

KITCHEN BUYING GUIDE

The Furniture Industry Research Association is an independent body that works within the UK furniture industry to promote quality and standards across the whole furniture range.

The Association has over 65 years' experience in developing and setting the Standards for furniture in the UK and Europe to try to ensure that the products you buy are safe, durable and fit for purpose.

Furniture is usually a significant purchase and we believe that we are perfectly positioned to be able to provide you with some hints, tips and additional information that will help you decide what to buy.

We hope that you find this guide useful and that you find the perfect piece of furniture for you.

Choosing your kitchen

A new kitchen will probably be one of the most expensive purchases you are going to make for your home. Spending your money on your home improvement dreams should be a pleasurable experience - following a few simple rules can help to make this is so.

When choosing your new kitchen, the choice of products offered, by a multitude of suppliers, appears endless and, perhaps, at first, a little daunting; after all, they almost all claim to be the best!

There are many different styles, designs and price ranges available and it is important that you take the time to research what is probably going to be an expensive and, hopefully, enjoyable experience. Start planning well in advance by browsing through one or two of the specialist consumer magazines dedicated to kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms. Once you have some ideas of what you want, go and have a look at several different showrooms before making any appointments with designers or salespeople. Open the cupboards; look inside, try the drawers etc. Make a wish list of your ideal items to be included: dishwasher, soft-close doors and drawers, wine racks, extra wide pan storage drawers, split level cooking, and any other features.



Finally, it is vital that, prior to making any final decisions for your new kitchen, you use the knowledge and experience of an established kitchen specialist; these can be independent businesses or multiple stores. Often the temptation is to make the selection based on what looks good, fits in with your home furnishing scheme in terms of style, finish, colour, and meets the budget; all of which are important. The strength, durability for use and maintenance requirements are, however, often overlooked at the time of purchase, but can be essential to the longevity of your kitchen.

Kitchens are expensive and it stands to reason that great care should be taken during the pre-purchase stages to ensure mistakes are kept to the minimum – or even prevented altogether. Although there are differences in the materials and finishes, the most important things to consider when choosing a kitchen are its uses (is it just used for cooking and preparing food, or will the kitchen be a social area or dining room too?) and the available space (making the best use of what is available).

Remember too that many kitchen products will come with additional guarantees from the manufacturer and you may want to shop around to see what additional benefits these offer.

Look for products certified by FSC or PEFC. These organisations have developed sustainable Standards for forest management and operate programs that verify compliance to them. They operate certifications schemes throughout the timber supply chain, to ensure timber is sustainably sourced. When you buy FSC/PEFC certified wood furniture or other wood products, you can be certain that it supports responsible forestry.

Planning your kitchen

The most important part of buying a new kitchen is the planning. This covers not only the products you select, but also the shape or layout of the room in which your kitchen will go, the use you expect it to receive, and of course the fitting.

It is true that a well planned and fitted kitchen, even at the lower end of the market, looks and works well whereas a more expensive, badly designed and poorly fitted kitchen may not.

Points to consider include:

- How often will your kitchen be used each day?
- Will it be used for simple preparation of food or is it also your dining room?
- What do you use the room for, apart from cooking?
- Do you have children – this will affect the use your kitchen will get, durability and safety issues.
- Is there ‘traffic’ flowing through the room (e.g. a kitchen with an internal and exit door) as well as in and out of it?
- Does your existing kitchen have enough counter space, or do you find yourself moving between different areas?

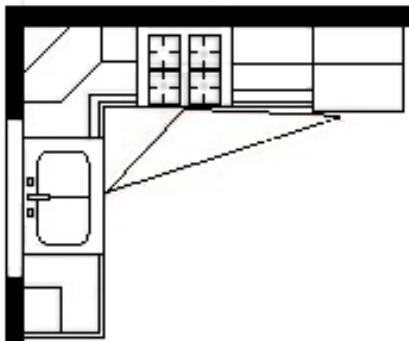
It is important to think about how many people will use the room each day, whether there is enough storage, what appliances you need, and whether you need seating space.

