

Remodeling in California is already a juggling act: permits, inspectors, Title 24, wildfire zones, seismic concerns, and local quirks from San Diego to Sacramento. Then someone asks where you want the router, the EV charger, and the future fiber drop, and the job suddenly pivots from flooring and paint to a conversation about cabling and wiring.

That is usually the point where homeowners start asking the same set of questions. Is cabling the same as wiring? Do electricians install cable outlets? How much does cabling cost, and who should actually be doing the work?

I have walked plenty of homes where the sheetrock is already up but nobody thought about where the modem, access points, or TV coax should go. Fixing that after the fact is always more expensive and messier than planning it up front. The good news is that with a basic understanding of terms and roles, you can hire the right people and avoid paying twice for the same walls.

Cabling vs. Wiring: clearing up the vocabulary

Most homeowners and even some contractors use “cabling” and “wiring” as if they were identical. They overlap, but in the trade we usually draw a line between them.

Electrical wiring typically refers to line-voltage conductors that carry 120 or 240 volts: your lighting circuits, receptacles, appliances, EV chargers, spa feeds, and similar loads. In California homes, that usually means NM-B cable (often called Romex) inside walls, or THHN/THWN conductors in conduit. Electrical wiring is governed very tightly by the National Electrical Code (NEC) as amended by the California Electrical Code and local jurisdictions.

Cabling usually refers to low-voltage or signal conductors. That includes Ethernet (Cat5e, Cat6, Cat6A), coax for TV and internet, speaker wire, security system cabling, thermostat and control wiring, and sometimes fiber. Cabling still has codes and standards to follow, but the safety risk is lower because the voltages are much lower.

So, is cabling the same as wiring? In everyday conversation, people use both words for anything inside a wall. From a hiring and permitting standpoint, it helps to think of wiring as the high-voltage power side and cabling as the low-voltage data, audio, and control side. The person you hire and the permits you pull usually hinge on that distinction.

What cabling actually does inside a home

When people think about wires in a house, they picture lights turning on and off. Cabling lives a quieter life, but it touches almost everything you use daily.

At the simplest level, cabling moves information and low-voltage signals. That might be gigabits of internet traffic on a Cat6 run, HDMI-over-Cat for a TV, sensor signals for a security system, or audio for built-in speakers. Good cabling turns a house into an infrastructure for current and future technology instead of a series of one-off devices.

Professionals usually talk about the three primary components of cabling when they build a structured system:

1. The cable itself: twisted-pair copper like Cat6, coax such as RG6, fiber, or specialty low-voltage cable.
2. The terminations: jacks, keystone connectors, patch panels, wall plates, and any mechanical or soldered joints.
3. The pathways and hardware: conduits, raceways, cable trays, supports, and racks that guide and protect the cable.

If any of those three are done poorly, the system tends to fail early. For example, I have seen expensive Cat6 runs brought down to unreliable performance just because someone bought bargain-bin jacks and rushed the terminations. The cable was fine, the connectors killed the network.

So when you ask, “What does cabling do?” the honest answer is that it quietly supports everything from your Zoom calls and smart thermostats to your gaming and streaming habits. You mostly notice cabling only when it was done cheaply or without a plan.

The major cable and wire types in a California remodel

Homeowners often ask two questions that sound similar but are different: What are the three types of cabling, and what are the 5 types of cable? The truth is that there are far more types than that, but a small group covers almost every residential situation.

For normal California remodels, think in ***Cabling Services Provider California*** these categories.

First, electrical wiring for power. The backbone in most wood-frame homes is NM-B cable (Romex), usually 14/2 or 12/2 copper for 15 and 20 amp circuits and 10/3 or larger for ranges, dryers, and EV circuits. In garages, exterior runs, or where conduit is required by code or local practice, you will see THHN or THWN conductors pulled into EMT or PVC conduit. If you ask most electricians what is the best wire for home use, they will say copper NM-B in the correct gauge, installed to code, with GFCI and AFCI protection where required. Aluminum has its place for some large feeders, but for branch circuits in a typical remodel, copper is the standard.

