

COUNTRY & TOWN HOUSE

A LIFE IN BALANCE

JULY/AUGUST 2022 £4.95

DIRTY WORK

The conscious
creatives saving
our soil

AFRICA'S CROSSROADS

Which path will
it choose?

WE NEED REGENERATION

Why sustainability isn't enough

DOLLY'S GIRL

Emma
Appleton
is one to
watch

30

PAGES OF
INTELLIGENT
WELLNESS



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: A Linley kitchen installed in a 16th-century Grade II-listed manor house; an architectural Poliform design; Smallbone's Modernist style has liquid metal highlights and grey marble worktops; a sleek and streamlined Minotticucine kitchen; the crowd-pleasing Shaker style from Neptune



PLAT DU JOUR

CAROLE ANNETT sits down to discover the kitchen companies serving up a fresh approach to the most popular room in the house

There's no recipe for a perfect kitchen. Like asking a group of chefs to make classic ragu, no two will taste the same. Likewise, design, and thankfully so. Over the years we've enjoyed a smorgasbord of styles ranging from Shaker, push-front

minimalism and lacquered cabinetry to refectory dining, myriad-shaped islands, and breakfast bars. Worktops spanning from stainless steel and granite to marble and quartzite have battled for starring roles, and even concrete momentarily hogged the limelight. But times change and tastes change, so what's currently on the design menu for our favourite gathering spot?

Leila Touwen of Pluck (pluck.co.uk), a Brixton-based kitchen company founded by three foodies in 2016, thinks we're moving away from tradition. 'British kitchen design feels exciting at the moment,' she says. 'We're merging contemporary sensibilities with old designs, and I think classic Shaker [a flat centre panel with edge overlay] can feel heavy in a modern setting. If you have a Georgian house, there's no longer pressure to mimic detailing.'

Pluck's kitchens are clutter-free with open shelves rather than a run of high cupboards, plus carefully considered stand-alone items like the brand's Brixton dresser. Objects, books and artefacts are on show to give a room warmth and familiarity, an important touch given kitchens now double as work and entertaining space in addition to food prep and cooking – they're the new living room. 'In my home I have antiques and ceramics,' explains Leila, 'it's fun to mix and match. We take the same approach to kitchen design. Intermingling is the way forward.'

Sophie Vile, senior designer at Smallbone (smallbone.co.uk), shares a similar ethos regarding architecture. 'Juxtaposing old and new can be really impressive,' she says. Smallbone's latest kitchen design, Modernist, is a glamorous newcomer with a swanky hotel bar vibe, boasting liquid metal highlights and a honed Palisandra

grey marble worktop. Its contemporary aesthetic offers new life to old buildings, while elements like hidden custom hinges retain a purity of line. Here, too, open shelves allow clients to showcase an edit of curios and glassware. Lighting plays an important role, highlighting bronze inlays, reflected in fluted glass door fronts, and bouncing off timber, coaxing out rich hues.

With all this talk of style it's easy to forget that, at their heart, kitchens are functional spaces. 'Cooking has become theatre,' adds Sophie. 'The majority of projects we design at Smallbone are open plan with function at the forefront so we often incorporate double islands, one for a chef to prep on and another for entertaining.' Whether guests are seated or mingling with a glass in hand, they can engage in the creation of a meal.

Islands have become ubiquitous in recent years, driven by the change not only in our relationship with the kitchen but also how we eat. With more of us enjoying a broader range of cuisine, appliances such as an in-built wok or Teppanyaki grill jockey for position with traditional oven space. Cooking shows have further ignited the fervour – just think of Nigella, chopping and whisking on a hob-topped island with built-in ovens in a wall behind, plus the popularity of chef's tables, all of which have played a role in us wanting to recreate the vision in our own home.

Islands aren't for everyone, though. Whether designed as a Victorian workbench or with an overhang for seating, they are a major consideration space-wise. If it's on your tick list, a good tip is to make a paper template of the size planned and lay it down to check walkways. Sacrificing floor space for an island can result in an awkward and uncomfortable ambience.

