



Previous page (p49): "Choose a kitchen company because you love its style and it will produce something well-proportioned and pleasing, whatever the challenges," says Helen Parker of deVOL. This Real Shaker kitchen is painted in deVOL's own Partry Blue colour. Prices from £10,000.

Above: Look for images for your moodboard that show a similar layout to your room. This kitchen by Laurence Pidgeon uses furniture from Elmar's @HOME kitchen collection and includes cabinetry in Clay ARA 33 with work surface in Jaipur Anis. Kitchens from Laurence Pidgeon start at £20,000.

It helps to think of buying a kitchen as a journey with distinct stages that are not to be rushed. The early stages are all about inspiration and gathering ideas for colours, materials for all surfaces, and images of layouts that could work in your space. Specialist magazines such as *KBB* are a great place to start, and look at the websites of the kitchen companies featured here. In addition, online resources such as Pinterest (www.pinterest.com) and Houzz (www.houzz.co.uk) offer plenty of inspiration and are useful for creating moodboards that will help consolidate your vision and make it easy to convey your ideas to others such as your partner and kitchen designer.

Setting the budget

Expect to pay anything from £5000 to more than £75,000 on a new kitchen designed to last at least 10 years. How much you spend depends not only on the funds available but also on how you view your house – is this a fixer-upper/stepping stone, or is this your forever home worth raising some extra cash for? Setting the budget early helps you identify kitchen companies in your price bracket and gives potential designers a realistic figure to work with.

"Pick three or four companies that sell locally so you can look at their products in the showroom before making your choice," suggests Doug

Haswell at Caple. "The closer you are, the easier it is to pop in to ask questions or iron out any issues." If your project involves structural work, such as removing walls or building an extension, it is important to get your kitchen company on board from the start of proceedings. "You don't need all the details planned out, but it's good to have a rough idea of the kitchen layout as the builders will need to know before installing the plumbing and electrics," says John Stephens at Rencraft.

You might also find that small tweaks to the drawings, like moving a window a few inches, could have a massive impact on the look and flow of your new kitchen. Even something seemingly simple and often overlooked such as extraction can prove critical, especially if you want a flush ceiling extractor or an island extractor that ducts out under the floor.

Kitchens made to order

There are two main choices for kitchen furniture – going bespoke or buying from a standard kitchen range. Bespoke tends to be more expensive as the furniture is handmade to order. In theory, you can have anything your heart desires, but you will find that most bespoke companies have ranges as it helps both the client and designer to have a steer on the design and uses pre-sets on the machinery, making it accurate, reliable and cost-effective to make, but there is always flexibility to make the finished design unique.