

Complete approach is a recipe for success

The experienced team at Newcastle Design are proficient at understanding and meeting clients' specific needs, writes **Caroline Allen**

When it comes to successful kitchen design, Ronan Carey of Newcastle Design spells out the ingredients in three words: cook, eat, relax. "If you have incorporated those three elements into one space, you have got it cracked," he said.

Carey and his business partner, Philip Hempenstall, who established the business in 1997, appear to have hit on that winning formula.

"Our signature look is classical with a contemporary twist," Carey said. "We have seen a huge upsurge in kitchen and general furniture sales with business increasing by 38 per cent year-on-year.

"A lot of clients are deciding to stay in their homes, regardless of whether they are in negative or positive equity. Where feasible, they are doing up their houses to achieve better living spaces. In general, people are looking for calmer interiors."

Newcastle Design's focus is on mid to high-end kitchens, and clients can cherry-pick between various ranges to satisfy different budgets and looks.

Having worked as cabinetmakers and furniture designers, Carey and Hempenstall originally started the business from Newcastle, Co Wicklow They relocated to a purpose-

built 17,000 square feet factory in Rathnew in 2005 due to rapid expansion.

"Having everything manufactured on-site is a huge plus for clients," Carey said. "When they come in with magazine photographs of what they want or specific ideas and ask if we can do it, the answer is always 'yes, we can.'"

Homeowners also benefit from joined-up thinking as Newcastle Design caters for every room in the house, though kitchens are a speciality. With time at a premium for many people, Newcastle Design steps into the breach by completely organising and coordinating projects from start to finish. For those planning a new kitchen as part of a new build, renovation or extension, the company can undertake and oversee the entire project.

Many new kitchens are being installed alongside laundries, utility areas and boot rooms, according to Carey. He believes that sometimes features such as individual personalised lockers can really boost the organisation of the kitchen and living space. The complete package includes the services of a dedicated colour consultant who meets clients after design is finalised.

The team at Newcastle Design takes time to ensure that clients' lifestyles and needs are reflected in their kitchens.



Ronan Carey, co-founder of Newcastle Design: 'Our signature look is classical with a contemporary twist'

"We look at the way people cook and eat and how they use and inhabit the space," Carey said.

"We explore the number of users, their ages and stages. In some cases, usage of the kitchen peaks at weekends when older children arrive home."

Homeowners are encouraged to

avail of an array of resources from the Houzz website to magazine tears to pinpoint their preferences.

Taking all the information gleaned into account, as well as budget and specific requirements, the Newcastle Design team devise solutions using smart symmetry, good ergonomics and proper design

principles. They relish the challenge of troubleshooting so awkward corners and other obstacles are overcome with creative imagination and style.

Demographics tend to have an impact on kitchen trends, according to Carey.

"Younger homeowners tend to

want open plan designs, whereas older age groups usually prefer separate spaces and the notion of closing the door on the kitchen and retreating to a snug sitting room," he said.

Handpainted kitchens are in huge demand and can be rejuvenated with a new coat of paint after a few years, according to Carey.

"I have shown clients images of handpainted kitchens that we did ten or 15 years ago, and the only thing that would have dated would be the colour," he said. "We provide a lifetime guarantee with our paint. Clients can come back to us for a new coat of paint in a next-day service – and that is bringing in 60 per cent of our business."

The washed beachhouse effect is currently huge with greys and bleached oak also in demand. Newcastle Design's full-time colour consultant provides advice on how to achieve the best overall effect in the kitchen and other rooms.

Although handpainted kitchens are to the fore, hardwood cabinetry continues to find favour. "Last week, we sold two natural oak kitchens in oil finishes," said Carey.

Minimalist designs in matt or gloss with stainless steel finishes and handleless drawers appear to many young urban professionals.

When it comes to surface good looks, quartz is the best selling worktop at Newcastle Design. A manmade product, it is stain-resistant to red wine, lemon juice and tea, according to Carey. "It also means that clients can avail of light, bright colours which make a space feel bigger," he said.

Other popular options include marble and stainless steel. Surfaces range from the very thin to the thick, depending on the style of the

kitchen. Carey recommends doing a full backsplash in the worktop material, where budget allows for a seamless finish, good looks and practicality.

Whatever the choice of cabinetry or countertop, storage is vital and is something that is calculated at the first discussion drawings at Newcastle Design.

"Typically our kitchens have two food larders or pantries," he said. "We factor in good storage for crockery as well as for other essentials. We go through the average day of the client and always try to give them that bit extra.

"A lot of people like the idea of pieces of furniture rather than units and our Plain English collection caters for that. It appears to be almost freestanding but incorporates a very intelligent internal system with lots of pullout drawers. It also gives people the opportunity to display fine glassware, and for a lived-in look, their collection of cookery books."

Excellent appliances can make a real difference to the functionality of a kitchen and Newcastle Design supplies Die Dietrich Premium, Liebherr, Miele, Neff and Siemens. Once the layout, cabinetry and appliances have been finalised, the selection of the finishing touches can be a thoroughly enjoyable part of the process, according to Carey.

"From our experience, the perfect kitchen is achieved through knowing your trade and carefully listening to the client.

"All the team here have undergone years of business coaching. We know the right questions to ask at the start and how to carry through those responses into beautiful design and give the ultimate first-class customer experience," he said.