

FINANCIAL TIMES

How to spend it

APRIL 1 2017



**BRIGHT SIGHTS,
BIG CITIES**



cooking the looks

A more eclectic approach to kitchen design that blends individual, vintage pieces with 21st-century functionality is adding sought-after soul to the heart of the home, says **Lucia van der Post**



Notions of kitchens are changing. The cosy lived-in kitchen with the Aga, the comfy sofa, the television in the corner, the dog basket and the roaring fire has long been seen as the one that most people in their heart of hearts truly long for. Efficient rows of shiny cabinets are useful, tidy and very functional, but they lack soul. They also lack glamour – another modern must for the heart of the home.

As interior designer Guy Goodfellow puts it: “The challenge for the designer is to combine the efficiency that people still need and want with the soul and glamour they now crave.” What Goodfellow and many of his fellow designers have found is that the answer lies in two kitchens: a seriously functional area for prepping, cooking and washing up (where all the machinery can be hidden), and what Goodfellow calls a “play” kitchen that has an air of glamour and warmth. But where space allows, all these elements can be combined in a single room.

Take Hubert Zandberg, a South African designer who specialises in a rich, textured and layered look (example pictured left). He often starts with a “found” piece that then becomes loved and – unlike most kitchen units – is not discarded when a client moves house. “When we did a kitchen in a farmhouse in the south of France we used a massive, overscaled

From left: a textured and layered look defines Hubert Zandberg’s bespoke kitchens, with features such as industrial-style stools and lighting

and distressed oak floors. Characterful materials such as bronze and pickled oak give this Smallbone of Devizes kitchen a lived-in air

Left: the laid-back look so typical of the Diesel brand informs its kitchen collaboration with Scavolini (from the Misfits Collection), with its informal, rough-luxe pieces that have a retro-industrial vibe

cabinet, the sort often found in basement, larder-like rooms," he says. "It became the focal point of the kitchen." Zandberg buys up industrial shelving and beautiful old brackets whenever he sees them. For a house outside Bath he took some old Flemish industrial shelving made of wood and metal – on a huge scale, almost double volume – and designed the whole kitchen around it. He also sourced old Belgian wooden cabinets and factory lockers and added very contemporary Bulthaup units, the simplest metal ones. The giant industrial shelving formed a bridge between the vintage cupboards and the contemporary units, and with its history gave the kitchen both character and that essential element called soul. "I also use lighting to add an extra dimension of warmth – a lovely old factory light can transport one into another world – or I might choose some finely made craft lights or basketry versions," says Zandberg. "All of these can bring scale and texture and help create an ambience that is unique to the client."

Zandberg sometimes combines a kitchen with a library, while other times it becomes a repository of family art or framed children's drawings. He likes to lower the table – "as Mark Birley did at Harry's Bar" – and put comfortable chairs or upholstered benches around it so that people can read and loll comfortably. A niche with a daybed is another nice touch, he adds. "The challenge is to make the design appear a bit picked up and thrown together but to integrate that look with a fully functional kitchen."

Anthony Collett, another sought-after interior

Freestanding tables, trolleys and units create a charmingly informal kitchen that invites you to spend a lot of time in it

designer, is also in favour of a more random approach: "I don't really believe in the ergonomics of kitchens – that so-called golden triangle. I don't think people mind walking to fetch a pot." For his own kitchen (pictured overleaf) he found some Arts and Crafts vestry cabinets from an old vicarage that he utilised to create an inglenook into which he inserted a La Cornue oven.

These sorts of eclectic kitchens tend to be created by interior designers who skilfully mix and match from established ranges, adding in antiques, "found" and statement pieces, but there are also manufacturers that have embraced the increasing demand for individual kitchens. Take Smallbone of Devizes. It made its name in the mid-1980s with hand-painted, often rag-rolled units, but these days, says chief operating officer Martin Gill, "our customers want a much more eclectic mix and they frequently want to integrate pieces they already own or have just found". To this end, Smallbone has just launched its new Brasserie kitchen (from £45,000, pictured on previous pages), a handmade design that consists of unfitted and custom-made pieces with a contemporary, slightly industrial look from which customers can pick and choose in a way that fits their way of living and entertaining, and their existing furniture. Varying the materials on offer – stone, wood, bronze, marble and leather – also contributes to a layered, softer, more lived-in air. The options include a wine



wall and an oak dresser and, because each component is handmade, it can be adapted to fit any room.

