



Into Touch

Ahead of the launch of Touch Design Group's new showroom, *Imogen Clements* talks to the team about bespoke interiors, attention to detail, and viewing 'the story' of a product from thought to completion.

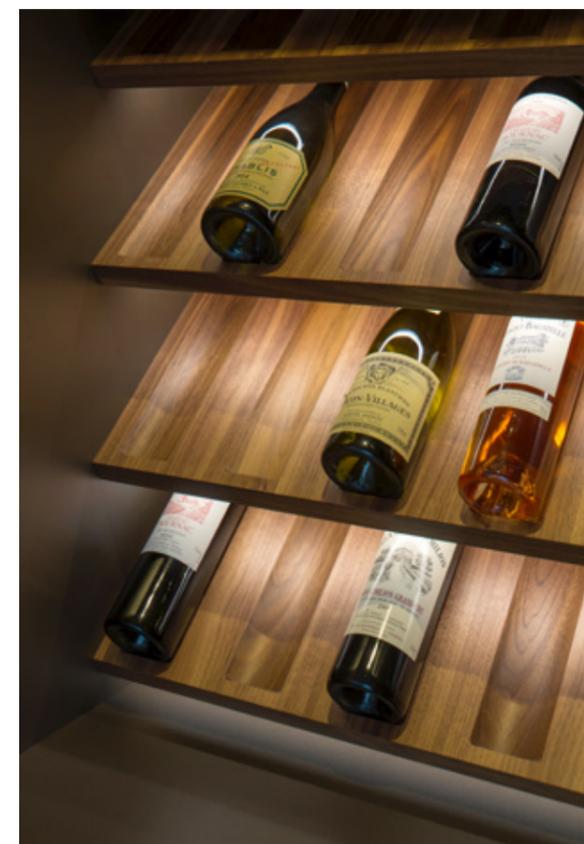
There are many benefits to living in the South West that are well documented. Space is one. We South West residents get to walk out onto open moor without a road or person in sight; to survey wide, sandy stretches of coastline punctuated by just the odd stick man and his dog; and live in houses that, for the price of a London one-bedroom flat, can accommodate a family of five and have them rarely bump into one another.

There is also the space associated with businesses: shops and showrooms, those who sell goods that require some room for their clients to fully gauge and appreciate what's on display, such as those associated with bigger purchases, namely interiors, carpentry, furniture, and kitchens. Designers' showrooms there are aplenty in London, but with square footage at a premium, there is rarely room for more than a few lines in each, and certainly no sight of the manufacturing process. When it comes to design, specifically design of the highest level, the making of it frequently occurs behind closed doors, some distance from the buying point and, more often than not, across-continent.

Ed Tremlett and David Crosby acquired a site the size of a small aircraft hangar in Marsh Barton in 2014, from which to run their own business creating luxury bespoke interiors. At 3,000 square metres, 6 Marsh Green Road North, in Exeter's extensive retail and industrial park, was to comprise the business in its entirety. With all needs of the business in mind, this cavernous space was architecturally divided into offices from which Touch Design Group would be run, including drawing studios in which products would be designed; there would be a spacious consultation and samples room, through which the company could present a variety of concepts and advanced materials to the client; and the 'hangar' would be split-level to allow for a viewing gallery of the massive workshop where Touch's team of carpentry and joinery experts can be seen making to order the highly refined and innovative bespoke kitchens, furniture, dressing rooms, media rooms, door sets and staircases for which the company is known.

It was an ambitious move acquiring such a site, a wide departure from many more conventional interiors operations, but 6 Marsh Green Road North has been cleverly designed – the immense frontage fully glazed across both floors, with the showroom immediately on entering, the workshop sitting behind it and the offices, consultation room, and viewing gallery on the floor above. Touch Design Group employs 32 people split into two core divisions: Touch Kitchen and Touch House.

