

Kitchen Buying Guide

Peter Earthy

www.independent-kitchen-designer.co.uk

Buying a new Fitted Kitchen is not something you do every day, and with the choice of products and services growing every year, the process can seem a little daunting.

We think this should be a fun thing to do, and have broken the process down into several steps that will help you along the way.

The process...

1. Choosing your products
2. Formulating your Budget
3. The Kitchen Design
4. Comparing your Quotations
5. Placing your Orders
6. Checking your Deliveries
7. Installation

Part 1. Choosing Your Products

Your new kitchen can be divided into four main areas:

- a) Furniture
- b) Appliances
- c) Worktops
- d) Installation

Furniture...

There are numerous kitchen retailers offering a wide range of door styles and cabinet types (both online and through kitchen showrooms).

The quality of these products will vary greatly, and we suggest viewing them wherever possible before finalising your choice.

As a rule of thumb, DIY Retailers will offer less expensive cabinets with a limited choice, Specialist Kitchen Retailers provide better quality “mid price range” cabinets with a greater selection, and Bespoke Manufacturers will produce the most expensive, but top quality purpose made products.

Appliances...

The choice of your appliances will impact greatly upon your new kitchen design, and we advise you make these choices before any design work commences.

- Kitchen Appliances can be “Built Under” your worktop or “Built In” to a tall cabinet and, as such, will require different positioning in the design.
- Kitchen Sink’s can feature multiple bowls and will require different size base cabinets
- Kitchen Taps may require greater water pressure than your current supply

It has become more common place to order kitchen appliances through “Online” retailers, so caution must be taken when choosing the model number and colour.

Worktops...

Worktops can be manufactured from a number of materials, the most popular being:

- Laminate
- Solid Wood
- Stone (Granite, Quartz, Slate)
- Resin (Corian, Mia, Wilson Art, etc)

Worktops cont...

Your worktop choice can affect your kitchen fitting timescales (Stone and Resin worktops require templating before manufacture adding up to two weeks to your installation time).

It is also worth remembering that your choice of kitchen sink will depend upon your choice of worktop ("Inset" sinks being commonly used for Laminate Worktops, "Under Mounted" Sinks for Solid Surfaces).

Installation...

Most people do not have the required fitting tools, or electrical/ gas qualifications, to attempt the installation of the kitchen themselves – and therefore require some assistance.

It is worth remembering that it doesn't matter whether you are spending £2,000 or £20,000 on your new kitchen – the quality of the installation is paramount.

Choosing a professional Kitchen Fitter will generally be more expensive than a local builder, but will normally produce a better end result.

A classic analogy would be – Your Doctor may know how to cut your leg off, but wouldn't you rather have a Surgeon perform the operation!

Kitchen Fitters have specialist knowledge, tools, and experience that general builders are unlikely to have.

The expense (£2,000 to £3,000) will be money well spent, however always ask for, and check up on, references from their recent clients.

If you would like a good estimate of your likely kitchen fitting cost check out the Free Fitting Cost Calculator at our web site, you can find details here...

<http://independent-kitchen-designer.co.uk/free-kitchen-fitting-cost-calculator.php>

Part 2. Formulating Your Budget

It really does make sense to formulate a budget – and then stick to it!

As expressed earlier, your new kitchen involves buying four major items (Furniture, Appliances, Worktops, and Installation).

The total cost of your new kitchen will reflect the mix of these choices – some of which you can control, and some of which will be more difficult.

- The Furniture Cost – can be controlled by “cost effective” planning
- The Appliance Cost – can be controlled by choice of manufacturer
- The Worktop Cost – will vary greatly by material
- The Fitting Cost – will not vary much by installer

Furniture Cost...

The cost of your Cabinets, Matching End Panels, Cornice, Pelmet, Plinth, and Handles can account for as much as 50% of your total order.

Obviously, better quality products are always going to cost more than inferior ones.

However, your Kitchen Designer should always plan your layout in the most cost effective way to minimise costs.

This can be achieved by using large cabinets in place of small cabinets, to reduce the number of cabinets to buy possible (A 300mm wide cabinet may be half of the width of a 600mm cabinet – but it is $\frac{3}{4}$ of the price).

Buying fewer “Large” Cabinets instead of more “Small” Cabinets will also mean there are fewer cabinets to fit (A Kitchen Fitter will charge the same to fit a 300mm Cabinet, as he does to fit a 600mm Cabinet)

Another cost saving solution is to plan for “Hi-Line” Cabinets instead of “Drawer Line” Cabinets.

The advantage of a “Hi-Line” design is that a single nest of drawers (of the optimum size) can be positioned in their optimum place – thus avoiding paying for numerous small (or even worse “false”) drawers scattered across the room.

