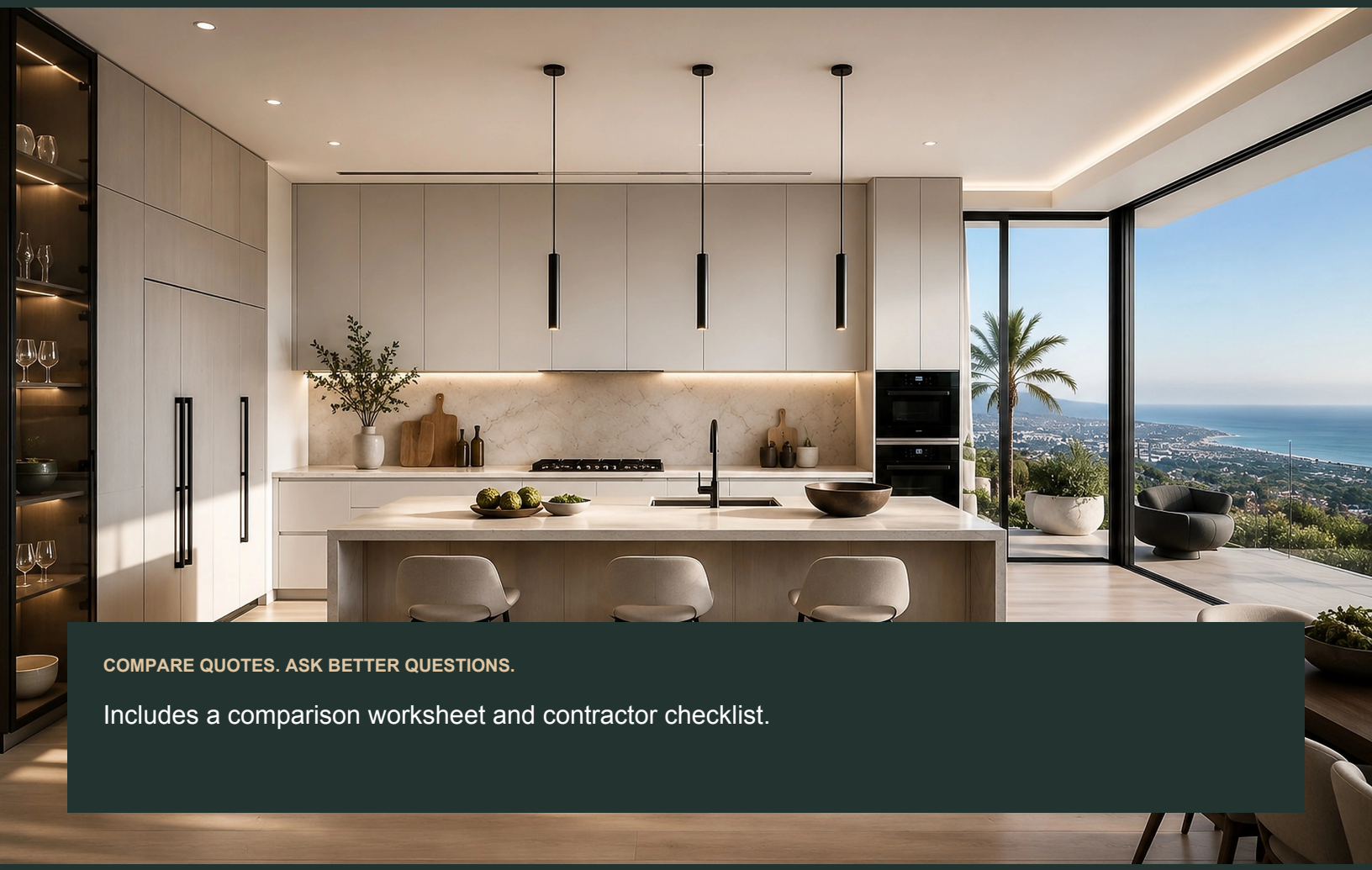
HM
INTERIOR & REMODELING

The Los Angeles Kitchen Remodel Guide

9 Costly Mistakes to Avoid Before You Sign



COMPARE QUOTES. ASK BETTER QUESTIONS.

