

# The one-wall kitchen is back – and more versatile than you think

Why have an ungainly L-shape, U-shape or galley design when one wall does it all? **Busola Evans** reports

When it comes to kitchen layouts, the one-wall design once languished bottom in the desirability stakes, even below the much-derided galley style. Comprising a solo run of cabinets against a single wall, it was deemed either an unfortunate but necessary option for those restricted on space, or a convenient way for developers to protect their precious square footage. But not anymore. Today, the one-wall kitchen is seeing a surprising rise in popularity, thanks to its many benefits and a growing awareness of its practicalities.



A single run is not just space-saving, it's also a more affordable way of doing things

“One-wall kitchens create a real sense of impact when you walk into the room,” explains William Durrant, owner of Herringbone Kitchens. “Having the design on a single wall allows for the different spaces in a room to be separate, while still feeling connected.”

British Standard by Plain English ([britishstandardcupboards.co.uk](http://britishstandardcupboards.co.uk)) is just one of the brands that has observed a wave of

interest in one-wall requests in the last few years. “Before, it made up about 10 per cent of our kitchens, and now it can be up to 30 per cent,” says Will Eaves, the company’s international design director. “We used to see them in much smaller spaces because they are functional and can make the most of a compact area, but now we are designing them for larger rooms too. Clients are now choosing to have that style rather than more conventional kitchens that take up additional wall space.”

Kasia Piorko, founder of Kate Feather ([katefeather.com](http://katefeather.com)), a bespoke kitchen design company based in Teddington, south-west London, recently completed a project in which the owners decided to ditch their more conventional kitchen layout for a one-wall option because the couple felt it would suit their lives better.



Kate Feather founder Kasia Piorko specialises in bespoke kitchens

“They were quite specific about wanting one, despite my attempts to give them an island when I saw they had more than enough space,” says Piorko. “The wall was four metres and the run has a range cooker, sink, dishwasher and storage – although I did manage to persuade them to move their freestanding fridge to the wall opposite. But they are extremely pleased with the results.”

The reasons behind this surge of interest are manifold. Open-plan living, with combined seating, cooking and dining areas, is one of the key factors –but with a difference.

“Many clients do not want their kitchen or appliances permanently on show,” explains Jess Swallow, designer at kitchen makers DesignSpace London ([designspacelondon.com](http://designspacelondon.com)). “They prefer them to be fully concealed when not in use, so there is a seamless transition between each separate area.” Her company has created the Ghost System, a fully functioning kitchen that stretches across one wall, concealed by bifold doors, which has become a particular draw for its high-end customers.

Will Eaves believes the popular “anti-kitchen” trend, where kitchens look less functional and more emphasis is placed on tactility and comfort, is another driving factor. “A lot of people come to us because our cabinetry is like pieces of furniture, so when it all goes across one wall in an open-plan space, it doesn’t feel overpowering,” he says.

