

Cabinetmaker

At a Glance

Cabinetmakers use a lot of skill and creativity in their work. They build and repair furniture made of wood and other materials.

16 Career Clusters

Architecture & Construction

Earnings

Earnings Range: 10 - 23/hr

Level of Education

- High School
- 2-Year College or Technical Training

Core Tasks

- Read drawings and specifications, and prepare patterns and layouts
- For custom pieces, discuss the projects with customers and draw up detailed specifications
- Set up and operate woodworking equipment, and cut, shape, and assemble the pieces of wood
- Sand and smooth the surfaces, and apply veneer, stain, or paint

Attributes & Abilities

- Mechanically inclined
- Work well with your hands
- Hand-eye coordination
- Communication skills
- Able to visualize finished products

Workplace

- Work for furniture manufacturers and custom furniture shops, or are self-employed
- Most work a 5-day, 40-hour week, but overtime is sometimes necessary
- Work indoors in factories or woodworking shops, which are usually dusty and noisy
- There is some risk of cuts from sharp tools
- On their feet much of the time

Job Description

Have you ever been to a high-end furniture store? Who made all of the tables and chairs? These may have been the work of a skilled cabinetmaker. Cabinetmakers build and repair furniture made of wood and other materials. This job involves lots of variety and creativity.

There are many steps in making a piece of wood furniture. First, cabinetmakers read drawings and plans. Then, they make patterns and layouts. They also set up and operate woodworking equipment. They use special tools to cut, shape, and assemble the pieces of wood.

Once the furniture is put together, they sand and finish the surfaces. To finish a product, they may apply a thin layer of fine wood called a veneer. The final step is to stain and polish the piece.

For cabinetmakers, it's important to use good quality materials. Skilled and careful workmanship is also a big part of this trade. Many people in this trade make beautiful home furnishings such as beds, sofas, tables, and chairs. Their creations may be production or custom pieces.

Production pieces are made in large numbers. They follow a standard design. Think of the items at Ikea, for instance. Custom-made pieces are often unique, rather than mass-produced. If someone wants a custom table, cabinetmakers can make a one-of-a-kind design. First, they discuss the project with the client. Next, they draw up detailed plans. Both the client and the cabinetmaker must agree on the final design.

After that, the cabinetmaker decides how much and what kind of wood to use. Then, they draft an estimate for the cost of all the materials they'll need. In addition to wood, cabinetmakers use items like screws, nails, and stains. Finally, the cabinetmaker makes the piece.

Cabinetmakers who create custom pieces often do the whole project themselves. However, those who work in shops may do specific jobs. Some focus only on installation. Others do the painting and finishing.

Cabinet shops often specialize in certain industries. For example, some make pieces for restaurants. They might produce booths, counters, and bars. Others specialize in church fixtures. They create panels, pulpits, pews, and altars. Some workers in custom furniture shops may shape and finish elaborate pieces. A few do carving and inlay work.

Working Conditions

Many cabinetmakers work for furniture companies. They are employed by large manufacturers or by custom shops. Others in this trade are self-employed.

In this job, a 5-day, 40-hour workweek is normal. Overtime is common when there are special projects to finish. People who are self-employed can set their own work schedules. However, they usually work long hours during busy periods.

Cabinetmakers work indoors in factories or smaller woodworking shops. Cabinet shops are usually clean, with good light and ventilation. But there can be a lot of noise.

Cabinetmakers also have to deal with sawdust and chemical fumes. Paints, stains, and stripping materials need to be handled with care. As a result, they have to follow health and safety rules. There is also a risk of cuts and bruises from sharp tools.

Cabinetmakers use many tools in their work. They often use trim saws, band saws, shapers, planers, jointers, and sanders. At some shops, only special workers can operate that equipment. When that's the case, cabinetmakers use only hand tools to finish their pieces.

Earnings

Most cabinetmakers are paid by the hour. Wages in this trade range from \$10 to \$25 an hour, with a median of \$16 an hour. For people working full time, that adds up to a range of \$21,000 to \$51,000 a year. The median yearly income is around \$33,000. Experienced and highly skilled tradespeople can earn more than \$25 an hour.

Earnings in this field depend on a number of factors. Experience, location, and employer can all impact income. Wages also depend on whether people work full time or part time.

People who are self-employed are often paid by the project. Their earnings depend on the how much they charge and how many customers they have.

Cabinetmakers who work for companies often receive benefits as well. These usually include paid sick days, vacation time, and health coverage. Self-employed cabinetmakers must provide their own benefits.

Tradespeople in unionized shops must join their local union. Union leaders negotiate the wages and benefits on behalf of the whole group. Unionized cabinetmakers often earn more than those who do not belong to unions.

Fully trained cabinetmakers may be required to have their own hand tools. They usually start purchasing their tools during their training.

Massachusetts Wages

Occupation: Cabinetmakers and Bench Carpenters

Level of Experience	Hourly	Annual
Entry Wage	\$15.14	\$31,490
Median Wage	\$18.36	\$38,190
Experienced Wage	\$23.08	\$48,000

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov>

Massachusetts Outlook

Occupation: Cabinetmakers and Bench Carpenters

Employment

2014	1,880
2024	1,910

Change

Number	30
Percentage	1.4

Annual Average Openings

Total	Growth	Replacement
20	--	--

Source: Projections Central <http://www.projectionscentral.com>

Education

Most people learn this trade on the job. You can do this through a formal apprenticeship program. Or, you can work as a helper to an experienced cabinetmaker.