Includes a comparison worksheet and contractor checklist.

KITCHEN INSPIRATION IMAGE - NOT A COMPLETED-PROJECT CLAIM

LOS ANGELES HOMEOWNER EDITION / OCTOBER 2026

START HERE

A beautiful kitchen starts with a better plan.

The expensive mistakes often happen before demolition: vague bids, rushed decisions and assumptions nobody puts in writing.

HOW A $65,000 BID CAN BECOME $115,000

ILLUSTRATIVE SCOPE / COST	AMOUNT
Quoted project price	$65,000
Omitted electrical, plumbing and permit scope	+$12,000
Cabinet, stone and appliance allowance gaps	+$18,000
Concealed repairs and layout rework	+$15,000
Delay-related living and storage costs	+$5,000
ILLUSTRATIVE OVERRUN	+$50,000

Illustration only, not a real project, Los Angeles price estimate, HM quote or typical outcome. The $50,000 figure describes potential combined exposure, not a claim that every mistake costs $50,000 or a promise of savings. All financial examples in this guide are illustrative.

YOUR NINE CHECKPOINTS

01 Compare scope, not just price

02 Verify the contractor

03 Control the payment schedule

04 Get the full contract in writing

05 Confirm permits and inspections

06 Investigate the older home

07 Lock the layout and appliances

08 Specify materials and allowances

09 Plan changes, timing and closeout

MISTAKE 01

Choosing the lowest number

A cheaper bid can hide a more expensive project.

BID A	BID B	COMPARE
Cabinets only	Cabinets + installation	Same installed scope

WHY IT GETS EXPENSIVE

A $65,000 quote and an $85,000 quote are only comparable if they buy the same kitchen. Missing demolition, disposal, finish work or trade labor can make a low bid look better than it is.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Request the same written scope from every bidder. Separate fixed-price work, allowances, optional upgrades and exclusions. Identify who pays for tax, delivery, installation and permit fees.

Watch for: A cabinet allowance covers materials, but installation and hardware are missing. The gap appears only after you have committed.

ASK YOUR CONTRACTOR

What is excluded, what is an allowance, and what could increase this price?

Ask for a revised, itemized bid before comparing totals. Official resources: S2 on page 14.

MISTAKE 02

Hiring before verifying

Great photos are not proof of a qualified contractor.

CONTRACT	LICENSE	PAYEE
Exact business name	Match CSLB record	Resolve differences

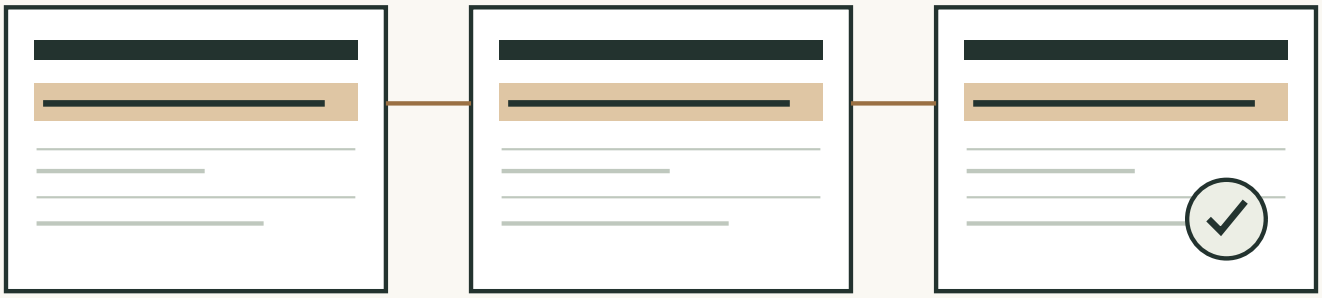
WHY IT GETS EXPENSIVE

A polished website does not prove that the business signing your contract is qualified or insured. Check the exact legal entity and the credentials needed for the work at your address.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Verify the exact contractor business and appropriate license classification through CSLB. Match the contract and payee to the record. Ask for current insurance details, confirm coverage with the insurer, and speak with recent kitchen clients.

