

The heart of the home

Kitchens are no longer a room reserved only for cooking up a storm – instead, they're multi-functional spaces that are fast becoming the centre point of any modern day abode

WORDS: Ellic Fells

Perhaps it's the place where the family gathers together at the start of each day, a room where visitors are welcomed, a home-office, or even a make-shift school during lockdown; whatever role your kitchen plays, the likelihood is that it's used for far more than just cooking. Indeed, for most modern households, the kitchen is well and truly the heart of the home.

'Life currently means that the need for a space where a family can enjoy precious moments together is more important than ever. I believe that a kitchen in which it's a delight to spend time can only help to enhance the quality of family life,' states the renowned kitchen designer, and founder of Ledbury

Studio, Charlie Smallbone (ledburystudio.com). However, this hasn't always been the case.

There was once a time when kitchens were completely separate from the rest of the household. This originates from the days in which wealthy families would have servants, so the kitchen was designated as a place for cooking and cleaning and was therefore kept firmly out of sight. Although it did gradually become part of the main home, up until the mid 20th century it was very much a space for the 'woman of the household', whilst any entertaining took place in the living room or dining room, an idea which is of course far outdated today.

Since then, living habits have changed hugely: an increase

in leisure time and disposable income, combined with a rise in cooking shows on television from the 1940s, meant that cooking gradually became an activity for everyone to take part in. This change was reflected in the evolution of open-plan kitchen designs, which really flourished during the 1970s and 80s, and in the increasing popularity of features like integrated seating areas.

Today, kitchens are often the piece-de-resistance of a home: they're a way to showcase interior style, with designs ranging from a sleek, minimalistic look through to rustic country kitchens with exposed beams and flagstone floors. Tables, sofas and televisions are also common features, allowing the kitchen to serve the functions of a living room and dining room too.

Open plan kitchens are of course commonplace, but interestingly in 2020 kitchen designers have seen an increased demand for 'broken-plan' kitchens too. This is essentially a room that is divided up into separate areas with a barrier, such as a bookshelf featuring the latest cookery books or a storage unit. **'Today, when designing a kitchen, it is completely usual for us to be asked to prioritise specific areas for displaying items, to consider room flow in terms of accommodating social events held within the space,' Charlie says.**



LEFT:
The Cheshire
Kitchen by
Ledbury Studio

Photo: monkeybusinessimages / Getty Images / iStockphoto



Other key trends to look out for include the popularity of two-tone coloured units, with blue and green hues often taking centre stage. Statement lighting, vibrant accents and clever storage solutions are everywhere, and as we all look for ways to be more eco-friendly, sustainable building materials are in demand too.

'Today's kitchens must both look good and perform superbly – one does not exist without the other – because they are always on duty and always visible,' Charlie reasons.

Given the fact that it's one of the most-used rooms, it's hardly surprising that kitchens can have a huge impact on property prices. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) say that it can add as much as 4% to the value on your home, and in line with this, the National Association for Estate Agents (NAEA) advise that if your

budget can stretch to renovating one room only, it should be the kitchen. 'The trophy kitchen has a major photogenic impact and appeal to prospective buyers on a property advert,' explains Miles Shippside, Rightmove's property expert.

This means that if you're looking to sell your home, it



ABOVE: Recently, kitchens have become a godsend during lockdown

LEFT: The Lugo, from huntersfurniture.co.uk, takes its inspiration from mid-century Nordic design, with beauty, simplicity and functionality at the core of the collection

could be time to give the kitchen a bit of a make-over. 'It has to be generic enough to suit the tastes of prospective buyers. It's often more about the space rather than the contents. Open-plan layouts are now very much in demand, and knocking through to an adjoining room or kitchen-diner can prove more cost effective than extending,' Miles advises. Smaller, but well done, changes, such as repainting the cupboards and walls and putting down new flooring, can have just as big an impact.

The demands of everyday life mean that we're constantly on the go, but the kitchen is often the one room in the house where everyone comes together. This means that it's likely to be high on the priority lists of buyers, so if you're looking to sell your home, it could be worth giving your kitchen a new lease of life first. ♦