



HOW TERESA CREATED A KITCHEN TO FIT HER UNUSUAL RUSTIC HOME

Teresa Harman 45,
marketing consultant

When Teresa Harman took on the challenge of modernising a converted granary in 2004 she knew she needed a bespoke kitchen. There isn't a 90-degree angle in the space, she told us, so there was no point in looking at standard superstore kitchen units.

Instead she approached a local kitchen design company. The package she bought from Orwells in Ipswich cost £22,680 and included design and installation. She spent a further £2,600 on

appliances, sinks and taps. The kitchen was part of a major remodel, where walls were knocked down to create a family-oriented kitchen-diner, and the project took six weeks to complete.

Teresa chose the firm because it had a good local reputation but also took time to visit the showroom and meet the people who'd be working on her project. Her research paid off and she was very happy with the end result. 'I appreciated I'd pay more but the designers and craftsmen were excellent,' Teresa said.

Cooking up a kitchen plan

Our guide tells you all you need to know about planning, designing and buying your new kitchen

A new kitchen is the biggest home-improvement project most of us will ever undertake, so it pays to plan the work in detail and anticipate potential problems before they arise. Over the next four pages we explain your design options and what you need to do to ensure that your project goes smoothly.

From DIY to handcrafted designs

You can spend anything from £600 to £60,000 on a new kitchen. At the budget end of the market are the ranges offered by the likes of B&Q and Focus. If you're good at DIY, buying a self-assembly kitchen from this type of outlet will save you money, although your choice of designs will be limited. If DIY isn't your thing, the next step up is to buy a superstore kitchen and pay someone else to fit it – Ikea and some DIY outlets offer installation services, or you may prefer to use your own local installer.

Virtually all of the mid-range retailers such as Magnet offer planning and installation (usually by a third party, although you can save money by doing it yourself). You'll find a wider choice of finishes here, and the more upmarket rigid units on offer are a step up in quality from some flatpacks. If budget is less of an issue, or your kitchen

is an unusual shape like Teresa Harman's (see left), a bespoke kitchen specialist will be able to offer virtually any size, shape or finish and will oversee all aspects of planning and installation for you.

HOW TO PLAN A NEW KITCHEN

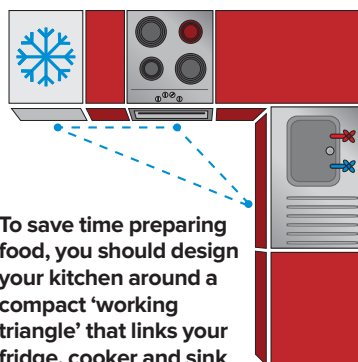
'If householders spent more time planning the layout of their new kitchen and less time fussing over their choice of new fixtures and fittings, they would end up with the kitchen they really wanted and avoid the massive overspend that is so often the hallmark of a kitchen makeover,' advises DIY expert Mike Lawrence. Here are some of our tips to get the layout right first time.

Three key questions to answer

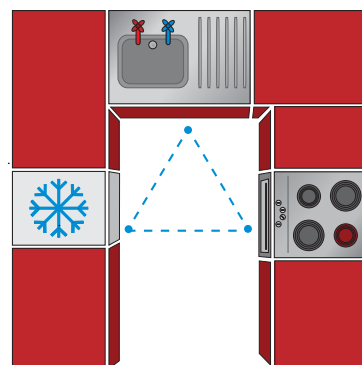
- What do you like and dislike about your current kitchen layout?
- What do you want in terms of space, storage and facilities?
- Would you like a kitchen that is fitted, freestanding or a combination? Fitted makes the most of your space but freestanding gives a more individual look.

Starting your plan

- Place the cooker, sink and fridge on your plan first and draw three lines to connect them as we have done below. The smaller



To save time preparing food, you should design your kitchen around a compact 'working triangle' that links your fridge, cooker and sink



the working triangle, the more efficient your kitchen will be.

■ Allow enough space (80cm minimum) for movement between runs of units or around an island unit.

