

The Cook Islands!

Kitchen islands, from a small preparation area to a huge edifice containing a hob, sink and storage, add a great focal point to any kitchen



The first thing to say about island units is that, wonderful though they are, you do need to have space to have one!

“Some kitchens are just too narrow or too awkwardly shaped,” stated Neil Lerner of Neil Lerner Designs. “An island can have different functions; in a big square room, it can form the centrepiece of the kitchen. In an open plan kitchen/living room it can be an informal divider. The very best thing about an island is that you can access it from all sides, meaning that the space can work extremely hard.”

One of the trends that Neil has noted is that a well-designed island is tailored both to the height and to the kitchen-working practices of the client.

“Dedicated food preparation areas, such as marble pastry boards or end-grain chopping blocks,” he said. “A small prepping sink;

ideal for rinsing vegetables and washing hands; an extended overhang, to act as a breakfast bar; purpose designed storage, perhaps for pans or for electrical equipment such as food processors, together with points to plug them in. You can use every last inch of space by incorporating plinth storage too.”

Neil also advises incorporating design details such as pop-up power points and internet connections – so they are there only when you need them.

“Cooking-wise, the island unit can house the main kitchen appliances, thus freeing up work surfaces in the rest of the kitchen,” Neil told us. “But we also see it as an opportunity to have extra ovens or specialist units such as a tappenyaki, a char grill or a wok burner.

“Discreet purpose-designed built in extraction systems can be housed in the ceiling above the island unit or a pop-up extractor fitted behind the hob.” ▼



Contemporary design from Kaizen



Lazio Lava by K Kitchens

▲ “Working within the very high end property spectrum, we are often asked to work on listed properties where there are very tight constraints as to what can be done to the architectural fabric of the interior,” Bill Schilling, of Kaizen Furniture Ltd told us. “Given this, some of the bespoke kitchens that we produce such as this contemporary design (see p??) are completely free-standing to include the island units although the illusion of fitted furniture has been created with the use of a false wall to which the cabinetry that you can see in the background has been mounted.”

Free standing island units are now expected to fulfil a ‘multi-function’ purpose. They

act as a visual separation between the socialising and the cooking and food preparation space; they provide additional storage and food preparation area; they provide informal dining/seating as well as being a home to appliances.

“The versatility that a free-standing island unit adds to a kitchen living space means that their popularity continues to grow with at least 70% of our commissions featuring an island unit of some description,” added Bill.

Kitchen island units are usually one of the most important features of an open-plan kitchen and appear on many customer wish lists.

“Not only is the island unit a focal point in most modern kitchens, but it helps divide the space into cooking-dining-living zones, often indicating where the kitchen ends and the socialising areas begin,” said Charlotte Mooney, Kitchen Buyer, K Kitchens Collection. “For this reason, kitchen specialists like K Kitchens are designing versatile furniture options that complement integrated open-plan kitchen living areas, allowing the multi-functional spaces to seamlessly blend together.”

Furniture transition seen in an island can include many elements, such as open shelving – ideal for the ‘living’ zone side of the island, worktops at different heights – perhaps incorporating a table/seating ▼



Henderson & Redfearn's Driftwood Kitchen

▲ area, the mix of different materials to add texture, integrated appliances and sinks, floating kitchen extractors, breakfast bars and LED lighting systems.

"Individuality continues to be a key kitchen trend for 2015 and the feature island unit is a great starting point for designers to translate their clients' personal tastes and interior style through the choice of elements incorporated in the island," continued Charlotte. "High gloss doors, such as our Lazio Lava (see p??) add to the kitchen's streamlined look, especially if handle-

less and making use of curved units and worktops. The mixing and matching of island door fascias in different colours and textures also allows for tailor-made looks. For 2015, classic timber tones and blue/grey earthy colour schemes continue to dominate, complementing most interior decors with their calm and soothing effect."

Andrew Hall, the managing director and chief designer of Woodstock Furniture, considers that a free-standing island unit will make the perfect addition to a bespoke kitchen design for an extra element of

individuality.

"This can make a good, practical choice as power won't be needed which would mean more can be spent on the cabinetry, whereas built-in kitchen islands must have electrical outlets installed," he said. "A free-standing kitchen island is ideal for creating additional counter space and seating, whereas built-in can host a sink, hob and other appliances."

If the island is permanent, the homeowner won't be able to move it to make the ▼



Innovative design from Johnny Grey

▲ most of valuable floor space or take it with them if they move.

“Heavy stone worktops are high in demand as these will ensure the free-standing island unit model will stay put and not tip over,” Andrew advised. “Free-standing kitchen design is perfectly suited to bespoke kitchens where the designer can create a unique kitchen with a bespoke piece of furniture, such as a dresser or butcher’s block as it will give the user a more individual look.”

