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The perfect homecoming

Relocating from the Middle East to be close to family meant Sarah and Tom Silvey could build their own home and include an open-plan kitchen to suit their family's needs

Words: **Lindsay Blair** Photography: **Paul Craig**

Taking on a home renovation to create the perfect kitchen is almost always a memorable experience. But for Sarah Silvey and her family, it signified a dramatic shift in lifestyle – including a journey across the globe and the challenge of creating her forever home. “We’d spent years living in the Middle East for my husband Tom’s work – in Dubai and Oman – but the kids were about to move schools, and I wanted to be closer to my family in Worcestershire after my father sadly died. So we decided to move back into a bungalow on a plot of land that was once owned by my grandfather and is down the road from my mum,” Sarah explains. “It was a busy time, but we already had a vision to knock down the dated bungalow and rebuild the house we wanted on the site – complete with my dream kitchen, as I love cooking and baking.”

Before long, Sarah and Tom – plus sons Oscar, 14, and Felix, 12, and Nelly the dog – had enlisted the help of an architect from AM Architectural Design and put forward their clear brief for a two-storey, five-bedroom house. The couple had designed the layout, including a spacious, open-plan kitchen-living-diner on the ground floor with large windows and sliding doors to make the most of the countryside location. Central to the brief was Sarah’s idea for a social kitchen area flowing onto the living and dining spaces. “I had an exact layout in mind, which was inspired by our time spent living in the Middle East where we had an open-plan villa that was filled with natural light and great links to the outdoors,” she says. “I also wanted to make sure the location of the stairs didn’t interrupt the view through the house, as I like the idea of seeing straight through to the kitchen and garden as soon as you enter the front door.” For the kitchen Sarah wanted an in-frame design with a central island and a long bank of wall units behind, but without any corner cupboards – which she thought would be impractical – plus a pantry and laundry room. “While living in Muscat, we had a kitchen with an island which I loved, so couldn’t go ▶





Left: With its striking shade, the large central island acts as a stylish design statement as well as a practical area for cooking, washing up and casual dining. Deep drawers either side are perfect for storing pans and stacks of crockery.



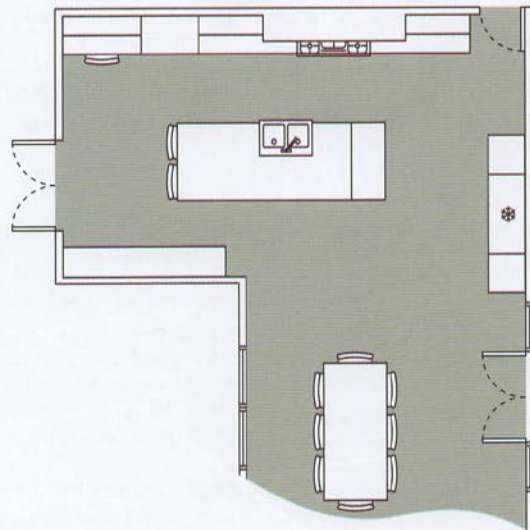
Inspired by the open-plan kitchen-diner Sarah had enjoyed when she and the family lived in the Middle East, she designed the space with clear sightlines throughout, making it great for keeping an eye on the kids and when entertaining. The L-shaped room benefits from plenty of natural light thanks to windows and large bi-fold doors.



Top left: Although classic in its design, the butler sink is made from stainless steel which brings the look right up to date. Grooves have been scored into the work surface to allow excess water to drain back into the sink.

Middle left: With colour an important consideration, Sarah was pleased with Gareth's idea to paint the inside of the cabinets in the same shade as the island, playfully connecting the design.

Bottom left: Oak is used cleverly throughout the open-plan scheme to tie the zones together, including an overhanging section of worktop, fitted alongside a white Dekton surface.





back to not having one. I was also keen to include a home office in the design, as the upstairs study would be Tom's space and I wanted a place to work, too. The benefit of designing our house from scratch was that we could specify exactly what works for us."

While the house build got underway, the couple moved into Sarah's mum's house nearby and set about with finding a kitchen company ready to meet their requirements. Many firms they approached wanted to change the couple's ideas. In the end, they agreed to work with Classic Interiors, who had also been recommended by their architect. "Gareth Davies at Classic Interiors listened to our brief, designed the layout we'd specified and made suggestions on how to improve it without drastically altering the design," Sarah remembers. "Gareth recommended the best size of island to incorporate the sink, prep and eating areas; a hardwearing white Dekton quartz worktop to complement my choice of painted cabinetry and he worked out the best amount of worktop overhang for a balanced look. Plus, he included a tall unit on the far left of the room that doubles as a desk. It was a really fun, collaborative process."

Although the couple's choice of cabinetry has a traditional influence, Sarah requested modern finishes in stainless steel, including a butler sink, boiling-water water tap and side-by-side fridge-freezer. She also

introduced a contemporary accent colour on the island. "I tested so many pots of paint on photographic paper, seeing how it looked in different lights before choosing Farrow & Ball's Radicchio – a warm red shade," she says. "I'd seen a lot of grey on Pinterest and in friends' houses, which I liked, but I wanted something different sit alongside the neutral shade. We deliberately chose painted units, so that the colour can be updated in years to come."