It’s worth taking a sensible view of “pullout” storage systems, which can be very effective for gaining access into cabinets, but can more the double the cost of the cabinet.

Furniture Cost continued...

Where possible choosing a Cabinet Supplier offering Colour Co-ordinated Carcasses can reduce the need to buy expensive matching end panels to mask the colour of Cabinet ends.

Matching End Panels can be extremely expensive – and require a fitting cost element.

Appliance Costs...

Now here the sky's the limit.

Kitchen Appliance manufacturers relentlessly add more features to their products every year – but are they of any benefit to you?

- Fish Fingers will taste the same when cooked in a £400 Oven as when cooked in a £2,000 oven
- Dishwashers can be purchased with 14 programs – how many do you use? (Probably no more than two)
- Buying a remote controlled Cooker Hood may be a “cool” thing to do – but will you realistically ever operate it from your sofa?

Your choice of manufacturer will determine your costs, and we wouldn't dream of trying to sway you from one to another – however we do suggest you look at whether it's worth paying for features you will never use.

More and more people are turning to “Online” retailers to purchase kitchen appliances, and there is nothing wrong with that.

However, you must be realistic here.

Online retailers sell appliances at very small profits and can be slow to rectify mistakes (yours or theirs) with orders, similarly are often not able to replace damaged items very quickly.

Having your Kitchen Fitter returning to fit appliances at a later date can often cost more than any saving on the appliances you have made.

Wherever possible it's worth buying all of your Kitchen Appliances from the same Retailer as you are more likely to obtain a quantity discount, and possibly a better “cover all” additional warranty.

Worktop Costs...

Your choice of worktop can seriously affect your budget, accounting from as little as 3% of your budget to as much as 25%.

Average worktop costs are:

Laminate £400-£600

Solid Wood £600-£1,000

Stone (Granite/Quartz) £3,000-£4,500

Resin (Corian) £4,500 - £6,000

Laminate worktops...

Are extremely hard wearing, and can be cut, mitred, and installed on site by your Kitchen Fitter – reducing the kitchen installation time and inconvenience.

Solid Wood worktops...

Can also be cut, mitred, and installed by your Kitchen Fitter, and can also be easily repaired (sanded down) if damaged by burns or scratches.

However, whilst can look stunning if properly maintained, they do require a lot of “oiling” to prevent them drying out.

If allowed to dry out they will shrink allowing the “staves” to loosen, which will lead to water penetration – and rot!

Stone/Resin Worktops...

Would be most people’s choice, but are also the most expensive.

Nothing beats the opulence of Granite Worktops, which look stunning and are extremely hard wearing. However, be aware of the additional Installation time required and the possible lack of facilities for over two weeks.

Quartz Worktops, whilst not achieving the same level of gloss, offer a bigger colour range, and as they are manmade the colour sample you see will be the colour you receive (not guaranteed with a Granite worktop).

Resin worktops are a perfect where odd shapes are required, as their invisible joints provide a seamless finish. Considered the most hygienic of work surfaces they are also generally the most expensive

Kitchen Installation Costs...

Obviously the cheapest option is to fit the kitchen yourself.

If this is not an option you will need to services of a Kitchen Fitter.

Most professional Kitchen Fitters work to a similar pricing structure that is based upon:

- Carpentry works (fitting cabinets, end panels, trims, handles, and worktops)
- Electrical works (Part P Upgrade, Addition Circuits/Sockets, Lighting, and Appliances)
- Plumbing/Gas works (Cooker, Hob, Water Based Appliances, Sink, and Tap)
- General Works (Small Building, Flooring, Tiling, Rubbish Removal)

You can expect to pay between £2,000 and £3,000 for a professional Installation.

Budget Summary...

As with every purchase “you pay your money and take your choice”

We think a sensible cost split would be approximately:

- 40% Furniture
- 25% Appliances
- 20% Worktop
- 15% Fitting

For example, a £20,000 (including VAT) budget would involve spending:

£8,000 on Furniture + £5,000 on Appliances + £4,000 on Worktops + £3,000 on Fitting.

Your own personal requirements may differ from this

If you would like a better estimate of your own likely kitchen cost check out our Free Kitchen Cost Calculator, you will find more details here...

<http://independent-kitchen-designer.co.uk/free-kitchen-cost-calculator.php>

Part 3. Creating your new Kitchen Design

Now come the fun bit, and remember this should be ... the fun bit!