Apprenticeship programs are offered by labor unions and employers. To qualify for an apprenticeship, you need to meet certain criteria. Depending on where you live, you should be at least 17 or 18 years old. Most employers prefer you to have a high school diploma. Try to take courses in math, shop, drafting, and blueprint reading while in high school. Courses in accounting and business are an asset if you plan to be self-employed.

Apprenticeships last for about 4 years. They include in-class instruction as well as on-the-job training. At the end of your training, you can become certified. To do this, you need to pass a written exam.

Another way to enter this field is to train on the job. You can be hired as a helper to more experienced workers. If you go this route, you'll start by doing odd jobs. You can progress to more complex tasks as you gain experience. There are no strict educational requirements for working as a helper. But again, it's easier to get a job if you have a high school diploma.

Some 2-year colleges and technical schools offer courses in cabinetmaking and woodworking. These courses are not required, but they may increase your chances of getting a job in this field.

Related College Programs

- Cabinetmaking and Millwork
- Carpentry/Carpenter
- Woodworking, General

Other Suggested Qualifications

Good mechanical ability, manual dexterity, and attention to detail are required. It helps to have good hand-eye coordination and the ability to communicate thoughts and ideas effectively. A natural ability to visualize the finished product is also useful. Try to take courses in math, shop, drafting, and blueprint reading while in high school. Courses in accounting and business are useful for those who would like to work as self-employed cabinetmakers.

Sample High School Program of Study

This Program of Study can serve as a guide, along with other career planning materials, as learners continue on a career path. Courses listed within this plan are only recommended coursework and should be individualized to meet each learner's educational and career goals.

Construction Architecture & Construction

Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English/Language Arts			
English/Language Arts I	English/Language Arts II	English/Language Arts III Technical Writing	English/Language Arts IV
Math			
Algebra I	Geometry	Algebra II	Construction Math Statistics
Science			
Earth or Life or Physical Science	Biology	Physics	Chemistry
Social Studies/Sciences			

Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
State History Civics or World History	U.S. History	Economics Psychology	
Career & Technical Courses			
Introduction to the Built Environment	The Language of Architecture and Construction Information Technology Applications	Safety, Health and the Workplace Environment Principles of Construction	Applications in Construction

States' Career Clusters Initiative, 2008, www.careerclusters.org.

Important

- Check with your advisor to make sure that your course selections satisfy your graduation requirements.
- Courses available may vary from school to school.

Sample Career Path

People take different pathways through their careers, but no one starts at the top. This is an example of how the earnings, education and experience requirements, and responsibilities might progress for someone in this occupation.

Level 1

Sample Title	Apprentice
Earnings	\$10 to \$12 an hour
Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school diploma • Math skills • Manual dexterity • Some woodworking or craft courses • Enrolled in apprenticeship program

Responsibilities	Observing a qualified cabinetmaker; cultivating skills; sanding and gluing pieces of wood; learning to use machinery.
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Level 2

Sample Title	Fully Qualified Cabinetmaker
Earnings	\$12 to \$23 an hour

Level 2

Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completed apprenticeship• Ability to read blueprints• Woodworking skills
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Responsibilities	Leading projects; building furniture from scratch; ordering materials.
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Level 3

Sample Title	Cabinet Shop Owner
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Earnings	\$20,000 to \$70,000 a year
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Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5 to 10 years of experience in the field• Many contacts and a good reputation
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Responsibilities	Running the company (hiring and firing staff, balancing the budget, marketing); building good quality, marketable furniture.
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Related Careers

Here are some other occupations that you might be interested in. Click on an occupation name to learn more.

- Antique Dealer
- Carpenter
- Construction Tradesperson
- Craftsperson
- Exhibit Designer
- Furniture Finisher
- Industrial Designer
- Model Maker
- Musical Instrument Builder and Repairer
- Picture Framer
- Production Woodworker
- Upholsterer

Related Military Careers

- Construction Specialist

Career Clusters

Career Clusters are groups or families of occupations that share common characteristics such as knowledge requirements, skill sets, and/or goals.

Architecture & Construction

National Employment by Industry

Industry	% Employed
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Manufacturing	72
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Industry**% Employed**

Self-Employed

15

Source: O*Net Online, Browse by Industry, US Department of Labor
<http://online.onetcenter.org/find/industry>

Other Resources

CabinetMakerFDM.Com

A magazine serving the cabinetmaking industry. Check out the latest news on the home page.
<http://www.cabinetmakerfdm.com>

American Woodworker

The online home of American Woodworker magazine. Be sure to check out the Techniques sections for great professional advice.
<http://www.americanwoodworker.com>

Amateur Woodworker

This is a helpful Internet magazine aimed at amateur woodworkers. Be sure to check out the Wood Types and Tool Glossary sections.
<http://www.am-wood.com>

Careers In Wood

On this website from the Wood Manufacturing Council, a Canadian organization, you can find helpful career and industry information.
<http://www.careersinwood.ca>

Cabinet Makers Association (CMA)

This is a membership organization for owners and employees of cabinet shops and wood products manufacturers.
<http://www.cabinetmakers.org>

Furniture Society

This non-profit organization promotes the art of furniture making. Scroll over Resources and then on Educational Institutions to find out about furniture craft programs.
<http://www.furnituresociety.org>

Occupational Outlook Handbook – Woodworkers

Career information from the US Department of Labor.
<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Production/Woodworkers.htm>