Watch for: The proposal uses one business name, the trade license belongs to another, and payment is requested to an individual. Resolve the mismatch before signing.



ASK YOUR CONTRACTOR

Which business signs my contract, which licensed trades perform the work, and who supervises the project?

Save CSLB checks, license details, insurance and reference notes. Official resources: S1, S2 on page 14.

MISTAKE 03

Paying too much, too soon

Your payment schedule should follow real progress.

SCHEDULE	VERIFY	RECORD
Defined work / materials	Check actual progress	Receipt + payment log

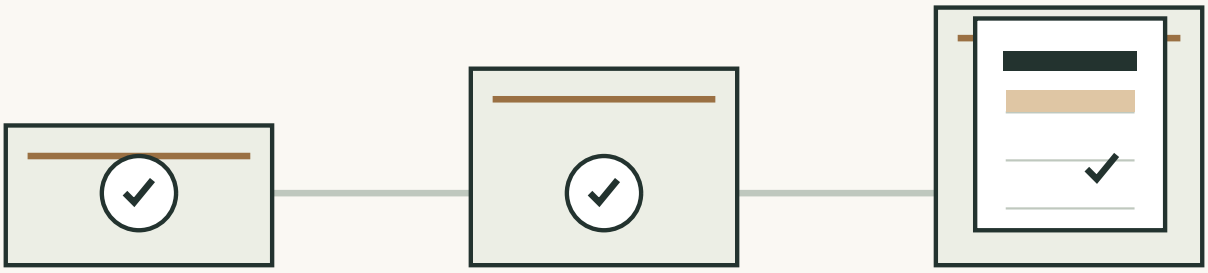
WHY IT GETS EXPENSIVE

Front-loading payments reduces your leverage if work stalls. A large deposit without a clear purpose, documented materials or a written schedule puts more of your budget at risk.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Agree on a written deposit and progress-payment schedule. Tie payments to defined work and materials, then verify progress before paying. CSLB's general home-improvement guidance caps the down payment at $1,000 or 10% of the contract price, whichever is less. Custom-order materials do not automatically justify more. Confirm any claimed statutory exception with CSLB.

Watch for: Illustration only: On an $80,000 project, a 30% upfront request is $24,000. This exceeds the general California down-payment cap. Ask what is being requested and confirm lawful payment terms before agreeing.



ASK YOUR CONTRACTOR

What completed work or delivered materials trigger each payment?

Get receipts and discuss subcontractor payment records and lien protections. Official resources: S3, S9 on page 14.

MISTAKE 04

Signing a vague contract

If it matters to you, it belongs in the agreement.

DRAWING	SPECIFICATION	AGREEMENT
What you expect	What is included	One signed document set

WHY IT GETS EXPENSIVE

Phrases such as "complete kitchen" or "standard finishes" leave too much open to interpretation. A detailed contract is where you define the result, responsibilities and how disagreements or changes will be handled.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Include drawings, material specifications, exclusions, start and completion timing, payment milestones, cleanup and warranty terms. Require written change orders showing scope, price and schedule impact before changed work begins.

Watch for: The rendering shows under-cabinet lighting, but the written scope does not. The homeowner assumes it is included; the installer treats it as an upgrade.

ASK YOUR CONTRACTOR

Can we attach the final drawings, specifications and exclusions to the signed contract?

Keep a complete signed copy and every approved change order. Official resources: S3 on page 14.

MISTAKE 05

Skipping the permit plan

Do not let "we never need one" end the conversation.