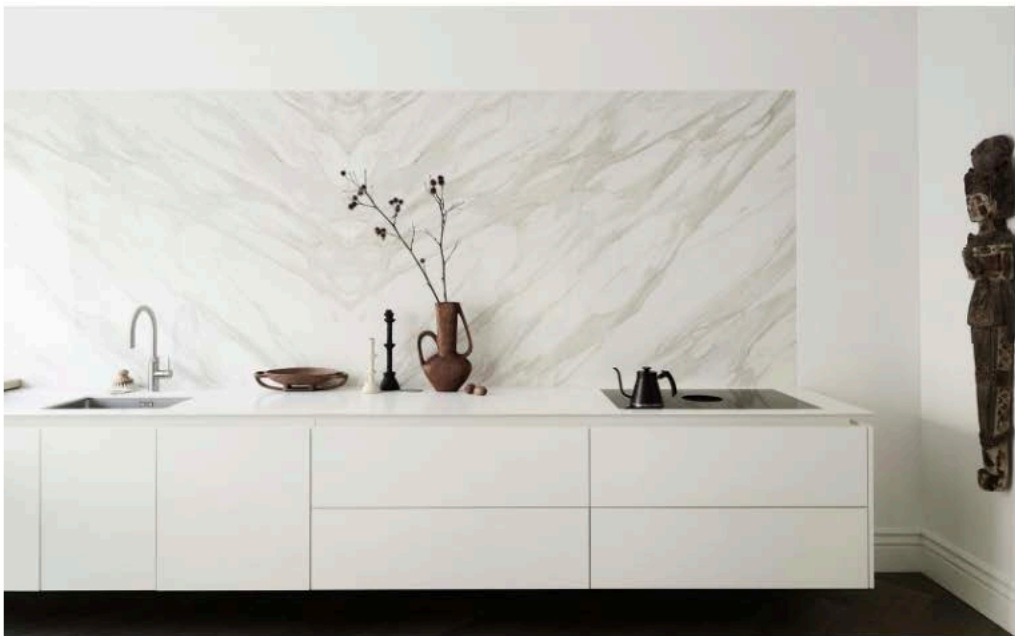


Use of colour: Kate Feather, a bespoke kitchen design company based in Teddington, south-west London, offers a brilliant palette

As everyone knows, kitchens don’t come cheap, so it’s hardly a surprise that many people are keen to explore ways to significantly reduce costs. A single run from Kate Feather would be in the region of £16,000, compared to starting prices of around double that for a more conventional layout. “People are trying to focus on using their spaces better, rather than doing kitchen extensions which can be even more costly now,” she says.

Eaves agrees: “A single run is a more affordable way of doing things. You may want to spend more money on the cabinetry, but you could be saving up to half the cost of a kitchen, which is considerable – especially if you are forgoing a kitchen island.”

The kitchen “triangle” model, in which the sink, fridge and hob are loosely designed in a three-angle format, has been long considered by both kitchen and interior designers as the most efficient layout. However, Eaves argues the notion may now be outdated and the simplicity of a one-wall design can offer surprising versatility to modern families.



Use of materials: Handy low plinth drawers by Roundhouse Howell, which can aid efficiency of space and flow

“We don’t need to stick to the triangle format,” he insists. “Everything is relatively close together on a single run, which also means multiple people can be working in the kitchen at the same time in different areas. If you are hosting or cooking, it’s easier if people have specific stations. Sometimes in a galley kitchen, for instance, things can get a bit tight.”

This is not to say that a one-wall kitchen does not require careful consideration and planning. With arguably less space on offer, it is important to get the creative thinking cap on.

Firstly, most experts agree that the minimum wall width for a fully functional kitchen is about 3 metres, although Eaves cheerfully admits he has been given the challenge of designing an oven, fridge, sink and storage into just 2 metres in the past.



Open shelving: British Standard by Plain English cupboards come in a range of standard sizes, starting at £590. An average-sized kitchen comes in at around £8,000

“There can never be a one-size-fits-all approach,” he says, “so there always has to be a negotiation about what is the most important thing. Some people who don’t entertain much or have a small family may be happy with a slimline dishwasher. Some families may be happier with a bigger sink; others cook a lot so may need a larger range. The compromise comes with talking through how you use the space and what size the household is.”

As with any other kitchen layout, maximising every inch of available space is crucial to its success. “It is important that the kitchen is still fit for purpose,” says Piorko. In her most recent one-wall project, even the unit that concealed the extractor had to double up on function. “Behind the door of the cupboard is a spice rack,” she reveals. “Another important tip is to keep the design of the cabinet doors as linear as possible so that it doesn’t look messy, and allow at least 60cm between the sink and the cooker so that it is practical to use.”