Complete with a large island incorporating deep drawers and cupboards, and with space for a separate laundry and pantry, Sarah now has plenty of storage and room to house large appliances. "I have an awful lot of cooking equipment, so having places to store it all away was essential," she recalls. "My favourite new piece has to be the Everhot range cooker."

The new house took around a year to build, with the kitchen installation marking one of the final stages. Sarah admits the project was exhausting. But now that the family's forever home is finished, she says it was worth all the time, money and effort. "As a family, we've spent so long moving to different countries and never properly settling, but this house feels like home and I now feel calm and content," says Sarah. "I love the whole house, but the kitchen is the best part – it brings the whole family together."

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Sarah chose Farrow & Ball's Radicchio to paint the island, and Pavilion Gray for the wall units. She tested the colours on photographic paper to see how they'd look in different lights. "I liked friends' kitchens who had grey with dark blue, but I wanted something unique," she says. The walls are painted in Manor House Gray, also by Farrow & Ball.





Above: Although the house is a new build, Sarah wanted to achieve a cottage-style look for the kitchen. Large-format grey stone floor tiles replicate a more traditional flooring style and work well as a base for the in-frame wooden kitchen. Elsewhere, oiled oak furniture and doors – leading to a utility room and living areas – add to the traditional aesthetic.



Above: Sarah asked designer Gareth to incorporate a work space into the kitchen, which has been achieved with a discreet but clever tall unit, in the same painted finish, to store a computer and files. When the doors are closed, the desk area blends in with the rest of the kitchen.

Q&A

Kitchen designer Gareth Davies says...

What was the biggest challenge with this project?

The house was built from scratch, so I worked from the architect's plans and Sarah and Tom's ideas to come up with a design that would meet their brief while also helping them to visualise what the space would look like. To help I used CAD software, which is very realistic, to represent the colours and textures in the room and demonstrate exactly how the layout would work with the desired island, storage and appliances.

How did you make the island work in the overall scheme?

Sarah chose the red paint for the island to add warmth and vibrancy to the grey cabinetry and walls elsewhere. I suggested having the inside of the cupboards, either side of the mantle, painted the same colour to tie in with the island.

What advice would you give to a customer wishing to incorporate an island with breakfast bar into their space?

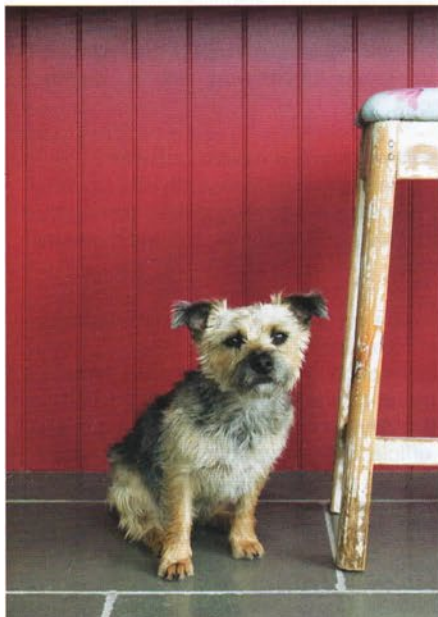
Make sure there is enough space. If it simply won't work in the room layout, don't try and shoehorn an island in. It is far better to look at alternative design options, such as a peninsula, to ensure an efficient and practical use of space. If there is space, consider whether you will have a dining table in the kitchen too? In which case, is seating required around the island or would you be better with a larger, more practical island and forego the seating there? Think about the type of seating you want, too, as this will determine the height of the breakfast bar area.



Large appliances were chosen to suit the proportions of the space. And as Sarah loves to cook and bake, she was sure from the start of the project that a generous fridge-freezer and spacious range cooker were key.



"I love the whole house, but the kitchen is the best part - it brings the whole family together."



SourceBook

DESIGN

Kitchen Classic Interiors (01527 66740 or classicinteriors.co.uk)

Architect AM Architectural Design (01789 765367 or amad.co.uk)

KITCHEN

Cabinetry Bespoke by Classic Interiors, as before, painted in Pavilion Gray (wall units) and Radicchio (Island), Farrow & Ball (01202 876141 or farrow-ball.com)

Worktops Dekton (01256 761229 or dekton.co.uk)

Appliances Range cooker, Everhot (01453 890018 or everhot.co.uk); Fridge-freezer, Liebherr (0333 014 7888 or myliebherr.co.uk)

Sink Astini (astini.co.uk)

Boiling-water and mixer tap Franke (0161 436 6280 or franke.com)

Flooring Topps Tiles (0800 783 6262 or toppstiles.co.uk)

External doors For similar, try IQ Glass (01494 722880 or iqglassuk.com)

Internal doors For similar, try Jeld-Wen (0845 122 2891 or jeld-wen.co.uk)

Barstools For similar, try John Lewis (0345 604 9049 or johnlewis.com)

Dining table and chairs Crate & Barrel (crateandbarrel.com)

Wallpaint Manor House Gray, Farrow & Ball, as before

COST

The kitchen cost £29,000, excluding appliances