

Yes, Plywood Interiors Are Good for Your Reno Budget, But They're Way More Than Just an Inexpensive Finish

Injecting modernist looks with an overlooked material, exposed plywood is a crafty, economical pick for bespoke interiors

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Hardworking and often undercover, plywood is a building block for modern interiors. But lately, it's made a surprising move into the spotlight as designers use exposed plywood not just as a structural material, but a decorative choice in anything from custom furniture to clean-lined joinery and characterful paneling.

"While plywood was once considered a more utilitarian material with visible imperfections, its quality has improved dramatically in recent years," says Glenda Flaim, managing principal at San Francisco's Butler Armsden Architects, noting advances in manufacturing techniques. "High-quality plywood can now be found in a range of finishes from raw, matte, and unfinished to lacquered or veneered."



This marine plywood has a more decorative grain.
(Image credit: Joe Fletcher. Design: Butler Armsden Architects)

In this beach shack-inspired modern bathroom, marine-grade plywood (chosen for durability and resistance to moisture) offers up plenty of character alongside a textured limestone counter. Plywood clads walls and cabinets with a swirly grain, creating a similar effect as veining found in stone – but architects were careful not to overdo it.

"Consider where it goes, why it's placed there, and the overall feeling you want to create in the room," recommends architect Glenda Flaim. "Treat it with the same respect as you would with a material like marble. Pay close attention to the grain and how the panels come together."