When planning the layout of a kitchen, the main consideration is that the layout is efficient so that you get the best use out of it. Food storage, preparation and cooking areas should not be too far apart, and it is a good idea to have a piece of worktop between sink and hob. Placing the fridge near the entrance to the kitchen will make dealing with shopping easier. Placing a fridge next to an oven or hob should be avoided where possible since the difference in temperature can make refrigerators work less efficiently; integrated appliances are unlikely to be affected by this.

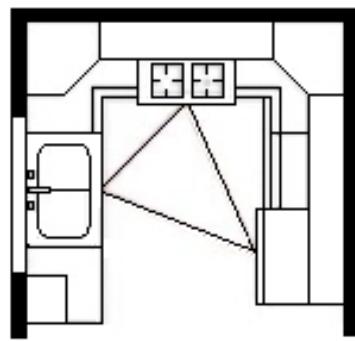
- Plan where you will have your sink, preparation area and hob first, as these are the most important features. Once you have placed these items, ensure you have a short walking area between them, and a feel for what suits you personally. i.e. should the sink be to the left or the right of the hob? Does the sink really need to be under the window? Natural light on a food preparation area may be more to your liking. Do I really need a double oven or would a single oven and combination microwave be more suitable?

- These decisions then dictate where service points for water, gas and electric will be. It is sensible to keep in mind where existing service points are when planning your kitchen – having to move these will incur the time and cost of additional rewiring and re-plumbing. The same principle may apply to any existing ventilation in the kitchen.
- Sinks are most often placed against an outside wall under a window – this is usually because of the position of the drain. This gives the advantage of good natural light, as well as a pleasant view when working in this part of your kitchen. If there is an option to place the sink in another location, then it may worth be considering.

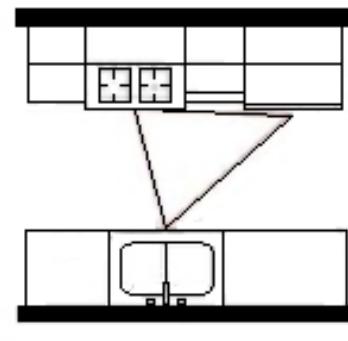
When going to a supplier to choose your kitchen, make sure you have the exact measurements, preferably in metric, and shape of the room, with existing ventilation and service points, doors and windows marked. Ensure your chosen supplier offers a technical service such as a site survey to check your dimensions etc. prior to placing the furniture order with the manufacturer.



L-Shaped



U-Shaped



Galley

Top tips when choosing your kitchen

Use the following checklist to help ensure you have considered the most important areas before making your purchase:

- Visit several showrooms to get ideas for your ideal kitchen
- Decide what facilities you want the kitchen to include e.g. laundry, dining area
- Decide on your total budget, remembering that there may be additional costs beyond those quoted by your supplier
- Consider how you will pay for your kitchen – if finance is needed will this be offered by your supplier or will you need to use a loan or other form of credit?
- Decide on the type of kitchen you want to buy – flat pack, rigid construction, custom built, fully fitted, non-fitted, freestanding etc.
- Make choice for worktop materials
- Make choice for cabinet materials including door and drawer fronts, cornices, plinths, edging panels etc
- Select appliances to be included in kitchen and their type e.g. gas, electric

- Measure kitchen, noting location of existing service points, doors and windows. Mark your preferred location for the sink, appliances, storage and work surfaces
- Agree specification for your kitchen in regards to its design and layout, with the supplier
- Get a full quote for your kitchen showing what is to be supplied, all costs involved, and when payments are due from you
- Check whether contract includes technical visit/site survey in your home before fitting starts
- Agree a timetable with your supplier for the site survey, delivery and fitting of your kitchen
- Understand what is and isn't included in the contract with your supplier. If additional works are required (e.g. plumbing, tiling, decorating), be clear as to who will do these and their cost
- Read carefully and check terms and conditions before signing any contract. Ensure you understand terms about payment, delivery, and fitting times
- Make arrangements for storage of your new kitchen before fitting starts
- Agree with your supplier/fitter any 'snagging' work needed to complete your kitchen
- Before signing off any satisfaction note, ensure you are happy with your kitchen and highlight any concerns to your supplier/fitter