You have three choices here:

- You design the kitchen yourself (no cost)
- You ask a Kitchen Retailer to design your kitchen for you (generally free service)
- You employ an Independent Kitchen Designer to design your kitchen (paid service)

*Please note, as an Independent Kitchen Designer I **will** try to remain impartial here!*

Self Design...

Anyone can design a fitted kitchen – it's not difficult.

- You will need to measure your room accurately, and identify possible problem areas
- You will need to be aware of current cabinet sizes, which can be obtained from manufacturers' price lists
- You will need to know your kitchen appliance specifications
- Having a good understanding of spacial awareness would be useful
- An understanding of kitchen fitting would also help (you don't want to design something that is impossible to install)

And then start planning away!

Free Kitchen Design...

Most Kitchen Retailers offer a free design service and employ (or self employ) sales people to produce a kitchen design for you.

This design/quote will be based upon:

- Their product range
- Their kitchen appliance range
- Their installation service

Should you require further quotations for comparison purposes, simply visit more Kitchen Retailers and repeat this process.

However, you will find a great deal of reluctance to provide any detailed drawings until you place a deposit.

Creating your new Kitchen Design continued...

Independent Kitchen Design...

Here you will employ (pay) an experienced Kitchen Designer to design your new kitchen for you.

This service will provide you with...

- Detailed and dimensioned Kitchen Plan
- Flat Elevation Drawings
- 3D Colour Perspective Images
- Specialist Worktop Drawing
- Cabinet Parts List
- Kitchen Appliance List
- Fitting Schedule

This Kitchen Design Pack will then form the basis of your quotations.

Instead of travelling around different Kitchen Showrooms simply email your Design Pack to different Kitchen Retailers ... asking them to provide their best quotation.

Most Kitchen Retailers will look upon such a request as a bonus (a good quality sales lead that has cost them nothing to generate) and will discount your quotation accordingly – often producing savings much greater than the cost of your Independent Kitchen Design Service.

If you live in Southern England and would like details of our own Independent Kitchen Design Service you can find them here...

<http://independent-kitchen-designer.co.uk/independent-kitchen-design.html>

4. Comparing Quotations

Having completed your kitchen design you should now be in receipt of a number of quotations for the supply, and possible fit, of your new kitchen.

If you have several quotes it can sometimes become difficult to compare them, due to changes in the design, alterations to the appliances etc.

You will often be in the position of liking some parts of a particular design/quote, but also some parts of another.

This is where decisions have to be made as comparing different quotations can become a pointless exercise.

The only way of comparing quotations from different retailers is to compare “like with like”, and we think a sensible approach is to decide upon the best design first.

If that means asking everyone else to change their design, to comply with your preferred design, then so be it (they are hardly going to refuse).

When you receive your revised designs/quotes you can clearly decide which one offers you the best value for money.

Value for money don't necessarily mean just price and other points to consider could be:

- Product Quality – you would expect to pay a little more for better quality products
- Customer Service – Have you been supplied with recommendations from previous clients?
- Location – A local supplier may be better placed to provide a good service
- Payment Terms – One retailer may provide a retention sum, to be paid when you are satisfied with the end product
- Contract – Have you compared the Terms and Conditions of each Retailers order?

5. Placing your orders

So, having decided upon your new kitchen suppliers, it's now time to part with some money.

But, before you go ahead and place deposits, its worth carrying out a few checks to make sure you not going to be in for a few nasty surprises.

After designing and overseeing the installation of thousands of Fitted Kitchens we have been on the receiving end of a few nasty surprises - we hope you can learn from some of our experiences.

You can download and print a Kitchen Checklist from our web site here...

<http://independent-kitchen-designer.co.uk/Kitchen%20Check%20List.pdf>

You may be placing your order with one supplier, or with a number of suppliers.

In each case we suggest you carefully read the terms and conditions of sale of each order before signing it.

You will discover (as in most industries) these terms and conditions do not exist for your benefit, and are heavily biased towards the supplier.

Don't be put off by this, however some suppliers will include onerous conditions that should be avoided.

We suggest you never pay the total cost "up front" and look for suppliers that offer similar payment terms to these:

- Deposit with Order (up to 25%)
- Interim Payment (up to 60% when orders go into production)
- Delivery Balance (up to 15% upon completed delivery)

Your Kitchen Fitter will normally expect to get paid upon completion of the installation (except where he is providing a large quantity of materials).

And remember Guarantee's will only last as long as the supplier (think MFI, Moben etc).

6. Checking your delivery

Your kitchen may arrive in one delivery, or be split into Furniture, Appliances, and Worktop deliveries

In each case you will need to check each delivery for both completeness and damage.

Your Kitchen Fitter will be arriving shortly to commence the installation ... and he can only fit what's there, and in good condition.