Johnny Grey is a kitchen design visionary

and innovator. His fascinating philosophy of design, informed by the study of everything from ergonomics to neuroscience, adds an underlying intellectual coherence to every project he works on - however original and maverick it may appear on the surface.

“One of my guiding principles when designing an island or peninsula is to ensure that there are no sharp edges or square corners,” he said. “A curved island allows you to minimise the ratio of work surface to floor and corridor area so people need less space to move around. A central island holds a room together and the use of curves

enables the island to be contoured to fit the available space perfectly.

“I plan my islands around the idea of contact and practical sociability. I advocate building different height work surfaces into the island design creating dedicated work surfaces for different kitchen tasks from slicing bread and preparing vegetables, to helping with homework or pouring a drink.”

Simon Redfearn, of Henderson & Redfearn told us that the majority of their installations feature the island as a must-have at the heart of the design process. ▼

▲ “However,” he said, “the simple kitchen island has evolved in to a multi-functional family and entertaining space, often now featuring separate cooking stations, sinks, instant boiling water taps and dedicated seating and prep areas.”

Many of Simon’s customers are opting for quartz over granite for its enhanced durability and colour choices, and Henderson & Redfearn are very interested in Dekton, the new product from Silestone which it is reported to be so resilient you can burn with a blowtorch!

“As a bespoke handmade kitchen company, we love the design possibilities an island brings, particularly crafting a fusion of quartz and hand-finished wood (as part of a recent Henderson & Redfearn Driftwood Kitchen installation pictured on p??), creating soft lines and warmth; a timeless look that is perfect for a family kitchen,” Simon said.

“Free-standing island units in kitchens have become an important, aspirational part of any contemporary design,” agreed Martin Saxby, Country Manager of LG Hausys Europe, manufacturers of solid surface material HI-MACS. “The island performs both a visually attractive focal point and an important functional role – adding lots of extra storage, and including appliances or an extra sink with the popular new hot taps.”

Many modern designers try to break the more angular domination of wall and base units by adding shape, form and split level horizontal surfaces to the island.

“HI-MACS is the most flexible product with which a designer can work because of its physical properties, durability and the thermoforming advantage of taking



Woodstock Furniture’s freestanding island unit

any shape including integrated sinks and sweeping angles,” explained Martin. “Step up and down levels can be formed from a single piece of HI-MACS, which is equally effective in joining with other contrasting worktop materials. The enormous variety of colours, texture and effects from HI-MACS - including translucent properties for backlighting - make it an increasingly popular material of choice for islands and peninsulas in a modern kitchen.”

And with more people now opening up their homes to open plan living, the kitchen island needs to be more versatile than ever. “We’ve got some fantastic ranges that allow us to create truly unique and stunning, yet practical features,” said Tom Layzell,

the Original Painted Kitchen Company’s Beaconsfield showroom manager/designer. “Islands are not just additional workspace but now places to entertain friends and family too. Clients will often ask for seating, be it a breakfast bar for two or a built-in table for twelve!”

Somewhere perhaps for the kids to do their homework, coffee with friends, a place just to sit and use the laptop or to have a glass of wine in the evening – an island can be all these things.

“Whether it’s traditional or contemporary we’re able to create something that’s unique,” said Tom. “With our Artisan and Shaker ranges we can add feature pot



▲ ends or put the whole island on legs to give it that freestanding country feel. With our latest Pure range we can use linear handle-less drawers to create that sleek contemporary look. Customers can choose to offset the island colour either in a darker shade or make a statement in our vibrant Marina Blue or Cardoon – or play with materials switching to wood for the island worktop or a big piece of Carrara marble.”

Richard Moore, the Design Director at Martin Moore, told us that in their experience freestanding islands have always been popular.

“Our signature Cook’s Table makes for an excellent freestanding centrepiece, providing extra worktop and storage space and, depending on what features are included, can be moved to re-arrange the kitchen space when needed,” explained Richard. “Multi-functional islands are also becoming more desirable, incorporating appliances, breakfast bars and other elements. These work well as informal space dividers, especially given the popularity of open plan living.

“In terms of colour the fashion in kitchens is for greys and off-whites, however people are willing to choose a stronger colour for small touches, such as a feature island. Dark blues are particularly popular. Mixed materials remain on trend. Martin Moore’s Modernist collection features an island in rich walnut, paired with hand painted cabinetry, whilst the Architectural range features natural oak for a fresh look.”

So whilst the Caribbean or Hebridean island must remain the dream, a stunning kitchen island may be an achievable reality!



The Original Painted Kitchen’s Artisan range



English Kitchen range by Martin Moore