Second, data and network cabling. The most common type of cabling used in networks in California homes is still Cat5e and Cat6 twisted-pair copper. Newer, better-planned remodels are leaning toward Cat6 as the default because it handles gigabit easily and 10 Gigabit over moderate distances, which is helpful as internet speeds increase. Luxury projects or tech-heavy owners sometimes specify Cat6A or even multimode fiber for backbone runs between a main equipment rack and remote network closets or media rooms.

Third, coaxial cable. RG6 coax remains the workhorse for cable TV, many internet providers, and satellite feeds. Most ISPs that rely on coax expect an RG6 home run from the demarcation point to the modem location. Older homes may still have RG59 which is thinner and less capable, and I almost always recommend replacing it with RG6 during a major open-wall remodel.

Fourth, low-voltage specialty cables. This includes CL2 or CL3 rated speaker wire for in-ceiling speakers, 18/2 or 22/4 for security sensors and keypads, thermostat cable, and control wiring for shades, irrigation, or gate motors. These usually fall under the cabling category, and many electricians do them if they are comfortable with low-voltage work, but AV integrators often handle them in higher-end jobs.

Fifth, fiber optic. Fiber is finally making inroads into residential remodels, especially in new construction or high-end projects where owners want to be future proof. Inside a single home, fiber often runs between floors or out to a detached office or ADU to avoid worrying about distance or interference. You still want copper drops to individual devices, but fiber makes a strong backbone for the property.

Those five broad families cover what most homeowners mean when they ask about the 5 types of cable in a remodel context. There are more niche types, such as fire alarm cable, plenum-rated versions for certain spaces, and shielded data cable, but they rarely come up outside special cases.

Cabling categories: three ways pros break it down

Another way to think about “types” is to look at how the trade organizes jobs. When someone asks about the three types of cabling, I usually translate that into three functional groups that map directly to contractors you might hire.

Power distribution refers to all the line-voltage wiring: outlets, lighting, dedicated circuits, panel upgrades, and subpanels. A licensed electrician must handle this, and in California you will usually need a permit and inspections, especially if you touch the panel or add new circuits.

Structured cabling covers network, phone (less common now), coax for TV and internet, and sometimes control wiring. This could be done by an electrician who is comfortable with low-voltage work, a dedicated data cabling contractor, or a systems integrator. The key here is proper topology: home runs to a central location, labeled and documented, with an eye toward future upgrades.

Specialty low-voltage includes AV, whole-house audio, security, surveillance, access control, and automation systems. Many electricians will rough-in cabling to a spec but leave terminations and equipment programming to AV or security specialists. On custom homes, you often see an electrician, a low-voltage cabling crew, and an automation integrator all working together.

Seeing cabling through those lenses helps you avoid the trap of asking one trade to do work that really belongs to another.



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Who does what: electrician, cable provider, or low-voltage contractor?

During remodels, confusion about roles costs more than the materials themselves. Homeowners call the cable company to do in-wall work, or they ask an electrician to design a Wi-Fi system. Sometimes people assume the general contractor is handling it, and nothing gets planned until drywall is already up.

Here is how responsibilities usually sort out on a well-run California remodel:

- Licensed electrician: Handles all 120/240 V wiring, service and panel work, new circuits, recessed lighting, code-required smoke and CO detectors, and usually conduit and pathways that may later hold low-voltage cabling.
- Low-voltage or structured cabling contractor: Pulls and terminates Ethernet, coax, and some control wiring, builds the network rack, and sets up patch panels and jacks.
- AV / integration specialist: Designs and cables distributed audio, home theater, in-wall speakers, control systems, and sometimes Wi-Fi and network hardware.
- Internet or cable provider: Brings service from the street to the demarcation point, activates modems and gateways, and may run short interior surface-mount runs, but typically does not open walls or fish long in-wall cabling.
- General contractor: Coordinates all of the above, sequences work so that inspections and rough-ins happen before insulation and drywall, and manages communication with building officials.

