

# CABINET FURNITURE BUYING GUIDE

The Furniture Industry Research Association is an independent body that works within the UK furniture industry to promote quality and standards across the whole furniture range.

The Association has over 65 years' experience in developing and setting the Standards for furniture in the UK and Europe to try to ensure that the products you buy are safe, durable and fit for purpose.

Furniture is usually a significant purchase and we believe that we are perfectly positioned to be able to provide you with some hints, tips and additional information that will help you decide what to buy.

We hope that you find this guide useful and that you find the perfect piece of furniture for you.

## Choosing your cabinet furniture

When buying a dining table, bookcase, cupboard - or any item of cabinet furniture – the selection of products on offer can appear endless. There are many different styles, designs and price ranges. The temptation is to make the selection based on what looks good, fits in with the home-furnishing scheme in terms of style, finish, colour, and meets the budget.

Although there are differences in the materials and finishes, the most important things to consider when choosing cabinet furniture are the purposes for which you need the item, taking into account size, strength, durability and after care requirements. Of course this has to be balanced against your budget and the overall perceived value for money of the piece of furniture.

If the item is for storage – whether for drinks, ornaments, books or even filing – check the space that you need. Carefully measure the space where you intend to position the item. Remember that units usually require extra space to allow doors and drawers to open. It is also worth considering the weight of the intended contents to be stored/displayed to ensure stability.



## Types of materials used for cabinet

Cabinet furniture can be made from a variety of materials – solid woods, natural or synthetic veneers, and man-made engineered boards (such as chipboard or MDF) or a mixture of each. All have their advantages and understanding a little about the materials can help you choose the product most suited to you.

### Solid wood

The colour, feel and overall appearance of a solid wood product gives the most authentic feel to cabinet furniture. As a wholly natural product, solid wood will show knots, grain/colour variation and other features.

Solid wood products will have a tendency to move with temperature and humidity changes and panels will move against each other. The colour of solid wood can also change over a period of time as the wood mellows and matures. The unique nature of wood can also mean that panels and adjoining pieces of furniture will not always be an exact match in terms of colour and grain. Other features, such as medullary rays within oak can be perceived as a fault but are actually an inherent part of the wood and should be considered to add unique beauty to your individual piece.

Look for products certified by FSC or PEFC. These organisations have developed sustainable standards for forest management and operate programs that verify compliance to them. These organisations operate certifications schemes throughout the timber supply chain, to ensure timber is sustainably sourced. When you buy FSC/PEFC certified wood furniture or other wood products, you can be certain that it supports responsible forestry.

### Real wood veneers

Veneers consist of thin layers of wood with a fine or decorative finish that are applied to various types of material. This could be timber or board materials. The advantages of veneers are that the furniture itself can be more stable and less prone to movement or warping than solid wood. Grain and colour match can be better than solid wood, but because the veneers are wood they can be subject to movement with changes in temperature and humidity.

In some cases, wood veneers can give the look of real wood at a lower price. This is not always the case, as finely decorated or finished veneered items can be expensive due to the level of human skill needed to select and apply the veneer.

### Synthetic veneers

Synthetic veneers are also used extensively on cabinet furniture. These are paper, PVC or HPL (high pressure laminates) that have been printed, and sometimes embossed, to represent the feel and appearance of real wood. They too are usually bonded to chipboard or MDF. The difference to the customer is that these have a uniform colour and grain structure. Modern production printing methods mean that today's synthetic veneers are able to give a very realistic alternative to solid wood or natural wood veneer that will be hard to tell apart. Exotic woods that are no longer available in solid or natural veneer form due to scarcity are also available as synthetic veneers.

Synthetic veneer designs can also offer more contemporary modern finishes in an endless pallet of colours and finishes. Synthetic veneers are used for many reasons, sometimes cost, design or required end use. Some finishes can stand very high temperatures and are less prone to damage than solid timber or veneer.

## Chipboard and MDF

Man-made boards such as chipboard and MDF have the advantage of being more stable than solid wood. They are less likely to warp, split, shrink or expand when temperatures and humidity vary.

Chipboard and MDF are available in large sheet form, which makes them ideally suited to the production of large storage items, such as wardrobes.

As a smooth board which can be cut and shaped without leaving a rough edge, MDF is particularly good for achieving clean painted finishes and is a great choice for producing lacquered furniture.