For extra assurance see if your kitchen is [**FIRA Gold certified**](#) or check if the company operates under the [**FIRA Gold installation certification**](#) scheme



Types of kitchens

Decide what type of kitchen you want – flat pack, rigid construction, custom built, fully fitted or free-standing. Each has their pros and cons and will also affect the price you pay.

Fully fitted kitchens

Fully fitted kitchens make the best use of space, maximising storage and working areas. These can be supplied in a rigid (i.e. built) or flat pack option, and can be fitted by the supplier or the customer themselves, depending on budget. Pre-assembled units come in a wide range of shapes and sizes, even offering excellent corner solutions. A quality fitted kitchen will enhance your home, but you can't easily take it with you if you move house.

Freestanding kitchens

Non-fitted or freestanding kitchens, consisting of individual pieces of furniture for specific tasks, are becoming increasingly popular for that informal or de-structured look. Whilst the furniture can be moved and used elsewhere, it does not make such good use of storage space and may therefore be better suited to larger rooms.

Rigid factory built kitchen furniture

Rigid factory built kitchen furniture can be either of a traditional glued and doweled or similar construction method or they can be dry assembled with what are commonly known as 'metal cam and dowel' fittings. In general, the choice of cabinets is large allowing substantial flexibility in the design. A rigid kitchen carcase may be quicker to fit, as the item arrives fully assembled, however if the installation is not going to happen immediately, they can take up a lot of space. Rigid kitchen carcases are primarily manufactured using chipboard panels and MDF.

Flat pack or self-assembly furniture

Flat pack or self-assembly furniture has been developed over many years to help speed up the supply chain, reduce costs and to satisfy the huge DIY market in the UK. This type of kitchen furniture is still quite rare in Europe and is more common in the UK. The choice of cabinet sizes is generally more limited although recent years have seen vast improvements in the range of products available. As with rigid kitchen carcases, these are primarily manufactured using chipboard panels and MDF.

Bespoke kitchens

Bespoke kitchens allow you to have the ultimate kitchen designed for you. Some companies use the term to cover kitchens that are not one-off designs, but which do offer a range of shapes, colours and materials. There is a difference between a fully bespoke kitchen and one that is built using a range of fixed dimension manufactured cabinets, tailored to fit your home. An unusually shaped room or problem corners and windows can be overcome by a good bespoke design. However there is often a price premium to be paid for a truly bespoke kitchen, and installation times will often be longer.

Types of Worktops

Kitchen worktops can be made from a variety of materials – solid woods, natural or synthetic veneers, manmade boards – even stone or steel! All have their advantages and, understanding a little more about the products used, can help ensure you choose the product most suited to you.

Apart from the differences in materials and finishes, the most important things to consider when choosing your kitchen furniture are the purposes for which you need the items, taking into account their size, strength, durability and after care requirements.

Kitchen worktops are a very important part of your kitchen; possibly the most important, as they will take the brunt of the wear and tear and come into regular contact with water, fats, juices, oils, hot pots and pans, as well as knives and other utensils. Buy the best and most durable you can afford. Note that not all worktops are equally durable and you may still need to use worktop savers such as trivets or chopping boards to prevent damage to them. There are numerous options not only in terms of construction but also in appearance.

Solid wood

A great choice for colour and character, but remember wood will scratch, cut and become stained if not cared for. Hot pans will burn a wooden worktop, and they can be unhygienic when used as a chopping board themselves. Wood worktops can be advantageous in that slight surface damage can be refinished. Using solid wood worktops for a breakfast bar as a contrast to say laminate worktops elsewhere can give the kitchen a very individual look. Solid wood worktops do require regular maintenance.

