

# Lip-smacking KITCHENS

Worcestershire interior designer, Elaine Lewis, provides professional insights into creating the perfect, multifunctional eating and entertaining space

Over the past few years, one of the most common requests from clients is to create a multifunctional space where families can cook, eat, open the post, entertain and help the children do their homework. Dining rooms are becoming a thing of the past and, as a reflection of how we live now, we are leaning towards single, larger spaces where numerous people can gather.

When it comes to planning a new kitchen, there is often a huge gulf between budget and expectation. An installation is made up of so many units that when you start adding on the price of labour, worktops, tiles, lighting and other extras, costs can very quickly escalate. To add to the confusion, there are 'off-the-peg' suppliers as well as bespoke manufacturers, which can offer similar-looking cabinetry for wildly different prices, which makes it difficult to know where to begin.

So how much should we budget for a new kitchen? As a rough guide, it is advisable to spend a maximum of 5 per cent of the overall value of the house. These days, kitchens are one of the biggest selling points of a property, so you need to avoid fitting a cheap and cheerful kitchen which, in the long run, will have a negative impact when you come to sell. Your choice of cabinets and finishes are vital, so invest your time carefully to make sure you get a beautiful finish on a limited budget.

With budget now set, the next most important step is the layout in a way that makes best use of the space. Every home is unique,



but there are four to five standard kitchen layouts, each with their own benefits: single and double galleried kitchens with one or two continuous runs; L-shaped kitchens that are built into a corner and offer optimum counter space; and U-shaped kitchens, which surround the cook on three sides, with everything in easy reach.

One of the biggest mistakes people make at the planning stage is not allowing for enough storage. You need to use every nook and cranny. Put overhead cabinets

A traditional Victorian Gentleman's Residence, mixing a new bespoke kitchen with antique furniture.



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**Top:** A galleried kitchen with an added light and airy dining room, combining old brick with new appliances.

**Above:** Natural architectural light and feature lighting can transform a kitchen.

as close to the ceiling as you can, consider deep drawers for saucepans and kitchen appliances you need to put away; cutlery drawers, wine storage, cookery books and spice racks to name but a few. Be sure you have adequate power sources for new appliances, and USB points and sockets in areas where you work with laptops.

A kitchen island can delineate the kitchen zone without compromising it, plus it's perfect if you like to socialise with guests while cooking. It also makes for great accessible space without interfering with the main preparation areas and a useful added informal dining area where the kids can eat, or additional seating when entertaining.

When it comes to kitchen worktops, the material options are almost endless. Whether you're using your island for utilitarian purposes or making a kitchen showstopper, there is a counter surface to suit. If cost is a concern, consider laminate or solid man-made finishes.

For mid-level spending, consider higher grades of solid surfaces or stained concrete. At the high end, look at granite and exotic wood choices.

And . . . last but not least . . . lighting, which is probably one of the most important features in kitchen design. Lighting in the kitchen is very important for it to function well and modern technology has brought with it great choice; however, sometimes too many variations can cause problems.

The most popular choices are halogen and low-energy lighting, or LED. Once you've made your choice, chose what colour of lighting is best for you. Also, consider the bonuses of dimming effects and what your options are on feature lighting.

Generally in a kitchen, there are five different types of lighting positions: ceiling lights, which provide general overall light; plinth lights, used in the form of LED spots or strips providing a runway effect at a very low level; display lighting, found mainly in glass-fronted cabinets and over mantle shelving to provide targeted light to illuminate a particular space or object; under wall-unit lighting, designed to illuminate your working areas in front of you; over wall-unit lighting, either facing down to illuminate the area or facing up to illuminate the ceiling; and finally, the all-important versatile hanging pendants in funky, industrial, retro or classic designs, for the kitchen's main showstopper.

Natural light also plays a key feature in a kitchen with many families now adding a selection of bi-fold doors, skylights and solar tubes to provide a light connection to the outdoors, a green catalyst to control temperature in the kitchen, depending on the windows' directional exposure and, of course, great architectural interest in terms of proportion and size.

And as you enter your wonderfully designed kitchen, you're not going to want it spoiled by incompatible colour schemes, so try to apply the same principles you'd use elsewhere in the home with your choice of materials and accessories, particularly if you're satisfying the needs of two (open-plan) rooms. Pick the most appropriate flooring for both rooms, combining the style and textures the best you can. Be mindful though, as even the slightest material mistake or bad choice of colour can affect the harmony and make the place look less balanced. ■

Elaine Lewis has been professionally styling residential and commercial interiors for over a decade. She lives in Malvern with her family. See [www.elainelewisdesigns.co.uk](http://www.elainelewisdesigns.co.uk) for more information.

