



'I love what I do and actually the highlight for me is always the next big thing...'



METAL MAGIC

Luxury kitchen designer Charlie Smallbone has been creating wonderful spaces for more than 40 years

WORDS BY GILL HARRIS

As a young graduate in the mid-1970s, Charlie Smallbone took to reconditioning pine dressers and selling them on for a profit. Setting up shop in Devezes, he was an instant hit with the locals and his new style of 'unfitted' kitchen soon became all the rage. Within six years, Smallbone of Devezes had opened its first London showroom, leading the revolution that saw the kitchen elevated from a humble workroom to a social space right at the heart of the home. Now, after 40 years of pushing the boundaries of kitchen design, Charlie is throwing his considerable energy into a new venture: Ledbury Studio, the glittering star of which is his stunning new metallics kitchen range. "I decided to set up Ledbury Studio because I was keen to focus on my design work again and I wanted to create a new business," says Charlie. "I'd been working in this direction for a few years, but it all came together when I designed the Elemental Kitchen for the Chelsea Flower Show. The public reaction was so positive it became very apparent to me that this was something I should take forward

and turn into a business. For me, product is the bedrock of a business and this concept felt right. "Of course, it needed fine tuning. The very first concept of the Elemental Kitchen was made completely of metal, but we quickly learnt that however much we tried to soften its look, we couldn't. In purely practical terms, there were also issues in applying metal to certain areas of the kitchen - we needed to work on our finishes. As a result, we decided to be more discerning in our use of metal, restricting it to the fascia panels for a sophisticated look that is stylish and functional. Thus, the Elemental Kitchen grew into the Metallics Collection and Ledbury Studio was born." With more than four decades' experience under his belt, Charlie tells me it is impossible to pick a highlight. "I love what I do and actually the highlight for me is always the next big thing. But there have been plenty of highlights along the way. "When we showed the Elemental Kitchen at Chelsea Flower Show it was better received than we could ever have hoped for. You can't beat the adrenaline rush - the realisation that a new idea can turn into a business." Choosing a kitchen is one of the biggest