"What we wanted to do," explains David, "was to show the 'story' of the business. As you come in, you can appreciate the finished article in the showroom, then you come up through the drawing office to see how it's drawn, then look down through the windows on the workshop to see how it's made. As a result, you get sight of the end-to-end process at every stage."





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The showroom was always to be the final stage in the site's development. Mission complete: the Touch Design Group showroom opens on 17 October 2017.

A showroom, you may suggest, is interesting for a company known for its bespoke creations. But everyone needs a reference point, and Ed and David, the business's founding partners, and Richard Swift, responsible for Touch Design Group's kitchens, have curated the space to show a wide spectrum of what this company is capable of.

"You're not coming in and seeing white or grey kitchens," explains Richard. "Here, there is an eclectic range of forms and materials, because we offer a breadth of finish and design capabilities, which I believe are quite refreshing, and pretty unique. We can take the classic white sleek kitchen and give it a bespoke contemporary treatment that you won't find anywhere else."

In the Touch showroom, you won't find a clean, white designer kitchen in its entirety. Here, you will find a kitchen 'composite' made up of different approaches and materials, such that you can compare and contrast how they look and feel within the same context.

Richard adds, "I wouldn't expect a client to come in and say, 'I want that', because there are around 25 materials used within that one ensemble. We've been relatively bold with it, but it all hangs together."

David adds, "The showroom is really to show the possibilities; that what we can do doesn't need to relate to anything the client has seen before. A samples library works well for architects and interior designers, but for a client it can sometimes be quite hard to visualize – they need to see those materials applied. Plus, it allows us to show the attention to detail we like to give to each individual project."

Of the 3,000 square metres, the showroom extends to approximately 120 square metres of space, with the lion's share of the site still given over to the makers. Touch Design Group is regularly involved in big projects; as well as kitchens, there are whole-house briefs for expensive homes. Much work to date has come from

London (where both Ed and David first started out) and many are jobs from high spenders, occasional VIPs. The aim of the showroom, then, was to bring the company's expertise closer to South West residents as yet unfamiliar with what Touch offers.

David ponders Touch's point of difference: "To be honest, I don't think there is anywhere else in the country, not just county, like it – where you can see the product, how it's designed and drawn, how it's made, and look at the range of materials from across the world that you could use. I believe what we're doing is unique. There is a growing design awareness in general, and certainly in the South West. Plus, we find that the added end-to-end view of their product provides not just reassurance, but interest for the client."

Based in Marsh Barton rather than the town centre, the Touch Design Group team isn't expecting a great deal of passing traffic, so initially the showroom will be open Tuesdays through Fridays, from 10am to 3pm, and by appointment at any other time.

Richard explains: "Obviously, we'll see how it goes, but our line of work is pretty specialist and this showroom requires an expert to be in attendance at all times to explain the kitchen elements, plus the additional wide range of variations. It's me who really has all that knowledge, garnered through years in the business and my time travelling the world to source the latest materials and techniques." Richard clearly won't be in the showroom all week. Due to the depth of consultation required, it therefore makes sense to have the showroom open by appointment only, for part of the week.

During general opening times, interested parties can visit to see Touch Design Group's scope of work, and also, should they wish, buy product off the shelf. The Touch showroom will be selling lighting from Amos Lighting, furniture from twentytwentyone, and stone and ceramic flooring from Lapidica, all of which are suppliers in keeping with Touch's own style and level of design.

David adds: "It makes sense to make the showroom as complete as possible with lighting, furniture, flooring and accessories. The more ambitious projects are generally what we focus on and are obviously our primary objective, but the relationship often starts with a smaller token purchase."

Certainly, you value things far more when you see the stages of their development, particularly when an acute attention to detail has gone into making them. This applies all the more when the end product or kitchen is unlike anything seen elsewhere, using materials so advanced no one else in the UK is yet using them.

It is this that Touch Design Group delivers, precisely to the client's bespoke requirements. It's what – along with its 'complete story' showroom experience – makes 6 Marsh Green Road North well worth a visit. **M**

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