Laminate

High pressure laminate worktops are very popular, lower in price and offer an extensive choice of colours and finishes. In general they are hard wearing and easy to install, but cannot be refinished if they become damaged in use.

Solid surfaces

There are other solid surface worktops available - most commonly a solid synthetic/mineral mix surface with colour pigment all the way through. Worktops of this nature are durable and reasonably maintenance free; they are often repairable and offer numerous styles and colours. Scratches however can be expected. These worktops will often be more expensive than some of the other options, but not necessarily as expensive as steel or granite. The main advantage with this type of worktop is that almost invisible joints are achievable giving your worktop run clean, with elegant, unbroken lines. The same material can sometimes be used for cabinet doors, handles, sinks, side cladding and wall cladding panels.

Granite or marble

These are the most common natural stones used in worktops. They tend by their nature to be very expensive, but are very durable. There is a huge choice of colour but being natural products some flaws can be expected, especially in large pieces. Unlike granite, marble tends to be more porous and can stain more easily. If the budget will not cover granite or marble worktops all the way round the kitchen why not use granite or marble for targeted zones, such as the hob or sink area, and use laminate elsewhere?

Tiles

Tiles are easy to maintain and the options you can choose are almost endless. Cost can vary considerably depending on the type of tiles used. Whilst the tiles themselves are durable and largely maintenance free, grout and edging materials require care to ensure they don't stain or discolour. Tile worktops can be less hygienic if care is not taken where grout breaks or cracks. Certain grouts are available which are resistant to heat, dirt and water.

Stainless steel

Stainless steel is another option. This is a hardwearing and durable surface and of course extremely hygienic but it can give your kitchen a 'clinical' look. It will also require some ongoing maintenance to keep in visually good condition. Stainless steel faced doors are also relatively expensive.

Choosing your kitchen frontals

Cabinet doors, or frontals, are something you will have to live with for some time so be careful to pick a design and style that you like. Surprisingly, the doors and drawer fronts are often more expensive than the cabinets to which they are fitted. Durability and ease of maintenance are also factors that you need to think about.

Many kitchen carcasses are manufactured to standard sizes, therefore it is possible to refresh the look of your kitchen by simply replacing the frontals, providing the cabinets and worktops are in good working order.

Frontals are available in a variety of materials and finishes. All have their advantages, so understanding a little more about the products used can help you choose the product most suited to you.

Solid wood

Solid timber doors are usually a mix of solid rails and stiles with a veneered centre panel which gives the most stable performance. Veneer will generally be less expensive and less likely to be affected by heat and damp. If your preference is for consistency then a run of cabinet doors may look better in veneer since there may be less variation between different pieces in terms of grain, texture and colour. Solid wood, being a natural material, will vary from piece to piece – door to door. Kitchen cabinet furniture in wood can come in a range of colours and finishes; gloss lacquered, painted, colour washed, waxed, and stained to name a few. It is not unusual for the cabinet colour to be different from the door as they use different materials.

Laminate

Plastic laminates are synthetic surfacing materials manufactured in sheets using layers of resin-impregnated papers. The top surface can have any decorative effect and it is extremely hard-wearing, making it ideal for hard working kitchen furniture.

The laminate or melamine facing is usually bonded to chipboard or MDF. Laminates offer numerous possibilities in terms of colour, texture, style and finish. Combined with a choice of handles, worktops and other accessories, they offer many exciting options for finishing off your kitchen. Laminate doors are also virtually maintenance free, needing only occasional cleaning to maintain their fresh appearance.

PVC foil is a thermostatic foil bonded to MDF or chipboard, the flexibility of foil combined with inherent durability makes it particularly suitable for profiled doors. Both PVC and paper foils are available in numerous decorative effects.