ADDRESS

Find your authority

SCOPE

Confirm permit route

CLOSEOUT

Keep final records

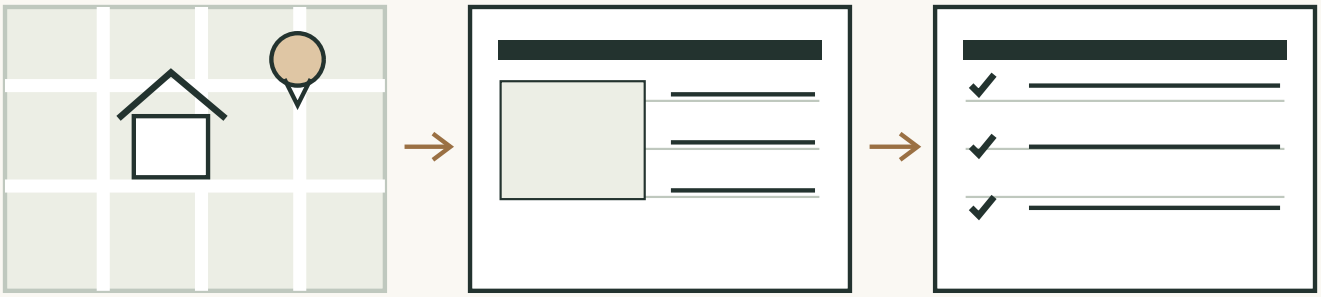
WHY IT GETS EXPENSIVE

Permit needs depend on the work and the city serving your property. Structural, electrical, plumbing or mechanical changes may require permits and inspections; cosmetic work may be treated differently.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Confirm the scope with your local building department before work begins. Los Angeles, Calabasas and surrounding cities have their own processes. Assign responsibility for applications, fees, inspections and corrections in writing. A Los Angeles mailing address alone does not identify the permit authority. LADBS lists nonstructural residential kitchen remodels under express permits; this is not a permit exemption.

Watch for: A finished wall must be reopened because required work was covered before inspection. You may face corrective work and schedule disruption.



ASK YOUR CONTRACTOR

Which permits and inspections apply, who handles them, and how will I receive final sign-offs?

Keep permit numbers and final inspection records in your project file. Official resources: S4, S5, S6, S7 on page 14.

MISTAKE 06

Ignoring what is behind the walls

An older home needs investigation, not optimism.

INVESTIGATE

What is visible?

DOCUMENT

What did we discover?

APPROVE

Price before proceeding

WHY IT GETS EXPENSIVE

Old plumbing, electrical limitations, moisture damage or structural issues may not be visible during a casual walkthrough. A cosmetic estimate cannot guarantee the condition of concealed work.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Arrange appropriate preconstruction evaluation. Agree on a discovery process: stop affected work, document the condition, price the remedy and get approval. For covered paint-disturbing work in pre-1978 homes, verify EPA lead-safe certification and practices.

Watch for: After demolition, the crew finds damaged framing and outdated wiring. Without a written process or reserve, the project becomes a series of rushed financial decisions.

ASK YOUR CONTRACTOR

What have you inspected, what is still unknown, and how will hidden conditions be priced?

Set a project-specific contingency with your team and keep it separate from upgrades. Official resources: S8 on page 14.

MISTAKE 07

Ordering before the layout is final

A kitchen must work before it looks good.

MODEL

Exact appliances

MEASURE

Door swings + access

COORDINATE

Plan before ordering

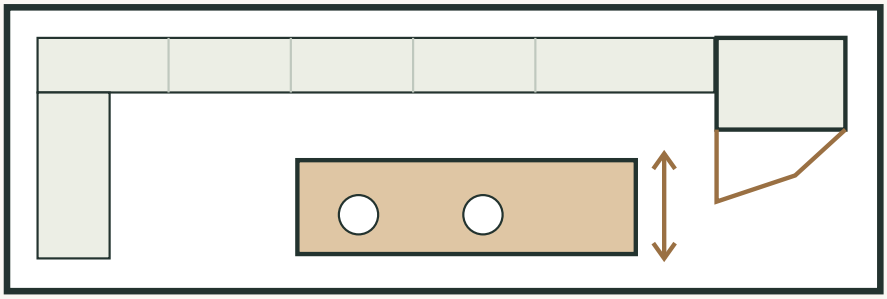
WHY IT GETS EXPENSIVE

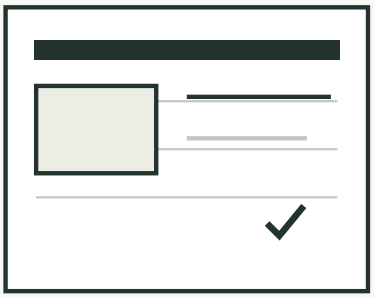
A gorgeous island can obstruct an appliance door or a main walkway. A late appliance change can affect cabinetry, countertop cutouts, electrical needs and ventilation. These decisions are connected.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Approve a measured plan with exact appliance model numbers before ordering. Check door and drawer swings, clearances, seating and storage. Have the team confirm utility and ventilation requirements against manufacturer instructions and local requirements.