■ Changing only the doors on your existing units can be a cheaper option, but make sure the carcasses are in good nick and you're happy with the current layout. You could pay just a few hundred pounds for a basic set of doors or several thousand for hardwood bespoke ones.

■ Decide where you want to spend the money – for example, do you want expensive appliances and cheaper units or vice versa? Remember that cheaper appliances don't necessarily mean poor quality. You could blow the budget on the £1,470 GE PGG21 American-style fridge-freezer, or spend just £290 on the Samsung RL33S BNS, for example – both are current Best Buys.

■ Be realistic about how long the project will take. An average kitchen refit could be completed in four to six weeks but some could take months. If you go for bespoke, expect to wait longer than if you buy off the shelf as bespoke units need to be individually made. It's also worth allowing plenty of time for research and decision making.

Use planning services

Make use of any free planning services offered by retailers. It's a sign that you are working with a good designer if they ask lots of questions and make suggestions rather than expecting you to do all the work. 'Don't agree to a quote until a retailer has looked at the space', advises Lucinda Kenny, Operations Director of the Kitchen Bathroom Bedroom Specialists Association (KBSA).

WHAT'S ON OFFER?

We compared the range of services offered by kitchen retailers and asked each to quote us a price for a set of units from both their cheapest and most popular kitchen ranges. The set we asked them to quote on consisted of a sink and base unit, one double base unit, three single base units, four wall units, housing for an oven and dishwasher, and worktops. We asked for handles and fixings but not appliances or installation.

Ikea and MFI offered the cheapest deals, but the prices shown in the chart, right, don't offer a direct comparison as companies had to make adjustments to the spec

and the quality of the ranges they sell does vary. Moben alone included installation costs in its quote as the company offers its kitchens only on a supply-and-fit basis.

DIY RETAILERS

We compared services offered by four major out-of-town DIY superstores: B&Q, Focus, Jewson and Wickes.

Design and planning

Most DIY superstores offer a free design service but this can be limited. Focus offers planning only in certain showrooms, for example, and not all Jewson branches offer home visits to check out your kitchen. Wickes and B&Q offer a full service, including home visits. Focus will also visit your home where planning is available.

It's a sign that you're working with a good designer if they ask lots of questions


MEMBER BENEFIT

Which? Legal Service

Half-price offer

Most kitchen makeovers go smoothly but if your supplier does let you down, Which? Legal Service provides members with the advice they need to get disputes resolved swiftly. We're currently offering members an introductory offer of a six-month subscription for the price of three months – £9.75. Visit www.which.co.uk/legalservice for details or call 0800 252 100.

WHAT EACH COMPANY QUOTED FOR OUR KITCHEN

Company	Cheapest range	Most popular range
B&Q	 Maple Style Modern £1,114	 Beech Style £1,325
Focus	 Alpine £794	 Chatsworth £1,883
Jewson	 Denholme £1,182	 Lyon Advanced £2,996
Wickes	 Eton £1,681	 Manhattan £2,259
Ikea	 Arlig £583	 Abstract £956
Habitat	 Sorrento £3,969	 Pimlico £5,352
Homestyle	 Lincoln Beech £1,906	 Décor Cream £2,165
Magnet	 Metro £2,038	 Shaker Cream £2,838
MFI	 Rimini £620	 Padova £1,000
Moben	 Manhattan Birch £5,409 ^a	 Manhattan Birch £5,409 ^a

All prices quoted are for nine base/wall units, plus housings and worktop, not for the number of units shown in each picture. Prices correct as of June 2006 ^a Moben prices include installation

'Don't assume there's any right to cancel your kitchen contract or make changes to it if you have second thoughts'

Installation

B&Q and Wickes are the only DIY stores we contacted that offer installation. The cost varies considerably depending on the size and complexity of the kitchen design.

KITCHEN SPECIALISTS AND HOME INTERIOR RETAILERS

As well as kitchen specialists Homestyle, Magnet, MFI and Moben, we also surveyed Habitat and Ikea.

Design and planning

A design service is included as standard at Homestyle and Moben and is also free at MFI and Magnet. Habitat offers an interior design service with consultations starting at £200, although you can have your kitchen designed for free at some London stores. Ikea offers advice in-store and work stations to create your own plan.