Other materials

Whilst wood or laminate doors are often the most likely choice, there are other materials that can be used to introduce some variety into your kitchen. The same type of cupboard and cabinet material can look bland, especially in a long run of cabinets. Options for adding interest/features include glass doors (clear, plain, patterned or frosted), open shelving or contrasting colours/materials.

Stainless steel

Stainless steel is also becoming increasingly popular. Arguably this is the easiest material to clean and maintain, and is of course extremely hygienic and durable, but it can give your kitchen a 'clinical' look. Stainless steel doors are also expensive.

High Gloss

High gloss PVC, acrylic or lacquered doors are available in a wide range of colours and are currently popular. Dark colours, such as jet gloss black, can more readily show up the effects of finger prints and scuffs and hence these particular colours may not suit all lifestyles.

Kitchen hardware

As well as the visual appearance of the kitchen frontals and worktops, the hardware used in the kitchen can enhance the look and your enjoyment of it.

Hinges and drawer runners

Quality features such as soft close doors and drawers can be a quality upgrade to your kitchen. Soft close drawer runners feature mechanisms that prevent drawers being slammed shut, and slowly self close for the last few millimeters of the drawers travel. Similarly, soft close hinges prevent doors being slammed shut and also self close the last few millimeters of travel.

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In addition to these other features, relatively recently introduced are electrically operated systems to open drawers, allowing for a smooth, modern, handle-less look and vertically opening high cupboards, that allow easy access into cupboards located above worktops.

Storage tidiers

Many suppliers now offer storage tidiers to maximize the storage space, this is particularly appropriate with a move to using more drawer based kitchens rather than door based.

Such tidiers are now well beyond the cutlery tray, but include storage systems for plates, crockery, cleaning equipment and recycling bins.

In addition you could consider ‘magic’ cupboards that use carousels or extending metal wire shelves to maximize corner units, or pull out larder units that make it easy to get to items stored in the back of the cupboard.

Handles

The choice of a handle style, traditional or modern, can really set off the kitchen and show your style. When selecting a handle however, check that it is the right size for you and that you can easily get your fingers around the handle.

Handle-less kitchens can offer a much sleeker appearance to the kitchen. ‘J-Pull’ type handles are a popular choice and are easy to clean. It is recommended to have these doors professionally fitted to ensure perfect alignment across cabinets.

However, when using modern electrically operated openers, totally smooth door and drawer frontals are available, and open with a light push.

Traditional handles however are a great choice for anyone on a tight budget as they tend to be a more affordable option. Handles can also help define the style of your kitchen.

Purchasing your kitchen - Paying in advance

If your supplier requires you to pay in full before delivery, check whether there is any protection they offer in case there is a problem. A number of members of The Furniture Ombudsman who ask for full payment in advance offer a ‘payment protection scheme’ to protect the customer in the event of an unresolved dispute during the sale and installation of your fitted kitchen.

If you do have an ongoing dispute that is referred to The Furniture Ombudsman service, the supplier will pay 20% of the contract price to The Furniture Ombudsman. The Furniture Ombudsman will investigate the complaint and if it is decided that any compensation is payable to the customer, the payment made to The Furniture Ombudsman guarantees that the customer will receive any money owed to them.

Kitchen installation process

A typical kitchen installation will often be what is called a ‘dry fit’ which includes the following:

- Delivery of all units and accessories purchased
- Assembly of all units and fixing to the wall(s), plus alignment of doors and drawer fronts
- Fitting of worktops, cornices, plinths
- Fitting of sink within a certain distance of its current location (moving it extensively may mean the additional cost of plumbing work)
- Removal and disposal of the existing kitchen
- Where additional works are required (such as additional plumbing, tiling or decorating), be clear about whether the supplier has agreed to do these for you and their cost. Sometimes the fitter will undertake this extra work but it is important to be clear whether this forms a separate contract with the fitter and what costs are involved.
- Make sure you read the terms and conditions before signing – some will contain expensive cancellation clauses if you change your mind.
- Check whether the supplier offers an after-sales service/inspection to ensure the kitchen is fitted to your satisfaction.
- Check with the supplier as independent third party certification for its installation service, such as the FIRA Gold installation certification scheme.
- Check whether the supplier is a member of a dispute resolution service such as The Furniture Ombudsman. Independence and impartiality are the cornerstones of The Furniture Ombudsman ensuring that better standards of service are promoted and consumers can buy with confidence. Buying from a member of The Furniture Ombudsman gives the reassurance that the retailer is following an approved Code of Practice. Furthermore, in the unlikely event of an unresolved dispute the retailer will accept the decision of The Furniture Ombudsman service.

