

# Q&A



**Richard Swift** has managed the design studio for Touch Design Group for the last four years. TDG is an Exeter-based studio and workshop that operates nationwide providing clients with a complete design and manufacturing facility – architecture, bespoke kitchens through to the design of individual furniture pieces – all under one roof.



## What are you currently working on?

TDG are currently working on various kitchen projects: we are finishing off the installation of a kitchen in a huge new build on the outskirts of London; the workshop is producing a kitchen for a barn conversion in Bath; and we are just about to start manufacture on two different coastal properties in Devon.

## How do you approach a project? How does the work come in?

Each project is unique, but our approach is always the same: we start with a comprehensive kitchen design questionnaire that is used to create a design brief for the project. Questions cover family and lifestyle needs, aesthetics, space plan options and storage requirements.

Work will often come from referral and we work with many architects and interior designers who appreciate the levels of creative design, customer service and project management that we offer. Some jobs will just be kitchens but generally TDG work on all aspects of a project where we will be designing and manufacturing the architectural joinery, fitted and free-standing furniture along with the kitchen.

## What are the key rules in any kitchen design?

I think the kitchen has always been the most important room in the house. Interior architecture is constantly adapting to the different demands of people and, as such, our perception of what a kitchen space should be changes, too. As the walls come down, kitchens are becoming more integrated into the rest of the house and the boundaries between kitchen, dining and living areas are becoming ever more blurred.

## What are the areas that people – end consumers and other kitchen designers – frequently get wrong?

Clients are often worried by what ‘others’ may think. They can often get fixated on certain materials or design trends that may look great in a magazine or showroom but often don’t translate well into the actual kitchen interior.

## What has been your most challenging project?

I worked in San Francisco for a number of years and understanding the subtle differences between UK and USA kitchen design and culture was a steep but enriching learning curve. Generally, clients were much less design



savvy and more traditional in what they expected. The European kitchen companies really only have a strong foothold on the East and West coast. Most aspects of European kitchen design are a mystery to even architects and interior designers. As a showroom manager, I needed to retrain my staff in how to design a contemporary European-looking kitchen as they were so ingrained in the traditional American kitchen aesthetic. The diversity of clients was also greater than in the UK – many of my clients in San Francisco were Chinese or Japanese so they had a very different set of requirements with regard to food preparation, cooking and storage.

## What has been your most satisfying project?

We recently completed a contemporary kitchen design in Budleigh Salterton using a rough-sawn smoked-oak veneer sourced from Italy. Although a period property, it had a glorious modern extension. The kitchen sat in both parts of the house and had to work with the old and new architecture. The clients were very brave and bold in the use of colour and materials, resulting in a striking but timeless kitchen design. We also designed a cocktail bar using copper sheet combined with the same rough-sawn veneer. This was combined with a copper tap and sink.

## What are your current favourite materials and who are your go-to suppliers?

Sourcing and selecting the finest and most innovative materials is one of the unique aspects of the TDG Kitchen Design Studio. I am lucky to get the chance to visit design and material shows throughout Europe to find materials and make them available for our clients. This often means we are using and designing with materials before they are common in the UK. If we can’t access the material direct then we will partner with a manufacturer (usually in Italy) to supply us with the product or material.

On a recent visit to Italy I found some beautiful weathered/aged veneers that are made from the old staging posts used in Venice to tie up the gondolas. These veneers are unique and have a story all of their own, which clients like. They have ‘added value’ and are quite rare, being only available in limited quantities. I could imagine using them in a modern design but where a client doesn’t want a purely clinical look.

We have just been visited by an Austrian company called

Alfa who are manufacturing some of the most interesting timber-board materials available in Europe.

## What are your sources of inspiration?

Design shows, blogs, magazines, Pinterest... all are used as a source of inspiration.

Innovation in the contemporary kitchen industry is driven by the manufacturers in Italy and Germany, although there are some very interesting kitchen design companies emerging in Belgium, Austria and the Netherlands that I like to keep tabs on. These are often smaller and more bespoke, like ourselves, meaning they can be more flexible in approaching projects.

## What are the current trends – do they vary between London and the South West?

The contemporary kitchen trends in the London market often filter through to the South West. The biggest trend is for distressed, weathered, textured brushed and scratched finishes. Many of the properties we work on in the South West are coastal and a common theme is to design with more texture and use an eclectic range of materials. Reinventing traditional forms with more modern materials is also an area of design that we employ in more period properties in the South West; for example, using rough-sawn veneer, sand-blasted timbers, textured stone worktops, concrete renders, and recycled timber flooring.

## What does the kitchen of the future look like?

Key elements will be: a more modular and less fitted aesthetic; materials that self-heal when scratched; methods of internal composting and recycling; cold storage rather than fridges to reduce energy use; finally, the trend for restaurant-style cooking techniques – such as blast chillers and vacuum cooking – will change the type of appliances clients use and how we design the space plan. **M**

[touchdesigngroup.com](http://touchdesigngroup.com)

