

Kitchen confidential

So you're after a kitchen that delivers on both looks and functionality? Our experts explain what you'll need.

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PLANNING

Proper planning is crucial to making sure your kitchen works well, looks great and serves your needs into the future, says Adriano Pupilli, director of Adriano Pupilli Architects. This is the time to set a budget and think about what you absolutely need in your kitchen – and what you can live without.

“Assess how you prepare and cook food, store cutlery, glasses, saucepans, food and appliances, and how much storage you need,” advises Frances Cosway, design director at White Pebble Interiors. “And if you're doing a renovation, work out how much flexibility you have with things such as structural walls, windows and the impact on floorplan changes. Also make note of any must-haves for the new design, whether it's a wall oven, a double sink or a 900-millimetre cooktop.”

This is also the time to visit showrooms for tiles, appliances and other materials, and to consult with trades to ensure that what you've got your eye on is suitable for your project.

“Contact suppliers and manufacturers to confirm lead times, which can often be several weeks – custom cabinetry, for example, can take up to six weeks,” says Luke Carter, registered architect and director at Sandbox Studio. “It's a good idea to schedule a start date and work backward to ensure items are delivered on time.”

Good tradespeople are often booked up in advance during busy periods such as before Christmas, so plan early.

LAYOUT

A good layout can make all the difference to the functionality and flow of your kitchen. “The layout should provide easy circulation between key points such as the benches, the pantry, fridge, sink and cooking appliances, and eliminate congestion in spots such as corners,” says Adriano. “It should allow for a decent-sized pantry next to, or close to, the fridge and ideally a good-sized window for natural light and ventilation.”

When planning your layout, think about how you use the kitchen on a day-to-day basis. “Ensure the bin and sink are close to the dishwasher,” advises Mikayla Rose, principal designer and director of design studio Heartly. “Also, ensure the fridge is not buried deep in the kitchen – keep it on the perimeter so those using it don't have to enter the heart of the kitchen. An island bench with access from both sides won't 'lock' you into the kitchen.”

Getting your measurements right is another consideration. “Allow one metre of space between the island and benchtops for smooth circulation,” says Luke. “If you want to include a butler's pantry, you need a minimum of 1.6 x 1.6 metres of space. A good kitchen island can range from 800mm to 1.2m deep and 2-3 metres long. Allow a decent overhang below the benchtop for stool seating and leg room.”

MATERIALS

The materials you choose will depend on your budget and the look you're after. “If your kitchen is open-plan, pick materials that are complementary,” says Mikayla. “They do not – in fact, should not – match the materials in adjoining rooms, but you do want a sense of cohesion.” MDF and laminate are appealing budget joinery options, or think solid or timber veneer for a luxe look. “You can make a laminate kitchen look expensive by teaming it with beautifully crafted metal or leather handles and stone benchtops,” says Mikayla.

As for benchtop materials, reconstituted stone, porcelain and honed natural stone are the go. “Reconstituted stone is often affordable, neutral and easy to maintain,” she says. “Porcelain is incredibly durable and beautiful textures are available. Natural stone can be a showstopper, but it needs to be sealed – and be careful where you place it, ensuring there are enough practical worksurfaces elsewhere.”

Adds Adriano: “For bomb-proof benches that look clean and contemporary, I would go with a porcelain panel or stainless steel.”

KITCHEN DOS AND DON'TS

Mikayla Rose, principal designer and director of design studio Heartly, says:

DO...

- ▶ Opt for drawers under the bench rather than cupboards. They allow you to maximise storage and they're easier to access.
- ▶ Set back overhead cupboards, for a more streamlined look.
- ▶ Plan for the depth of the fridge (to make sure it fits!).

DON'T...

- ▶ Choose too many materials. A simple, pared-back kitchen palette will stand the test of time.
- ▶ Specify a pull-out rangehood, as the metallic strip is often unsightly.
- ▶ Pick fragile surfaces to go below the bench in a busy family home where there is 'rough and tumble'.

BUDGET BUSTERS

Keen to keep your budget in check? According to Frances Cosway, design director at White Pebble Interiors, the main things that can significantly add to the cost of a kitchen are:

- ▶ Moving plumbing or gas points.
- ▶ Choosing high-end appliances, in particular integrated styles.
- ▶ Specifying timber veneer or solid timber cabinetry.
- ▶ Natural stone benchtops.