Hidden appliances: Gunter & Co, an interior architecture and design studio, suggests thinking vertically and extending your wall cupboards right up to the ceiling

While the wall width is a crucial factor, it's vital not to forget another key area to maximise. "Think vertically!" says interior designer Irene Gunter, founder of interior architecture and design studio Gunter & Co ([gunterandco.com](http://gunterandco.com)). "If you're lucky enough to live in a property with tall ceilings, consider extending your wall cupboards right up to the ceiling. This way, you'll have lots of space for storing items that you don't use daily. Just remember to factor in a

step ladder so that you can reach the top. Additionally, you could include a tall unit to house your microwave and coffee machine, freeing up valuable worktop space. Also consider a three-in-one boiling-water tap, which will remove the need for a kettle, serve as your mixer tap and deliver chilled filter water. Then, position the oven below your hob, place a bin in the cupboard underneath the sink – you don't need dedicated bin storage – and you'll have space for a dishwasher in between."

Ben Hawkswell, senior design consultant at kitchen company Roundhouse ([roundhousedesign.com](http://roundhousedesign.com)), suggests low plinth drawers (fitted behind the kickboards of base-level cupboards) for those less-used items. "Consider combined ovens, compact pull-out or raised dishwashers, vented hobs and space-saving gadget-laden sinks, which can all aid efficiency of space and flow," he adds.

**'Many clients do not want their kitchen or appliances on show. They prefer them to be fully concealed when not in use'**

According to Jess Swallow, of DesignSpace London, an in-depth knowledge of appliances can make or break the kitchen's success. "Having two appliances in one can make a big difference to the space you have to play with, so it's good to have an understanding of that market as well," she says. "A downdraft extractor, for instance, can take

out the need to have an extractor in a wall unit. It's a good idea to use compact appliances, too – a slimline dishwasher only needs a 45cm base unit, instead of a 60cm unit."

Several appliance brands, such as Siemens and Miele, offer an array of multifunctional appliances that are ideal for use in a one-wall kitchen. "They're a great space-saving choice," says Miele's Tom Hopper. "Combination ovens provide versatility and convenience by operating as a conventional oven with the option of either a steam or microwave capability."

Swapping out a large range cooker is another way of expanding the available space. "When things are tight, we can look at using an induction hob rather than gas so that it can double as extra worktop space," says Eaves.

One might think that a one-wall kitchen would rule out popular elements such as open-plan shelving, but Eaves believes that there is no need to compromise. "You can still have open shelving; it really depends on the width of the wall," he says. "If you have a run going the whole way down the side of an extension, for instance, there will be plenty of space for shelves." But if that places too much of a limit on useful storage, choose glass fronts on the wall units to stop the run looking too dense. Fluted or seeded glass will disguise the contents inside, while still reflecting light around the room.

**'We used to see them in much smaller spaces ... but now we are designing them for larger rooms too'**

full-height units, such as the fridge, in one finish, and the wall units in another finish. Any more than that and it will look too busy. It's also better to use the same or similar materials for your splashback and worktop to create a less cluttered effect."

Charlie Smallbone, founder of kitchen company Ledbury Studio ([ledburystudio.com](http://ledburystudio.com)), believes it is important to use materials to make an impact, and regularly incorporates sheet metals – copper, pewter, zinc and bronze – on kitchen door fronts. "I often introduce contrasts in my kitchens, such as pairing dark wood with a lighter material such as a mirrored splashback," he adds. "The contrast between the two creates a strong aesthetic. There is also a practical benefit: a mirrored splashback can help brighten up a small, single-wall kitchen, making it feel more spacious."

Other ways to introduce some personality to a one-wall design include bringing in freestanding pieces for an "unfitted" look. "A butcher's block adds warmth but is also another working space and prep area," says Gunter. "It can also give extra storage if you have shelves below."

Eaves agrees: "If you have all the cupboards flat against a wall, it can sometimes look overpowering. But if you can break them up with shelving, an antique wall cupboard and a farmhouse table instead of an island, that makes the space look more like a room, and less like a kitchen. Single runs can be more creative and that is probably why we have seen the increase, not just in cities but across the board. It's not something that is likely to slow down any time soon."

When it comes to materials and finishes, less is more, according to Irene Gunter. "It's best to limit the number of materials used to no more than two," she says. "Option one is to have everything in one finish, such as a wooden or coloured finish. Alternatively, you could use two finishes, with the low-level and