



**JESSICA LOUISE
& JOHNNY
ALVERNAZ
OWNERS OF
KITCHENS
MAKEOVERS**

- **I think our customers love their kitchens, they just hate the colour. What a shame it would be to rip out all that perfectly good wood just to put in the same layout for a more modern colour.**
- **We are refinishers, not carpenters.**
- **We are the more environmentally friendly option, and we also happen to be more affordable than buying new, so for the right person, we're a great fit.**
- **Thank you to the kitchen cabinet manufacturers in BC. Without the quality products they create, we wouldn't have a business to operate.**

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INNOVATION



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Filling a niche in a huge market

The kitchen cabinet industry is multi-faceted driven by a diverse customer base.

One area is kitchen cabinet refinishing which often appeals to the customer who likes their kitchen, but just doesn't like the colour, or a customer who may have limited funds to do a full replacement and wants to spruce up what they have.

Kitchen Makeovers of Aldegrove, BC operates in this space and has done so since 2009 when Tanya Bilmer was doing residential house painting. Tanya's clients kept asking her to spray paint their cabinets. Tanya was eventually convinced and started spraying cabinets on her customers' front lawns.

Fast forward to today and Kitchen Makeovers is now owned by partners Jessica Louise (daughter of Tanya Bilmer) and Johnny Alvernaz. Together with their team of 30 they work on 8-12 projects a week and complete anywhere from 30-50 kitchens a month.

While there is no association for kitchen cabinet refinishers, there is an on-line network of thousands of companies in Facebook groups across Canada and the US. Jessica Louise estimates that Kitchen Makeovers is one of the larger companies.

Kitchen Makeovers is a proud

member of the CKCA and we thought it was time to get to know more about this unique area of the kitchen industry.

CKCA: How many team members go into one refinishing project?



Jessica: This depends entirely on the size of the kitchen, and work area. One person could do an apartment kitchen on their own across 3 days, but a large kitchen could have 3-5 people working across 3 days.

CKCA: What's the average cost of a typical kitchen refinishing?

Jessica: Our average job is about \$6,000.

CKCA: How do you showcase the work that you do to potential clients?

Jessica: We offer shop tours of our 10,000 sq. ft shop to customers. We do not make structural or profile changes to the kitchen, therefore we do not use virtual drawings to show the transformation. We are refinishers, not carpenters.

CKCA: How do your clients find you? What is the most effective marketing channels?

Jessica: Word of mouth is how my mom built her business. Now we have several marketing funnels that we rely on. Google Ads and Social Media are huge.

CKCA: What guarantees do you offer on the workmanship you provide?

Jessica: We offer a 3-year warranty.

CKCA: Are you bidding on work where the customer is either going to transform their kitchen or they want to rebuild it?

Jessica: No, typically our customers love their kitchens but they hate the colour. This is our ideal client.

CKCA: Do you work with kitchen cabinet manufacturers to supply any components to the kitchens you refinish?

Jessica: We do not work with a cabinet manufacturer for refinishing. If we are offering the customer refacing, then we work with M&J or New Surrey to supply these pieces.

CKCA: What are the pros and cons of refinishing a kitchen?

Jessica: The pros is you get a like-new kitchen at a fraction of the cost, in a fraction of the time. The con is it's not a new kitchen and we

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“Are you green, yellow or red?”

are only fine finishers, and therefore can only work with what you have already in place.

CKCA: Do you also replace the hardware (external and internal) in the refinishing project?

Jessica: We do offer upgrades to new hinges and handles as an option.

CKCA: Are you finding that clients want more functionality in their cabinets (i.e. space saving, drawers instead of cabinets, additional shelves)?

Jessica: Sometimes yes, but we do not offer any kind of building services. We have contractors we refer them to who can do the work first, before we come in and paint everything same colour.

CKCA: What's the most common type of kitchen makeover you do?

Jessica: Chantilly Lace is the most popular colour. The most common types of kitchens we refinish are maple shaker cabinets.



CKCA: Do you ever go into a kitchen and determine that there's no way you can refinish it, the quality of the existing cabinets is not great and you recommend a complete replacement and you refer them to a cabinet maker?

Jessica: No, we aren't currently working with a manufacturer, but absolutely we want the customer to end up with the best result for them and if we can't provide that with our services, we will recommend they go somewhere else.

CKCA: Tell us about your team, you mentioned you have a high percentage of women working with you?

Jessica: Most of the people we hire have no prior experience in this niche industry. They're coming from retail, hospitality, and fast food. They start as Prep Technicians and work their way up to being Spray Technicians and Team Leads.

