

# COUNTRY LIFE

EVERY WEEK

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## Interiors special

Shall we go through? The return of the drawing room



Why real men don't eat Spam

Mind the magpie: superstition in sport

The new-look Frick and the saviour of blossom





# Material world

Copper, brass, wood veneers and reeded wood surfaces are bringing richness to contemporary kitchens, finds Arabella Youens



The warmth and texture of rich walnut and antique brass ensure this new Roundhouse kitchen extension fits its handsome period home

**I**N 1981, antique restorers Charlie Smallbone and Graham Clark opened a showroom off Westbourne Grove in west London, offering kitchens that featured simple cabinetry with recessed centre panels either painted or in natural wood. The style and feel were in stark contrast to the featureless melamine cabinetry that was prevalent at the time. The look, which became synonymous with English country style, quickly caught on. By 1986, Smallbone of Devizes had 12 showrooms in the UK's smartest postcodes and three in the US.

Since then, the kitchen has evolved to become a multifunctional space, often adjacent to the main living space. In many homes, this has precipitated a desire for kitchens that blend seamlessly into a succession of open-plan rooms where functionality is concealed and appliances hidden away. Typically, these designs feature few cabinets and a Tardis-style

pantry, as well as discreet full-height cupboards and freestanding cabinets.

Paul Welburn, senior designer of Roundhouse Design ([www.roundhousedesign.com](http://www.roundhousedesign.com)), was recently asked to create a space for a French family in London that looks nothing

**‘I am excited by the idea of juxtaposing interesting elements in a traditional setting’**

like a normal kitchen. ‘The challenge was that the owner is a serious cook and, therefore, wanted a practical kitchen, yet she was determined to keep the space looking streamlined and uncluttered,’ explains Mr Welburn, who has been a designer at the firm for more than

15 years. ‘The team came up with the idea of a hidden kitchen that blended in with the rest of the ground floor, wrapping the room in traditional wall panelling that conceals floor-to-ceiling storage. It means almost all the appliances are out of sight, requiring precision engineering and meticulous detailing.’ The island is designed to feel like a dining table made of dark wood with raised legs, rather than a conventional block of cabinets.

Roundhouse Design was established in 1996 by a small group of architects based in Primrose Hill, north London. ‘Back then, the design of a kitchen was built around the core elements of a cooker, the sink and the fridge,’ explains Mr Welburn. ‘From the start, we did Shaker-style cabinetry—and continue to do so today—but we also developed sleeker collections with handleless cabinetry. It appealed to clients who wanted something a bit different.’ Roundhouse designers explored →





# Interiors

a variety of finishes for doors, including high gloss, metallics and book-matching wood veneers that create a luxurious, less utilitarian look. Today, the company offers everything from leather-effect quartzite to cabinet doors made of brass mesh.

Having cut ties with the company he founded in 2009, Mr Smallbone later launched a new venture, Ledbury Studio ([www.ledburystudio.com](http://www.ledburystudio.com)), also in west London. The designs, which feature striking metallic and wood finishes hand-carved in oak with a gold-leaf *appliqué*, are far removed from his original kitchens. 'I always had an idea about doing a new take on a less fitted look,' he says. 'Sleek, modern options from Germany and Italy never sat happily in an English country house. They tend to be very architectural, which doesn't always work in a historic house where you need nuance and scale,' adds Mr Smallbone. 'I wanted to design something with enough variety in the materials to give each project a highly distinctive look. Quickly, it became obvious that contemporary finishes and frameless joinery were the key to this.'

Ledbury Studio focuses on kitchens that blend classic and contemporary styles, combining the warmth and elegance of materials with the clean simplicity of modern design. 'It's not about hiding from the fact that it is a kitchen; it's about making a design statement,' he explains. 'My interest is in materials and I am excited by the idea of juxtaposing interesting elements in a traditional setting.' At Ledbury, the team offers everything from copper-fronted cabinets through to splash-backs in silver-leaf *verre églomisé*.

Roundhouse also employs a combination of innovative finishes, textures and colours



**Classic and contemporary: Ledbury Studio kitchens pair modern design with interesting materials, such as diamond quartzite in John's Wood, London NW8 (above), and patinated copper in the Cotswolds (below)**



in its schemes. 'Our Shaker-style designs are fitted with modern hinge mechanisms, such as pocket doors that fold back into slim recesses to reveal ample storage or work space or close to disguise any chaos inside,' says Mr Welburn. 'Alternatively, we combine Shaker-style wall cabinets with a more modern element, perhaps a stainless-steel worktop or an island in an eye-catching material, perhaps antique brass. Each element, whether it's the island, walk-in pantry or cooking area, can be different. It's about adding personality to the space.'

Another strength of a contemporary style is the ability to introduce texture to a kitchen. Fluting and reeding add movement to otherwise flat surfaces, softening the sharp edges of a more standard contemporary kitchen. 'There'll always be space for a timeless, Shaker-style kitchen, which works as comfortably in a London house as it does in the country,' adds Mr Welburn. 'With a contemporary-style kitchen, the advantage is that you have the choice: either disguise all appliances in the furniture so that it looks like another room or push the boundaries using cutting-edge finishes and textures to make a feature of it.'