## Colour variation of cabinet furniture

Many timbers, solid or veneered, naturally vary in grain and colour from piece to piece. This gives the furniture a uniqueness that sets it aside from synthetic veneers and painted surfaces. Depending on the intensity of daylight that an item is subjected to, over a period of time the colour of the timber will mellow i.e. become darker or orange.

This often happens in what appears to be an erratic manner, as some pieces will appear lighter than others and the effect is natural. However problems can occur if an item such as a lamp, vase or mat is left in one place. This will slow the colour change of the timber under the item and may result in an area of lighter wood that may take longer to mellow. The mellowing of timber occurs rapidly for about the first two years, it then appears to slow down and eventually the furniture will achieve full 'maturity'. However some woods do lighten with exposure to sunlight so regularly repositioning the furniture and items on it should be undertaken as a precaution. Taking care not to position in direct sunlight will keep your furniture looking at its best longer.

Any wood or veneer will vary in colour and graining from piece to piece, giving it that unique individuality which distinguishes it from synthetic materials such as plastic or metal. Matching of veneers cannot always be guaranteed and you should check with your retailer before ordering.

## Delivery of your cabinet furniture

When your furniture arrives at your home, check carefully that it is 'as ordered' and fault-free. Damage and defects should be reported as soon as possible so that the matter can be resolved swiftly and satisfactorily.

## Assembling your cabinet furniture

Self-assembled furniture is often perceived as lower cost, this is not always the case. Quality self-assembly furniture can look just like factory assembled units but with the advantage of minimising delivery damage and also allowing large items to be assembled where they are to be positioned, thus avoiding access problems (e.g. struggling with a large wardrobe through doors and up the stairs!).

It can be very tempting to unpack and immediately start assembling your purchase but even some simple products need to be assembled in a particular order that may not appear obvious so, as a general rule, always read the instructions before beginning. We recommend that if you are not confident in your abilities we would recommend using an experienced assembly service.

Once properly assembled, these types of unit are usually very secure and depending on the fittings, may be dismantled and reassembled if the furniture needs to be moved. Some larger pieces of furniture should be secured against a wall by a simple angle bracket or the overbalance protector provided, which should help to keep the structure rigid and strong – a useful safety precaution for large items such as tall bookcases and wardrobes. This will also ensure that the furniture is safe and secure around children, and can prevent the product tipping and causing any accidents.

## Looking after your cabinet furniture

Modern finishes are generally hard wearing and require little maintenance. However care during use will help to prevent damage and will prolong the life of your furniture. Care needs to be taken to protect the furniture from accidents during use:

- When moving the furniture, protect the surface from knocks and scratches. Corners and edges are particularly prone to accidental damage and need covering during moving
- When the furniture is being moved, ensure this is carried out carefully and the cabinets are not dragged across the floor. Once the item is in its new position, make sure it stands level to ensure smooth opening of the doors and running of the drawers. Never use force on the doors, drawers or carcass
- When selecting a position for furniture, in the case of solid or natural wood veneer, ensure that it is in a place where it will not be exposed to excessive sunlight. Neither should it be in a position where there is direct heat, such as next to a radiator, as this may cause damage to both the surface and the wooden structure
- When using the surface for serving food and drinks, or any item that may be wet, always use protective mats and coasters. If any hot serving dishes are used, special protection will be needed. Casserole stand type mats are best as they lift the item away from the surface. However care should be taken to ensure that the dish does not overhang the stand as this may allow hot liquids or condensation to drop on to the surface
- If any spillages do occur, whether hot or cold, make sure they are wiped up immediately
- Obtain and follow the manufacturer's care instructions

Finishes used on solid and veneered wood vary from simple waxes and oiled finishes to lacquers capable of withstanding different levels of use. Finishes used on synthetic veneered product are generally very hard wearing and capable of withstanding most uses. It is worth asking your retailer how you should care for the product you are buying as the maintenance necessary for each type of finish varies.

If you have oiled oak furniture it is very important to re-oil your product regularly. Most products you buy will be pre-oiled; however we recommend that you apply an additional coat of oil within 48 hours of delivery. It is also recommended that you oil the table surface on a six month to yearly basis depending on its usage, taking care not to over-oil the table using a standard linseed oil.

Most modern furniture is finished with a lacquer that has been developed to maintain appearance in normal use and should only need regular, light dusting with a soft cloth.

Manufacturers' care instructions should always be followed. Cleaning products that are not recommended by the furniture manufacturer should never be used.

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