Watch for: The refrigerator arrives after the cabinets. Its doors cannot open fully beside the wall, forcing a cabinet modification and a change to the surrounding finish work.





ASK YOUR CONTRACTOR

Have you checked this layout against the exact appliances and how we use the room?

Sign off on a coordinated plan; avoid ordering from inspiration images alone.

MISTAKE 08

Leaving finishes as allowances

"Included" does not always mean fully covered.

PLACEHOLDER	SELECTION	RECONCILE
Allowance in the bid	Product + installed scope	Actual price + credit

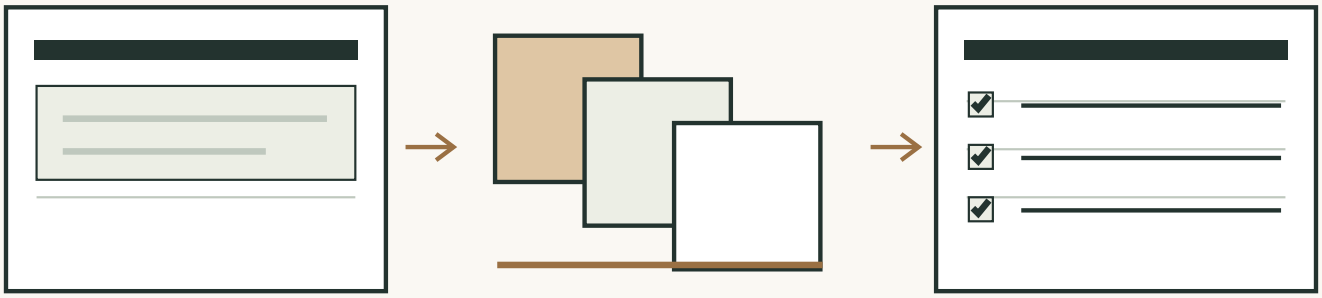
WHY IT GETS EXPENSIVE

An allowance is a budget placeholder, not a promise that any product you choose will fit the price. Small gaps across cabinets, stone, tile, fixtures and appliances can add up quickly.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Choose products early. List cabinet construction, finish, hardware, countertop material, edge detail, backsplash area and installation scope. Ask whether allowances include tax, freight, fabrication, labor and contractor markup, and how credits work.

Watch for: A stone allowance covers the slab but not fabrication, cutouts or a waterfall edge. The final installed selection costs much more than the number in the bid.



ASK YOUR CONTRACTOR

What exactly does each allowance buy, and what is the installed price of my actual selection?

Replace major allowances with priced selections wherever practical.

MISTAKE 09

Starting without an exit plan

The schedule, changes and finish line need owners.

READY	BUILD	HANDOVER
Plans + deliveries	Trades + inspections	Punch list + records