Electrical and gas installation work in your home

Any person carrying out electrical work in your home has a legal obligation to ensure that fixed electrical installations are suitably designed, installed, inspected, and tested so as to provide reasonable protection against being the source of a fire or cause of injury.

New installations as well as alterations and additions to existing installations will be covered. This can include electrical work carried as part of fitting a new kitchen in your home. This includes ensuring that the existing installation (i.e. the electrical installation in your home after the supplier's meter) meets British Standard's requirements for safety. If your existing electrical supply will not safely support the electrical installation required for your kitchen this may require remedial work, which could cause extra cost or delay the fitting of your kitchen. Any work that is carried out will need to be approved by your local authority's building control department, although your installer may be able to do this if they are certified to do so.

As part of having a new kitchen fitted in your home, remember to make arrangements to get your existing electrical installation checked before the fitting of your kitchen is due to start - any problems found here need to be corrected before fitting to avoid any unforeseen delays and costs.

Similarly any person carrying out work on the gas system in your home must be certified and on the Gas Safe register.

Remember gas and electrical systems have the potential to cause significant harm to you or your home. Always use a suitably qualified and registered installer.

Your contract with the supplier

Buying a kitchen is a major home improvement contract. There are a few simple steps you can take to ensure that things go smoothly:

- Whether the kitchen is supply only or supply and fit, make sure that the contract includes a technical visit to your home before fitting actually starts. If your contract is for supply only, this may incur an extra charge. However, a site visit may reveal issues that affect the plan of the kitchen, and it is better to identify those issues before you go ahead.
- Make sure you get a full quote for your kitchen, showing what is to be supplied, when, and all the costs involved.
- When getting quotations, remember to get information about the things you need to do – when will you have to make any payments? When will the furniture be delivered and what access arrangements will you have to make? When will fitting start and finish?
- Be clear about what work the supplier will be doing. The contract may not include certain works like electrical installation, tiling, plastering or redecorating.
- Your supplier will tell you how long fitting is expected to take. During the fitting stage, expect some disruption to your home. In particular, the supplier will need to disconnect some services (e.g. gas, electric, water) in order to fit appliances. Whilst your supplier should take steps to keep any disruption to a minimum, remember that you will need to make some arrangements for cooking, laundry etc. during this period.
- Where the kitchen is delivered to you before fitting starts, you will need to make arrangements to store the items; your garage if available is the most common choice. You will need to empty all of your cupboards and store the contents temporarily elsewhere. You may need to make some arrangement for your pet cat or dog! Tell your neighbours what is happening and inform them that there will be workmen coming and going for a week or so.
- Even the best supplier is likely to come across some ‘snags’ during fitting. This is inevitable with such a significant amount of work that a kitchen fit involves. Your supplier should identify these areas with you and either address them during fitting or let you know what arrangements they will make to resolve them once the major fit has been completed. Your supplier may need to make a ‘snagging list’ detailing the areas that need completion, and arrange a final visit to complete them. You should expect most remedial work to be carried out and completed within two to four weeks from the completion date.
- Most suppliers will ask you to sign a completion certificate at the end of the kitchen fit, to confirm that the kitchen has been completed and that there are no outstanding issues. If there are areas that you are unhappy about, note them on the completion certificate so that it is clear what is left to be done.

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