On small remodels, one contractor may wear two or three of these hats, but when you know which hat you need, your hiring decisions become simpler.

Do electricians install cable outlets?

Most California electricians install coax and Ethernet jacks as part of their service, especially those who focus on residential remodels and custom homes. They already own the ladders, fish tapes, drills, and know how to open and repair walls cleanly. Many are happy to run Cat6 and RG6 along with their power wiring during the rough-in.

The catch is design. Some electricians will ask you exactly where you want every cable outlet and simply follow orders. Others will suggest a more structured approach: running everything back to a central closet, leaving slack and labeling cables so that future upgrades are easy. A few prefer to leave complex networking to dedicated low-voltage contractors.

If your electrician seems hesitant about low-voltage work or keeps saying “the cable guy will take care of that”, clarify before the walls close. The internet or cable provider will almost never show up and happily snake multiple in-wall drops for you at no extra cost. Their standard scope is getting service from the curb to a modem and maybe to a single TV. Everything past that is either DIY or a separate contractor.

How much does cabling cost in a remodel?

Costs swing widely based on region, access, and how early in the process you make decisions, but there are reasonable ranges for planning purposes.

For low-voltage network and coax cabling during an open-wall remodel, California homeowners typically see per-drop pricing. A “drop” is one cable run from the central point to a wall plate. For standard Cat6 or RG6 home runs, materials are often in the range of 20 to 40 dollars per location for cable, jacks, plates, and patch panel space. Labor, even during open walls, tends to run another 80 to 160 dollars per drop depending on complexity and how many drops you order at once. That puts most basic data or TV locations in the 100 to 200 dollar range when done as part of the larger job.

For finished walls, fishing a single new data or coax line can easily cost 250 to 500 dollars per location once you account for the extra labor and patching. This is one of the reasons it is so much cheaper to think about cabling during framing rather than after the paint has dried.

Electrical wiring is measured differently. Electricians usually bid by circuit, device, and panel work, not per “drop” in the same way cablers do. Adding one simple outlet to an open wall while they are already on-site may run 100 to 200 dollars in labor and materials, while adding a new small circuit for a niche office or media area might be 400 to 800 dollars. Larger additions, like EV chargers or subpanels, go into the thousands, especially once you bring in permitting and possible service upgrades.

If you are budgeting a full remodel, a reasonable rough starting point for structured cabling and low-voltage work in a moderate-size home is often 1 to 3 percent of the construction cost, depending on how tech-heavy you want the home to be. That is a big range, but it shows that trying to save a few hundred dollars by cutting cabling can cost you functionality you will care about every day.

“Who is the cheapest cable provider?” and what that actually means

At some point in the conversation, someone will ask who is the cheapest cable provider in California. The honest answer is that it depends heavily on your exact street, what infrastructure is in the ground, and which promotions are running that month.

Different parts of California are served by different providers. In many urban and suburban areas you will see at least one cable company such as Xfinity (Comcast) or Spectrum, one phone-company-based provider like AT&T or Frontier offering DSL or fiber, and in some regions independent fiber providers such as Sonic or small municipal systems. Satellite, and 5G fixed wireless add more options.

Price is only part of the story. A “cheap” plan that locks you into a slow speed or data cap can feel very expensive once the family is trying to work and study from home. When I advise clients, I suggest they look at three factors together: the stable monthly cost after the first-year promotion expires, the speeds and latency they realistically need, and the flexibility to bring their own modem or router.

Where this intersects with your remodel is simple. Before drywall, decide where the provider’s demarcation point will likely land and where you want your modem, ONT, or gateway. Have your electrician or low-voltage contractor run at least one high-quality coax (if your provider uses it) and one Cat6 from that demarcation area to your network closet or central location. That small step avoids having a technician staple an exposed wire along your new stucco or through your garage.

Is cabling difficult, and what can you DIY?

Technically inclined homeowners often ask whether cabling is difficult. The truthful answer is that basic low-voltage cabling is much easier than line-voltage wiring from a safety standpoint, but doing it cleanly inside existing walls and to a professional standard is still a skill.

