

The AI Joinery Quoting Calibration Guide

5 inputs that fix Claude's \$15,600 mistake

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AI gets quoting wrong because it doesn't know your real costs. These 5 inputs are the difference between a quote that's \$15k off and one you can stand behind.

01 LABOUR COST RATE

- Cost input rate: **\$65–\$75/hr blended (owner + apprentice on site)**
- Never use: **your charge-out rate (\$95/hr) as the cost figure**
- Charge-out belongs in: **your margin %, not the labour line**

This is the single most common error. One wrong rate corrupts every labour calculation in the sheet — and Claude won't tell you it's wrong.

02 SPRAY FINISH RATE

- Trade rate: **\$130–\$160/m²**
- Count face area only: **doors · visible end panels · bulkhead facings · drawer fronts**
- Never spray: **carcass internals — they are white melamine, zero cost**

A typical three-bedroom kitchen can have 25 doors and 10 visible end panels (~40m² face area). Calculating on total board area will blow the finish line by 30–40%.

03 SHEET PRICING

- HMR board trade price: **\$65–\$75 per sheet**
- MDF trade price: **\$65–\$75 per sheet**
- No trade account yet: **deduct 20–25% from retail as your working estimate**

The retail-to-trade gap on a 50-sheet job is \$600–\$700. Claude defaults to retail pricing because that's what's indexed online. Always override it.

04 HOURS BENCHMARKS

- Raked/slanted ceiling scribing: **3–4 hrs added (not 8–10)**
- Production drawer boxes: **30–40 min each, installed**
- Repeatable standard runs: **15–20% faster than one-offs — tell Claude which build type**

If Claude assigns 8–10 hrs for raked scribing, the quote is already \$325–\$650 over on one line item alone. Lock in these benchmarks before every build type.

05 MARGIN BY JOB TYPE

- Competitive tender: **28–32%**
- Standard quote: **32–35%**
- Premium / complex: **35–40%**
- Non-negotiable rule: **never apply maximum margin on a job you need to win**

Winning at 28% is better than losing at 38%. Tell Claude the job category before it builds the cost sheet — it won't infer it.

Paste this file at the start of every Claude quoting session before your job brief. Update your numbers as your business changes.