Installation

Moben is the only company we contacted that includes fitting as standard, with work carried out by Moben employees. Elsewhere,

we found it was an optional extra carried out by a third party, and at Habitat you'll have to arrange the fitting yourself.

BESPOKE DESIGNER

If you can't find what you like in any of the major retailers' brochures, local bespoke kitchen makers can create a one-off design using materials of your choice.

Design and planning

Expect a home visit to discuss your needs followed up with full drawings.

Installation

Most specialists in bespoke kitchens will oversee all stages of your project, employ their own craftsmen to fit the kitchen and carry out a final inspection.

Costs

Companies offering bespoke kitchens quote on an individual basis and don't have price lists, so we haven't shown cost information for them. £10,000 to £20,000 could get you a mid-range bespoke kitchen.

B&Q KEPT US WAITING FOR OUR KITCHEN

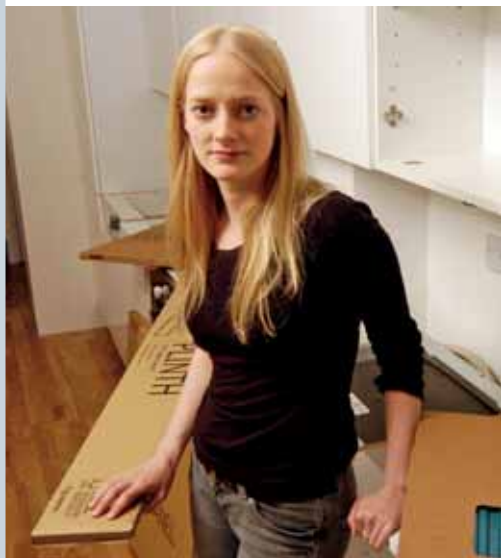
Rebecca Pike 26, architect

Delivery problems are a common cause of frustration so it's a good idea to prepare for your kitchen being out of action. Architects Rebecca Pike and her partner Patric were on

a tight budget so they chose a kitchen from B&Q and installed it themselves. They spent £1,890 on the units and appliances, which were due to arrive nine weeks after they placed their order. However, delivery problems

caused big delays. It took 11 weeks just to receive the complete order as, initially, some items were missing and others were incorrect. The fridge couldn't be built in, for example, and needed to be replaced.

Two weeks later, the next delivery failed to arrive and after a further three days, Rebecca collected the items from the store herself. 'It took a lot of phone calls, a lot of petrol, three days off work and a lot of takeaways to get this resolved,' Rebecca said. Her advice? Talk to staff to see how knowledgeable they are about the kitchens available and check the order thoroughly before it's placed.



ONLINE PLANNING TOOLS

If you're unimpressed with in-store designers or simply want to try out some ideas of your own before visiting a showroom, we've tested three tools for creating your own layouts. They all allow you to view the design in 3-D to get a feel for the finished look. We'd suggest allowing a couple of hours to try out some detailed designs, although you can create some simple plans on the MFI site in just a few minutes.

www.diy.com

What is it? An online tool from B&Q. You have to register on the B&Q website to use it.

Requirements

350MHz CPU with 128MB Ram, 56Kbps modem, Internet Explorer 5.5+, Cookies and Javascript enabled. Not compatible with Macs.

We like It can save multiple designs and 'auto-fill' walls with cabinets and technical support is available.

But: It's tricky to remove unwanted items from your shopping list and difficult to add furniture/draw objects.



www.ikea.com

What is it?

Downloadable software

Requirements

Windows 95, 98, 2000, NT or ME Pentium processor with 128MB of Ram, 25MB of free hard-drive space, 8MB of Video Ram. Not compatible with Macs.

We like This one was our favourite. It offers great 3-D modelling, is very intuitive, provides the widest range of kitchen shapes and has an easy-to-modify shopping list.

But It can take up to 20 minutes to download if you don't have broadband.



www.mfi.co.uk/mfi/kitchenchoice.asp

What is it? An online tool.