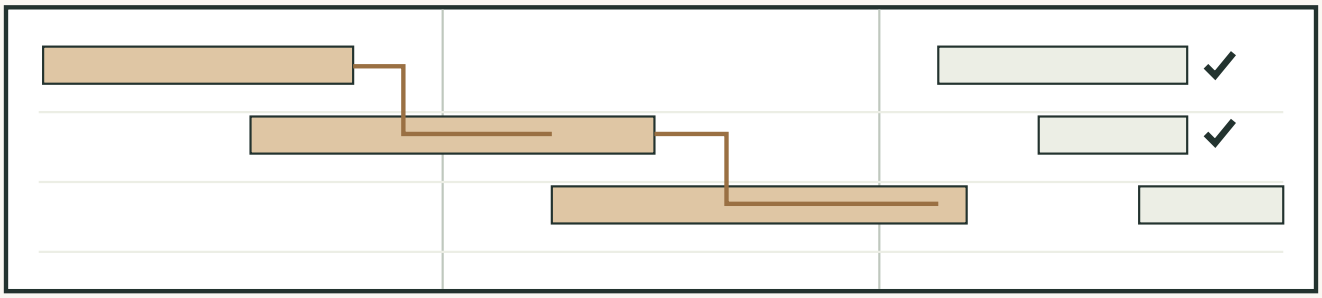
WHY IT GETS EXPENSIVE

Demolition is easy to schedule; a functioning kitchen is harder. Missing materials, unresolved choices and undocumented changes can extend disruption. Paying everything before closeout can leave loose ends.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Confirm critical deliveries before demolition. Map trade work and inspections, assign a daily contact and hold weekly updates. Track changes in writing. Define the punch list, testing, cleanup, warranties and final inspection documents required for closeout.

Watch for: Cabinets are delayed after the old kitchen is removed. Temporary meals and storage continue, then a countertop change triggers another delay and extra labor.



ASK YOUR CONTRACTOR

What must be ready before demolition, and what documents and finished work define completion?

Keep a change log and a closeout checklist tied to the contract. Official resources: S3, S4 on page 14.

WORKSHEET

Compare the same kitchen.

Print this worksheet. Ask each bidder to fill in missing details before you compare the bottom line.

I = included | A = allowance (write amount) | X = excluded

SCOPE / RESPONSIBILITY	BID A	BID B	BID C
Quoted contract total			
Design, measurements and engineering			
Demolition, hauling and protection			
Cabinets, hardware and installation			
Countertop fabrication and installation			
Appliances, delivery and hookup			
Plumbing work and fixtures			
Electrical work and lighting			
Ventilation / hood installation			
Flooring, backsplash and painting			
Permits, fees and inspections			
Allowances: actual selected cost			
Exclusions and unresolved scope			
Start / completion timing			
Payment milestones / warranty			

Do not turn an unknown into $0. Request revised totals for the same scope; keep your contingency separate.

BEFORE YOU SIGN

Before signing, check these nine boxes.

- [ ] **Same scope**
  Every quote covers the same work and specifications.
- [ ] **Verified business**
  Entity, CSLB license/classifications, insurance and references checked.
- [ ] **Clear payments**
  Deposit and progress payments have been reviewed.
- [ ] **Complete agreement**
  Drawings, inclusions, exclusions and timing are attached.
- [ ] **Permit ownership**
  Applications, inspections and closeout have an owner.
- [ ] **Known unknowns**
  Hidden conditions have a process and contingency.
- [ ] **Final layout**
  Appliances, dimensions and clearances are coordinated.
- [ ] **Real selections**
  Major allowances are reconciled to chosen products.
- [ ] **Ready to start**
  Deliveries, changes and completion requirements are clear.

OFFICIAL RESOURCES

Check the right authority.

Use these official resources to verify the requirements for your address and project scope. Reviewed October 26, 2026.

S1 CSLB - Check a contractor license

Match the exact business and review current license information before hiring.

S2 CSLB - Finding the right contractor

Compare equivalent written bids, check references and verify insurance.

S3 CSLB - Home improvement contracts

Review payment guidance, written scope and signed change orders.

S4 LADBS - Permits and inspections

Start with City of Los Angeles review, permits and inspection services.

S5 LADBS - Express permit bulletin

P/GI 2026-003, revised June 10, 2026; residential kitchens without structural changes are listed.

S6 LA County - Find the right permit office

Use the Service Locator for an address within Los Angeles County.

S7 City of Calabasas - Online Permit Center

For Calabasas properties, confirm the local process directly with the city.

S8 US EPA - Lead-safe renovation for consumers

For pre-1978 homes, understand paint-disturbing renovation and certified lead-safe firms.

S9 CSLB - California contractor law reference

See Business and Professions Code 7159.5 for payment rules and statutory exceptions; confirm applicability with CSLB.

City of Los Angeles, LA County and neighboring cities have different jurisdictions. A service ZIP is not a permit determination. For another city, use that city's official building department. Source links are clickable in this PDF.