Furniture Delivery...

You may be unable to check for damage during the delivery for a number of reasons, e.g.:

- Time – Your delivery vehicle is obstructing the road
- Cabinet Type – Your furniture is flat pack and cannot be inspected easily

However this does not stop you checking the “completeness” of the order – simply sign the delivery note as “Not Inspected”

As soon as it is practically possible you will need to check all items for transit damage, paying particular notice to any damage to the corners of parcels.

This will invariably mean unpacking everything – and temporarily placing items back into the same packaging (the boxes are likely to be coded – the Kitchen Fitter will be looking for certain coded parcels during the fit).

Take particular notice of the furniture doors, and carefully re-wrap.

Count your Handles – you will not believe the amount of returns kitchen fitters make to fit missing handles.

Report any damage to the supplier by telephone immediately, and confirm this by email.

Similarly, should any items appear to be missing telephone the supplier to check they have not been packed within any yet un-opened parcels (Handles / Hinge Packs are the main culprit here).

Checking your delivery continued...

Kitchen Appliances, Sinks & Taps...

Some large Kitchen appliances will require to be delivered on a separate vehicle (American Fridge Freezer and Range Cooker)

Please be aware that most delivery companies will now only deliver “to your door” and it will be your responsibility to move them within your property (it’s an insurance thing).

However most Kitchen appliances will be delivered together and whilst are not particularly heavy, they will take up some room.

As per your furniture delivery you may not be in a position to check for damage, but again you can check for completeness. (Quantity, Model, Colour etc)

If you cannot check for damage always sign for as “Not Inspected”.

It is vital you check for transit damage at your earliest opportunity.

You will need to unpack each appliance (keeping the packaging in case a return is required) and check for any visible scratches, dents, or other defects. (Sinks are particularly prone to damage)

Kitchen Appliance Retailers (particularly “On-Line” ones) offer a short timescale to report problems, and you need to meet their timescale.

Worktops...

Laminate Worktops will be covered with a protective film – you will need to remove this film to check for scratches (particularly on Hi-Gloss Laminate Worktops).

Laminate Worktops are supplied with a minimum of two matching end trims to cover exposed worktop ends – you need to find these and keep them safe (they are easily discarded by mistake)

Solid Wood Worktops are generally supplied in cardboard packaging – they should have been stored horizontally and perfectly flat – check to see if there is any noticeable warping.

Stone/Resin Worktops will be delivered at the time of installation by your worktop fabricator, so you will not need to inspect them yourself.

1. Installation

Your kitchen installation will require a small amount of preparation on your part.

Prior to the Fitters arriving you will need to:

- Empty your existing cabinets
- Make available some space for rubbish (skip or weekly collection)
- Arrange for temporary cooking facility
- Arrange for temporary sink/water facility
- Buy plenty of cookies

As a rule of thumb your Installation will proceed as follows:

1. Removal of cabinets and appliances
2. Removal of existing wall tiles
3. Alterations to current electrical system
4. Installation of new ceiling lighting
5. Alterations to current plumbing system
6. Re-plastering walls / ceiling where required
7. Floor preparation
8. Base carcass and appliance fitting
9. Specialist worktop templating
10. Wall carcass fitting
11. Cabinet trim fitting (End Panels, Cornice, Light Pelmet, Plinth)
12. Specialist worktop installation
13. Connection of Hob, Sink, and Tap
14. Fitting and adjustment of cabinet doors
15. Fitting of cabinet handles
16. Floor laying
17. Possible Glass Splash Back Templating
18. Certification of Gas – “Gas Safe”
19. Certification of Electrics – “Part P”
20. Glass splash Back Fitting
21. Completion and “Sign Off”

Kitchen Installation continued...

The average timescale of your kitchen installation (with Laminate Worktops) will be between one and two weeks.

The average timescale of your kitchen installation (with Specialist Worktops) will be between two and three weeks (depending on the time between templating and fitting of the worktop)

If you are including Glass Splash Backs, these times will be extended by another two weeks (Glass Splash Backs will be templated upon completion of the installation with a further period of two weeks to manufacture and install).

Your kitchen appliances will all contain guarantee cards which will need to be completed and thankfully most manufacturers provide an on-line service to assist this.

Your Gas and Electrical certificates will generally be provided as soon as their registration has been completed with the relevant body.

We hope you found this simple Kitchen Buying Guide useful, and wish you luck with your new Fitted Kitchen.

You may find additional help at our web site:

<http://www.independent-kitchen-designer.co.uk>

Or contact me (Peter Earthy) at:

<http://www.independent-kitchen-designer.co.uk/contact.php>