — into five figures — while making the package better, largely through carcass standardisation and challenging the units that benchmarked high. The visible finish was unchanged; the price was not.

05 QUALITY ASSURANCE

Price is only half the picture. Before accepting, view one of the supplier's completed installations and check the things that separate good joinery from ordinary — veneer edging quality, cabinet gaps, consistency and general detailing. A fair price on a well-made package is the goal; a low price on a poorly made one is not a saving.

