

Taking a wider view of design

Kitchen designers across the UK and Ireland recently took part in the 2020 360° Panorama Contest. Kitchens & Bathrooms News spoke to the winners about their design inspiration



Richard Johns

Inspiring warmth, creativity and functionality and transforming a space into a home, were the skills demonstrated by the winners of the 2020 360° Panorama Contest. The three winning designers were chosen by kitchen peers voting, and a panel of 2020 design experts. Richard Johns from RJ Signature Kitchens in Taunton, Somerset, won the Traditional Design category, while Arran Whitehouse from Anthony Sanders in the Wirral was awarded top prize in the category Modern Design. The Country Kitchen Design Category was won by David Finnegan from the Panelling Centre in Dublin, Ireland.

Q What was the inspiration behind your award-winning kitchen design?

Richard Johns (RJ): This design was created for a client who didn't know what they wanted. So I took inspiration from their home - a beautiful Victorian mid-terrace with lots of original features and exposed brickwork. I wanted to add a level of sophistication that was affordable yet striking, and which would look far more expensive than it actually was. The colours were intended to add a modern yet classic finish that would bring the clients home right up-to-date.

Arran Whitehouse (AW): Our clients, a family of five had recently moved into their 'forever home'. It is a property that boasted two separate reception rooms off a dark kitchen, which screamed out for an open family living space. We decided the focal point in the kitchen would be a breakfast bar on the back of a dividing peninsular workstation. This allowed whoever was sat on the high stools to be separated from the person cooking.

David Finnegan (DF): This was a collaborative project in which I worked with our Santry Branch Manager, Alan Maguire, who had prepared hand

sketched plans, along with a mood board of materials. The remit was to display two new In-frame doors in areas of the showroom, with a working kitchen for cooking demonstrations. We decided to make one more country style and keep the other a little more contemporary.

Q What was the process you went through to come up with your award-winning design?

RJ: I need to see the actual space to get a true feel for the room. Too many kitchen 'designs' look like any old room with a load of kitchen units in it. I recreated the exposed brick wall, along with sloped ceiling and roof windows, and even put a photo of them on their wedding day on the shelf. I always try to add a personal detail to my client's designs, as it shows I care and pay attention to detail. A good understanding of the client's needs is the only way to be a successful kitchen designer. My job is to take all this on board and present a design that ticks all of the client's boxes, as well as introducing them to ideas they might never have dreamt of. I look at the ergonomics of using the kitchen in conjunction with storage and, of course, it needs to look fabulous.

AW: At survey stage I check for design limitations like boilers, service valves etc. I also enquire about the client's lifestyle. Do they eat together as a family? Do they entertain? From here I set about a 'rough' layout. At this stage I don't look at fine detail, I just want to be happy with the main aspects like appliances, sink, seating/eating area positioning. Once I'm at the stage where I'm happy with the basic footprint, I then start looking into the aesthetics of unit specification, colours, panelling and so forth. It is at this point I would then invite the client in to discuss the design and take on any feedback or any potential revisions.



Arran Whitehouse

DF: The winning project consisted of four designs in one space. I designed each area individually, in separate layers, allowing me to tweak and redesign aspects before combining them together to create the panoramic view. One of the most important aspects of this design was to create a walkthrough between the two main displays which works with each kitchen. To create this concept, I designed a walkthrough pantry and wine cellar encased with painted finish book shelving on the outside and oak finishes in the pantry walkthrough, that complements both designs.

Q How would you best describe your design methodology and do you have a signature style?

RJ: I think my designs are definitely recognisable from other designers. Winning the traditional design category was ironic, as I'm known for my contemporary and minimalistic style. I always mix colours and/or materials - never all white or all oak - that's boring. Mixing colours and finishes not only adds interest and removes monotony, but also creates the feeling of space, individuality and adds a feeling of luxury to a room. My strictest rule is to treat each and every design as a unique thought process.

AW: I tend to like clean lines, nothing that looks like too much maintenance. Using current trends, I like to design with contrasting chunky wood panelling and breakfast bars. I also tend to steer clear of curved units, as I feel they have a limited shelf life and could soon date.

DF: I like to establish a balance and symmetry in all aspects of the design, whilst adapting my style to suit the clients' remit and their needs.

Q Why do you enjoy using CAD? What are the benefits during the design process?

RJ: That's an easy one. CAD, especially 2020 Fusion, allows me to portray the client's room with complete accuracy, and allows me to play with design ideas quickly and easily so that I can see what will, or will not, work. CAD renders enable the client to see a highly detailed, aspirational representation of their design. With 2020's Panoramic viewer, I can now present the designs where the client can physically look around their kitchen as if it were already fitted.

AW: I started out as a kitchen designer on the cusp of CAD really taking off in the industry, when we were still drawing plans and perspective images by hand.

Now I think it is a given everybody uses some form of CAD. Some customers find it difficult to interpret from two dimensional plans and elevation drawings. CAD 3D images are the perfect tool to get that visual message across.

DF: In order to evolve design versions, CAD is the fastest and most flexible tool. Making changes or providing alternative options can be done with ease. When I started in kitchen design, 17 years ago, I used a traditional Auto Cad system where I would create blocks for all the units I'd use. This was a slow process. When I first started using Fusion I couldn't get over the speed and accuracy.

Q What aspect of designing kitchens do you find the most challenging?

RJ: Creating designs that are unique and individual, yet still portray my specific style. I love using new materials but being 'ahead of the game' is always difficult, as the client worries it might 'go out of fashion'. My advice to them is simple - if they love it what does it really matter if it is still deemed as fashionable in five, 10 or 20 years' time? My kitchens are designed to be like architect unique but to last for many years.

AW: Big kitchens! So many options and schemes means the design stage can become a longer process with the client having more aspects and layout options to choose from.

DF: As designers, we have to be careful not to lose sight of the client's vision. It is our job to interpret their vision and to turn it into a good design.

Q What advice would you give to other budding and experienced kitchen designers?

RJ: Be thoughtful and creative. Make sure your designs stand out from the crowd. But most importantly, listen to your client's needs.

AW: Keep it practical. I like to put myself in the position of the fitter and often ask "Will this work from an installation point of view?" Just because we can design it, doesn't always mean the installer can fit it!

DF: Ascertain your client's vision and use all the tools at hand to make it a reality. Don't be afraid to start over again with a design. If it's not working don't force it.



David Finnegan

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