



The kitchen for so many of us is the most important room in the house. The subtle blend of style and practicality needed for a successful family/working kitchen is a test to any designer. Visions of mummy elbow deep in flour offering little Jonny advice on his maths homework as he sits opposite, nursing a glass of orange and homemade cake, all the while surrounded by homely (but elegant) kitchen comforts is a mood many of us aspire to. The designers at Living North are no different and were therefore very keen to make the most of the kitchen area to create a functional, practical, kitchen but also an easy-to-live-in space.

The original kitchen was completely unmodernised and quite pokey with a walk in store tacked onto one side - crammed full of allsorts. Steps led down from this into the south facing back yard which was very shabby and in terms of its size, we decided, not much good for use nor ornament.

The first decision was easy. After consultation with architect James Ritchie, we would knock down the outhouse and build out over the yard so extending the kitchen area as far as possible. The pitched, glazed extension designed by James would add a 'conservatory' feel to the kitchen and would allow in plenty of light. The rest of the yard was to be decked to make maximum use of the small space. One added bonus was that by building out over the yard we would also create secure storage underneath the extension - always useful.

The existing kitchen was lower than the rest of the ground floor so before we did anything else we raised the floor level in line with the hallway which gave a better proportion to what was a very high ceilinged room. Where the existing window was we created a doorway and where the door had led to the outhouse we created an opening to allow light through from the 'conservatory'.

Basics done, it was time to call in kitchen expert Martin Scarth from Broomley Furniture Makers. Having seen samples of his work we knew Martin was not only innovative but also worked to an exceptionally high standard and would create something unique for us. We did have a few fixed ideas but the team gave Martin pretty much a free rein. His brief, 'to create a practical kitchen but with plenty of 'wow' factor'. Not easy, but Martin came up with a scheme using sycamore with American black walnut panels, with touches of stainless steel, very contemporary but very 'liveable'. Favourite touches include the 'louvered doors' for the floor to ceiling larder and the tambour which hides the combi oven and clutter of cookery books. Martin included plenty of deep drawers - essential in a family kitchen where there is always so much stuff to get rid of, and each corner unit was given a hinged door to make maximum use of the space. Martin also designed some stunning, deep, dresser shelves in black



Kitchen Design

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Architect

James Ritchie, Architect 01661 844455

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Photography:
Kevin Gibson, KG Photography



walnut, wrapped in stainless steel. When the lights are on underneath the shelves they seem to float above the units.

The chimney breast which originally housed the boiler was knocked out as far as possible to accommodate the spectacular Britannia Stove, complete with barbecue grill. One prerequisite had been a large fridge and Martin designed a cabinet to house the American Fridge Freezer from Amana - one of the best decisions we made. Not only is it the biggest toy in the house as far as children are concerned but also there is never the frustration of trying to cram fresh produce into too small a fridge.

The stainless steel sink by Kindred was inset into black granite which we used on all the work surfaces - hard working, practical and very beautiful too. The 'joy stick' tap came from Rudge & Co at half the cost of some of their rivals.



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One more difficult decision was flooring. We decided against wood which would have been difficult to match with the units and also would have bleached terribly in the 'conservatory' area. Calling in our tile expert, Ernie from Arco Iris, we eventually decided on black slate to mirror the granite. Hard wearing and practical it was the perfect solution and having a horror of radiators (and also wanting to preserve precious wall space) the slate would allow us to have underfloor heating, a huge bonus - especially on cold winter mornings as you step onto the warm tiles.

With the exception of the shelves the remaining walls were kept bare but we did paint one wall in Tangerine - a striking contrast.

After careful consultation, the original pendant light was replaced by downlights. Listen carefully to the professional's advice on your kitchen lighting. It is very important to get it right. Get it wrong and you will be forever frustrated by glare from your work surface or shadows over your preparation area.

Too small for a table, the kitchen did lend itself perfectly to a large breakfast bar which could seat four and which is totally indispensable.

We decided against doors into the extension but rather to keep the space free flowing. The same slate was used throughout, again with underfloor heating. The walls were painted off-white to increase the sense of space and a dark wood table which can seat up to ten, used to echo the black walnut. The dining chairs are from Laura Ashley.

All in all the kitchen has been a huge success. From a small, dark space has developed a beautifully light and airy family kitchen and conservatory dining area - the hub of the house.