Whether you opt for an island or not, the trend for proper entertaining at home is here to stay. 'It's a joy to design kitchens for clients who cook,' adds Leo McLaughlin from Poliform (poliformuk.com). 'Gone are the days when a beautiful kitchen was put in a house at great expense yet mostly just for show.' He feels it's not just lifestyle but technology driving change. 'We've seen a shift in the way we live and use our kitchens:





clients are generally buying more fresh produce and therefore require less freezer space.' Additionally, some find built-in coffee appliances superfluous – 'too much maintenance and the space can often be better utilised.'

As for what's new? 'Extraction,' says Leo, 'it's developed immensely in recent years, particularly of the draught variety' (rising and retracting into the worktop allowing for a clean, uninterrupted space). 'And we're seeing an increase in clients opting for steam ovens over microwave appliances, in the same way that induction tends to be more popular than gas cooktops. Clients are more ecologically focused and discerning, preferring to reduce their use of fossil fuels and opt for more sustainable alternatives.'

The most important part of kitchen design is planning, and the positioning of the holy trinity – oven, sink and fridge. The temptation for gadgetry can be overwhelming so it's important to be realistic about what's actually going to be used. If steamed food has never appealed, a new oven is not going to switch on a change in eating habits. Larders on the other hand have perennial appeal; either as a cordoned off section of the kitchen, with Crittall-style doors or hidden behind concertina cupboards. In large houses it's not unusual to specify two – one as a breakfast station and another as dry food storage.

In stark contrast, nothing recognisable is on view in a Minotticucine kitchen (minotticucinelondon.com), and that's the aim. The antithesis of a hectic space, Minotticucine has monastic appeal, creating heavyweight showstoppers, particularly in an outdoor setting. Founded in 1949, the Verona-based company celebrates the beauty of natural materials, raising the design stakes by offering 60mm thick raw-edge stone worktops and a galvanised gold finish. Operating at the top of the luxury sector, most sales are via the architect and interior design community.

'Our furniture is more than a kitchen,' explains senior designer Anthony McLean, 'it's sculpture for the home.' Referred to as 'visual silence', all traditional kitchen embellishments are either removed or out of sight – no visible appliances or handles, two main aspects that can date a design, along with materials. While

quiet beauty is the common thread, every project is unique. A recent Minotticucine scheme installed for a family in Marlow comprises concealed ovens, natural quartzite worktops and an island cloaked in fossilised wood. A scullery hides behind a run of tall cabinets as storage overflow. 'We use only wood, stone or bronze in our furniture, natural materials that have existed for hundreds, if not thousands of years,' says Anthony. 'Our furniture is contemporary, yet it is also timeless.'

Natural materials are celebrated at bespoke cabinetmaker Linley (davidlinley.com), renowned for marquetry and fine craftsmanship. Marco Arba is Head of Fitted Cabinetry and Kitchens. 'An eclectic approach to design makes interiors more sophisticated and fascinating, and kitchens are no exception. Ours are rich in detail, some of which, like veneers or metal finishes, can tie a contemporary kitchen to an old house,' he explains. Linley's Odyssey kitchen, currently installed at Harrods, was inspired by an original Harrods sign, incorporating figured veneers, inlays and antiqued brass. Book-matched Bolivian marble streaked with blueberry and gold sits atop the main work area, like gloriously rippled marzipan. It comes at a price, of course, but Linley can fulfil any design fantasy.

Today's menu of kitchen designs offers traditional, a casual living-room vibe, or super-glamorous and monastic. As to which is most tempting, it's worth noting Smallbone's Original Handpainted kitchen, over 30 years old, is still one of the brand's bestsellers. Shakerism is here to stay and there are plenty of companies serving it up with relish, including Neptune (neptune.com), Plain English (plainenglishdesign.co.uk), deVol (devolkitchens.co.uk), Humphrey Munson (humphreymunson.com) and Martin Moore (martinmoore.com). Once the main furniture is decided, it comes down to styling, and there's plenty of choice: wicker baskets, personalisation (a house name on internal drawers, for example), or even a built-in worktop herb garden. As any good chef will tell you, the secret to a great dish is finding the perfect twist and balance of ingredients. ■

