

Kitchen creativity

Richard Swift is head of the kitchen design studio at Touch Design Group in Exeter

As Richard Swift walks around the former glass factory on Marsh Barton which Touch Design Group has just moved into there's a tangible sense of creativity and extreme attention to detail. In one part of the building work continues on creating a stunning copper worktop for the kitchen of a client in East Devon. In another a striking dark oak veneer - sourced from Italy - is being applied to a cabinet door with extraordinary care. In a third a craftsman is finishing off a bespoke knife block - made-to-measure for the exact set of knives a customer owns.

Richard heads up the busy kitchen design studio at Touch Design. A trained cabinet maker, he's built and fitted hundreds of kitchens during his career and now relishes the challenge of helping customers bring dream designs to life.

It's a role that means he gets to know his clients very well. He explains: "Kitchens are the centre of the home. People say that as a phrase, but it's true. So if you are discussing the centre of their home, by default you get to know them and their family. We talk about things like whether they have children, or a dog or a cat or whether this is the house where they hope to live for their rest of their lives or somewhere that five years down the line they are going to sell on."

After years of travelling to design shows, marble quarries and manufacturers across Europe, Richard has an encyclopaedic knowledge of contemporary and traditional



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materials and loves working with new ideas, often suggested by customers who have seen something on the internet.

"With most of our jobs we are doing things that are five degrees of separation from what we've done before. There is always something new and exciting that is happening. It might be a material, it might be a detail, it might be context.

"Often people get ideas from Pinterest. We say to clients 'use Pinterest - send me your Pinterest board'. If they give me 10 images it tells me visually where they are. It's a fantastic tool for me and the clients. We use it all the time."

The design process can sometimes take up to six months, with a series of meetings and reviews before in-house production begins. Richard says: "We go to a very detailed level with our clients. This level of care is something that's incredibly important to us. Good design takes time and it's great when our experience and knowledge gives our clients the confidence

to go a bit further than they initially thought and enjoy it! Kitchens are opening up now. Whereas before the kitchen was in its own room, now the kitchen is dining, living - it's multifunctional and meant to do a lot more things."

So what single piece of advice would he give to people beginning their journey to a new kitchen? "Do your research and have a clear idea of budget. That helps tremendously when you are a designer. If you know that you can make sensible choices.

"There's a hierarchy of quality and choice and budget, so you need to know what your budget is and spread that budget evenly. If you are going to spend more on certain areas spend it on the bits that are going to come in contact with yourself, like the worktops."

And what about Richard's own kitchen? He laughs: "Don't even ask! I'm renovating the house I live in, which used to be a

village forge, and I haven't started on the kitchen yet. But when I do it's going to be black. We've only done one black kitchen, for a house in Shaldon. It had a black Aga and it looked amazing." ■



Kitchens are at the heart of the home



Richard Swift,
Touch Design