The Italian company Scavolini has been thinking along similar lines and has collaborated with Diesel to create the modular Diesel Social Kitchen (pictured left) as part of Diesel's Misfits Collection. This consists of a range of informal, rough-luxe, mismatched pieces with a retro-industrial vibe, all of which come in different materials, with varying treatments and finishes. The idea was, says Diesel creative director Andrea Rosso, to interpret the laid-back look so typical of the Diesel brand. There are freestanding tables, stools, trolleys and non-modular storage units. Steel surfaces can be shiny or have a smoky, patchy effect – and while the circular extractor units are made of aged steel, vintage steel rivets provide decoration around the edge of the seat on

the stools. The result is a charmingly informal kitchen that invites you to spend a lot of time in it. A standard-sized layout starts at £25,000.

There are other ways of putting soul into a kitchen. Patricia Urquiola, for instance, launched a design (from £36,000, pictured overleaf) for Boffi, inspired by the one in her grandfather's house. She took a simpler approach, in essence providing a background that fulfilled all the essential functions but allowed space for the owners to mix and match the units and to make the room their own. Urquiola called it Salinas, after the town on the coast of northern Spain where her grandfather had lived and where she spent a lot of time as a child. She loved the views from the house over the long, curving beach and had happy childhood memories of her family gathering and cooking together. She wanted to capture

Left: an Arts and Crafts vestry cabinet from an old vicarage forms an inglenook in this kitchen designed by Anthony Collett for his London home. Bottom: Patricia Urquiola's nostalgic creation for Boffi is inspired by her grandparents' kitchen in the summer house overlooking Spain's Salinas beach

that feeling in her new range, instead of the “very masculine kitchen” look that she dislikes intensely. It would be hard to call it grand but it is immensely sympathetic. There are huge sinks and generous spaces for social moments. She completely hid all plug sockets and appliance wires in “trenches” that ran along the backs of units, thus removing all the modern technology from sight. There are open shelves that can hold and display kitchen equipment and she uses a variety of sympathetic sustainable materials such as wood (for surfaces and small counters and tables) and PaperStone, a pressed paper made using petroleum-free resins, for the doors, as well as zinc, brass, aluminium and copper. The resulting simplicity has a charming, almost nostalgic air, reminding one of the kitchens of yesteryear, yet offering up-to-date (but critically, hidden) technology.

Boffi also recently launched its Piero Lissoni-designed Boffi_Code with the clear intention of making the kitchen more human and personal. There is no standard cabinet that is simply “customised”; instead every item is made to order, designed around the needs of the customer. Though Boffi presented the Boffi_Code kitchen using (very beautiful) grey stone marble tops and doors made from a fossil-oak wood that is found in rivers and lakes and varies in shade from dark brown to black (depending upon its age), it really exists as what the company itself calls a “programme” rather than a range, and it marks a decided turning away from rows of industrially produced identical units, which is what gives many a kitchen such an uninspiring air.

Finally, for some really wonderfully off-the-wall but truly poetic thinking, Japanese architect Kengo Kuma showed a kitchen at last year's Venice Architecture Biennale, consisting of rather precarious-looking shelves formed by balancing the slats on a range of artefacts – ceramic bowls and plates, vases, wicker baskets and

Urquiola uses a variety of simple, sympathetic materials that recall the kitchens of yesteryear



suitcases – that he had found in the Chinese city of Chengdu. Kuma called it The Floating Kitchen, and it was meant to provide a romantic alternative to the austere functional, unit-laden contemporary kitchen. Not easy to replicate, of course, but – individual? Special? Poetic? Yes, yes, yes. ♦

MISMATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

Boffi, 254 Brompton Rd, London SW3 (020-7590 8910; boffiuk.com). **Collett-Zarzycki**, Fernhead Studios, 2B Fernhead Road, London W9 (020-8969 6967; collett-zarzycki.com). **Guy Goodfellow**, 13 Langton Street, London SW10 (020-7349 0728; guygoodfellow.com). **Hubert Zandberg Interiors**, Studio 5.18, Grand Union Studios, 332 Ladbroke Grove, London W10 (020-8962 2776; hzinteriors.com). **Kengo Kuma and Associates**, 104 Rue Oberkampf, 75011 Paris (+331-4488 9490; kkaa.co.jp). **Scavolini**, 39 Fortune Green Road, London NW6 (020-8090 0909; scavolini.com). **Smallbone of Devizes**, Empire House, 220 Brompton Road, London SW3 (020-7581 9989; smallbone.co.uk).