It's a great opportunity for young women who are looking for opportunities in trades but don't know where to start. With most trades, they require some sort of schooling before you're able to even try something to see if you like it, but with us, we offer on-the-job training and career advancement for those that excel.

CKCA: How do you keep your team engaged and motivated for the work they do?

Jessica: We're a very close-knit and engaged group of people. We meet every morning to share what colour we are, "green (good), yellow (meh), red (not good), and something we're grateful for before we start our work day. These meetings actually started because of COVID, but we kept doing them because it allows us to connect with each other before going off to work.

We also do a few culture events a year to celebrate the team's hard work.

CKCA: What kind of training or requirements do you employees need in order to work with you?

Jessica: Not a lot! Just standard fit tests and WHIMIS tests. We teach our employees everything they need to know.

CKCA: Do you think coatings have come a long way and do you have a particular coating you work with?

Jessica: Absolutely. When Tanya started, she was using lacquer. Now we use a water based polyurethane from ENVIROLAK, a Canadian company in Ontario.

CKCA: How do you stay up-to-date on

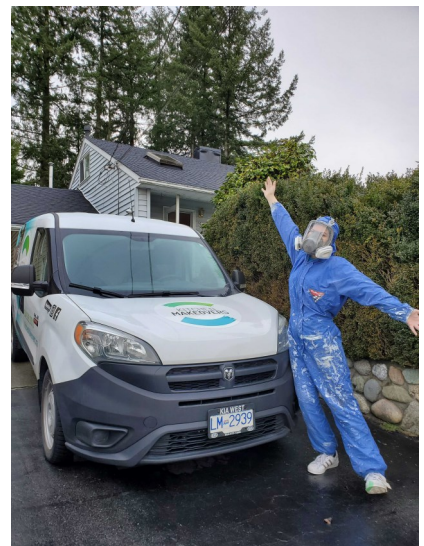


the latest coatings technology for the kind of work you do?

Jessica: There are always new products coming out. These products are always shared online in the Facebook Groups we joined. I would just say it is important to try and test as many as possible before deciding on what you're using.

CKCA: Is white still the most popular colour or what else is trending the refinishing business?

Jessica: Yes, white is still the most popular colour. However, we're seeing a



lot more accent colours as well. Black, blue, grey and green lowers are super trendy right now.

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“Plenty of work.”



CKCA: Do you find it difficult to paint over solid wood with beautiful natural grains?

Jessica: No, but sometimes we get calls asking for re-staining, but we don't offer it very often as it has to be the right kind of project for us to take on. It's also really expensive because it more labour intensive.

CKCA: What are you most proud of about your business?

Jessica: We're really proud to be a part of reducing the 600 million tons of construction waste in North American landfills each year.

We're also proud of the inclusive environment we've built in our trades business. We're LGBTQIA2S+ friendly workplace.

CKCA: Do you have consistent work coming through your doors and is there lots of business for refinishing ?

Jessica: We have year-round consistent work, it is not seasonal. It's a huge market.

CKCA: Are you impacted by the labour shortage?

Jessica: Production is our bottleneck, but we are growing at a steady pace.

CKCA: What are some of the challenges you face as a business?

Jessica: I think everyone is feeling the inflation pinch, rising material costs etc.

CKCA: What do you think the future looks like for the work you do and your company?

Jessica: We plan to grow our business in

B.C. to be about 50 people, before expanding and opening up additional locations of Kitchen Makeovers across Canada. We want to upcycle as many kitchens as possible to help reduce the 600 million tons of construction waste going into North American landfills each year.

CKCA: The majority of readers of this article are kitchen cabinet manufacturers, any final thoughts or comments you'd like to share?

Jessica: I want to say thank you to the kitchen cabinet manufacturers in BC. Without the quality products they create, we wouldn't have a business to operate. People will always need new kitchens in new homes, but I think there's a lot of room to be made for refinishing in the homeowner renovation process.

CKCA: We wish Kitchen Makeovers continued success as a niche part of the kitchen cabinet industry. Interestingly, kitchen cabinet manufacturers can add to the selling features of their quality products the ability for their cabinets to be refinished down the road because they are built to last.

Could there be opportunities to partner with refinishing companies as an extension of an existing kitchen cabinet business?

While refinishing does not address the updating in design and functionality of a kitchen, the environmental benefits can make sense. But as Jessica clearly states, the product to refinish needs to be of a certain level of quality

We're very grateful that Kitchen Makeovers shared their story and we're always pleased to hear from members who take great pride in what they do and foster a great team culture. In a tough labour market we know how important that is.

The Canadian economy is comprised of many small companies like this one, and with increased demand for kitchens as Canada looks to house a growing population, it is clear there is plenty of work for everyone.



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