Requirements

'Shockwave' plug-in for web browser, Macromedia v10.1 (available on website).

We like It's great for getting an idea of what you want, very speedy and simple to use and can 'auto-fill' walls with cabinets.

But It can't illustrate obstacles like boilers or radiators.



Our legal expert says

Peter McCarthy of Which? Legal Service gives his top tips on how to avoid a kitchen disaster



■ DON'T BE FOBBED

OFF If something goes wrong with an appliance, don't let the kitchen company tell you it's the manufacturer's problem. Your contract is with the kitchen company and it is liable for any problems.

■ GET PROFESSIONAL HELP IF YOU NEED IT

Which? Legal Service provides members with the advice they need to help get disputes resolved swiftly. For more information on Which? Legal Service see www.which.co.uk/legal-service. For details of how you can get six months' membership for the price of three, see the offer on p17.

Help is also available from the independent standards body Qualitas (www.qualitas.uk.com) which has around 240 members including B&Q, and MFI. Check whether any company you are considering buying from is a member. If you complain to Qualitas, it will hold 20 per cent of anything you've paid while your complaint is being investigated and can also provide a conciliation service. See 'News', p6, for an update on major companies which belong to Qualitas.

■ BEFORE YOU PLACE YOUR ORDER, MAKE SURE YOU'RE SURE

Don't assume there's any right to cancel the contract or make changes to it if you have second thoughts.

■ ALWAYS READ THE

SMALL PRINT Admittedly this can be tedious but it has to be done if you want to protect yourself. Some terms and conditions have unexpected surprises hidden in them but the law usually takes the view that if you sign an order form, you have accepted any terms it contains. Any unfair terms can be challenged, though.

■ PAY ON YOUR CREDIT

CARD If the kitchen doesn't cost more than £30,000 and the amount on your card is less than £25,000, the credit card company is jointly liable if the kitchen isn't as promised or of 'satisfactory quality' or the way it's installed isn't up to scratch.

'Don't be fobbed off if something goes wrong'

FIVE WAYS TO ADD PERSONALITY TO YOUR NEW KITCHEN DESIGN

■ **MIX AND MATCH** Mix colours and/or materials (wood with coloured units, for example).

or units raised above the floor for a less fitted and uniform feel.

■ BREAK UP LINES

Use cupboards of varying heights or features such as open shelves to add variety to wall storage.

■ KEEP WALLS PLAIN

Opting for wide pan drawers instead of wall cabinets can break up long unit runs.

■ STAND-ALONE

Consider incorporating freestanding cupboards

■ **GLASS DISTINCTION** Use different materials – say, glass for splashbacks instead of tiles.

Looking for something different?

There's a style to suit every taste, whether you want to make a bold design statement or just add some variety.

Sleek European designs are already changing the face of British kitchens – fussy

details are out and flat-fronted doors with simple handles are in, letting the colours and finishes do the talking.

Bright, lacquered units in glossy reds, blues and oranges are fashionable, too, although more

earthy tones are also stylish (and easier to live with). There's a huge choice of striking woods, too, with dark oak and walnut being popular choices. More unusual options include cherry, apple or pear wood.



This kitchen from Intoto is typical of the fashion for bright, glossy red lacquered units. The worktop is a grey marble-effect laminate

Contacts

B&Q

0845 6096688
www.diy.com

Focus

0800 436436
www.focusdiy.com

Habitat

0845 6010740
www.habitat.co.uk

Homestyle

0845 6024295
www.homestylekitchens.co.uk

Ikea

www.ikea.co.uk
Intoto 01924 487900
www.intoto.co.uk
Jewson
0800 539766
www.jewson.co.uk

KBSA

01905 726066
www.kbsa.co.uk
Magnet
01325 744093 N England,
01325 744094 SE England,
01325 744095 SW England

www.magnet.co.uk

MFI
0870 6075054
www.mfi.co.uk
Moben
0800 413413
www.moben.co.uk

Orwells

01473 680091
www.orwells.co.uk
Qualitas 01483 777777
www.qualitas.uk.com
Wickes
www.wickes.co.uk