OPTIONAL NEXT STEP

Already have a kitchen quote?

Get clarity before you commit.

BRING

Your proposal, room photos and your must-have list.

IDENTIFY

Missing scope, allowance gaps and unclear responsibilities.

ASK

Which decisions need an itemized answer before signing?

Request a no-obligation quote review from HM Interior & Remodeling, the team that sent you this guide.

Bring your proposal, kitchen photos and must-have list. We can help you spot missing scope, unclear allowances and questions worth asking.

ASK ABOUT A KITCHEN PROPOSAL REVIEW

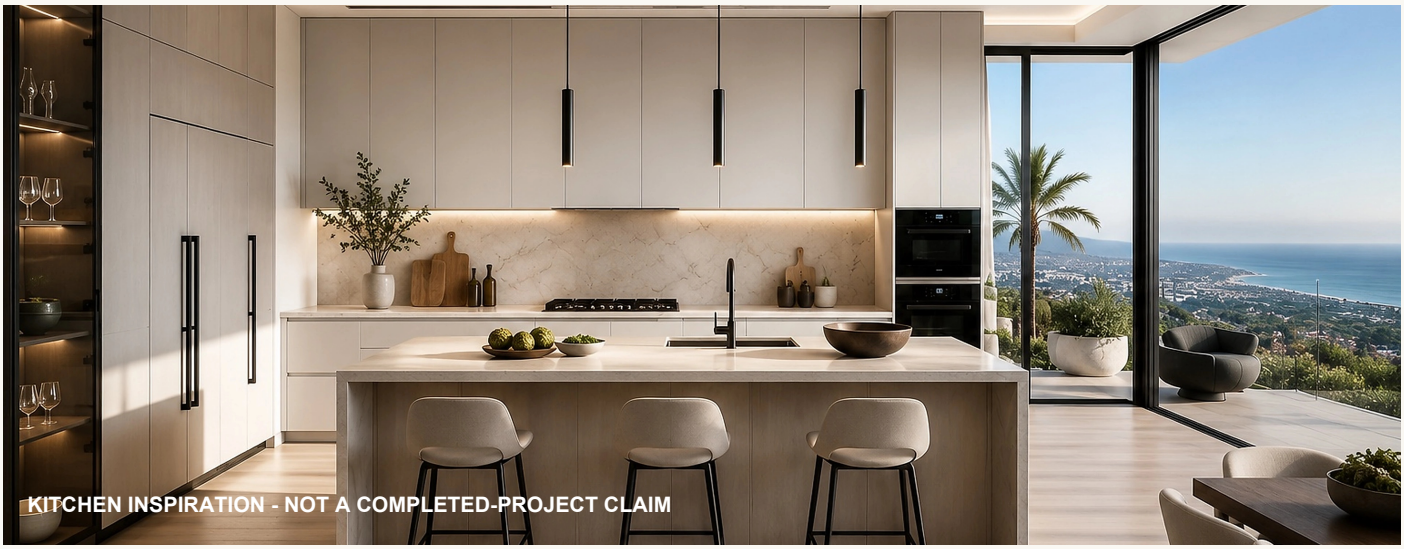
Visit HM's contact page / hminteriorandremodeling.com/Contact

No pressure to hire. No obligation to move forward. A conversation or appointment is optional; downloading the guide does not request an estimate, authorize a call or reserve a meeting.

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR KITCHEN

Your next step starts here.

Planning a remodel or comparing quotes? Reach HM through its public contact page.



Planning a remodel or comparing quotes? Use the public contact page to ask about your kitchen. Any call or appointment is arranged separately with HM.

Contact HM Interior & Remodeling
hminteriorandremodeling.com/Contact

HM focuses on kitchen projects with planned budgets of $30,000 and above. This is a project-fit threshold, not a price quote or the cost of the guide. Exact service ZIP and project fit must be confirmed; the wider Los Angeles area is not a blanket coverage promise.

No meeting is required to use this guide. Any consultation or appointment is arranged separately with HM. Public contact path checked October 26, 2026.