Terminating Cat6 into keystone jacks or a small patch panel is a task many DIYers can learn with a punch-down tool, a good crimping tool, and a tester. Running cable through open studs before drywall is also accessible if you understand fire-stopping rules, separation from electrical wiring, and basic drilling practice.

Where things get difficult for non-professionals is in finished walls, multi-story runs, and older homes with obstructions. Fishing existing cavities without damaging finishes, avoiding plumbing and other hidden hazards, and maintaining fire blocking requirements is where the experience pays for itself.

For planning, I often suggest homeowners use a mental checklist:

- Safe DIY items: short, accessible runs in open walls, terminating and labeling cables for a rack, and adding surface-mount raceways where aesthetics are not critical.

- Marginal DIY items: fishing a single new wire into a simple wall with attic or crawl access, provided you are comfortable cutting and patching small drywall holes.
- Hire a pro: multi-room cabling in finished walls, work in crowded utility chases, and anything that needs coordination with inspectors or other trades.
- Never DIY: line-voltage panel work, service upgrades, and any wiring that affects life-safety systems such as smoke alarms and egress lighting.

If your project sits anywhere near the “hire a pro” or “never DIY” categories, involve a licensed electrician or experienced cabling contractor. DIY mistakes with low-voltage might only mean poor Wi-Fi. DIY mistakes in a panel can result in fire or injury, and in California they may also cause problems with insurance or resale if the work is not permitted and inspected.

Planning cabling in the context of California codes

California’s building environment complicates things in ways that matter for wiring and cabling.

First, the state and many municipalities are aggressive about energy efficiency. Title 24 and related standards affect lighting controls, occupancy sensors in some areas, and how certain systems are wired. Electricians working here are used to that landscape, and many of those controls require both power wiring and low-voltage leads.

Second, seismic and wildfire considerations affect pathways. In some hillside or wildland-urban interface areas, metallic conduit and particular routing might be required or strongly recommended. In multi-unit or mixed-use buildings, fire-rated assemblies and penetrations limit your cabling options.

Third, permit culture matters. In much of California, inspectors take a keen interest in any visible cable or wire. While many jurisdictions treat low-voltage work more lightly, some want to see permits or at least coordination when large low-voltage bundles share space with high-voltage wiring. If your GC or electrician is not guiding you on this, ask directly what will be inspected and what needs to be in place before those visits.

The safest path is almost always to let a licensed electrician own the relationship with the inspector for power wiring, and to make sure any low-voltage contractor you use is familiar with local expectations and does not create conflicts by stuffing extra cables into already full conduits or boxes.

Choosing who to hire for your remodel

When you step back and look at cabling vs. Wiring in a California remodel, the hiring decisions fall into a few clear patterns.

If your project is modest - say, a kitchen remodel with no new rooms or walls - you may only need an electrician to relocate outlets and lights, add a few USB-capable receptacles, and make sure your circuits meet current code. Cabling might be as simple as a new coax or Cat6 line to a relocated TV, which the electrician can usually handle while he or she is there.

If you are reworking a whole floor or adding square footage, you should treat low-voltage cabling as its own workstream. That means deciding on a central network location, deciding where you want wired connections for workspaces and media, and engaging either an electrician with strong low-voltage skills or a separate structured cabling contractor. Write those locations into the plans so the GC and subs see them.

If you are building a technology-heavy home - whole-house audio, integrated shades, multiple Wi-Fi access points, outdoor speakers, security cameras, and automation - bring in an AV integrator early. They will design the system, specify cable types and quantities, and often coordinate with the electrician on power needs and conduit

placement. On those jobs, the electrician still owns the power wiring, but cabling becomes part of a larger technology design rather than a set of isolated runs.

In every case, remember that your internet or cable provider is not your in-wall cabling contractor. They connect you to their network. They do not design the network inside your home.

When you think in terms of roles, understand what cabling does, and budget realistically for it, you end up with a California home that looks clean, works reliably, and does not need to be opened up again two years later when someone decides that yes, they really do want an office with a wired connection and decent Wi-Fi.