

## DETERMINING THE QUALITY OF DIY KITCHENS & FULLY INSTALLED KITCHENS

Below you will find a step by step article which covers areas on evaluating the types of construction and varying qualities of kitchens available in the market.

The following article is intended to give impartial advice and as an aid to helping you choose the right kitchen.

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FOR PUBLICATION

### DETERMINING THE QUALITY OF YOUR NEW KITCHEN!

Choosing your new kitchen whether you decide to have it professionally designed and installed or perhaps embark on your own DIY project, it is important to have an understanding on the types, styles and quality of kitchen units available.

For those who are enthusiastic with DIY, installing your own kitchen has become a popular home improvement feature. It does however require an advanced DIYer and high level of skill to fit your own kitchen, however the rewards are very satisfying not to mention the money you will save by fitting it yourself. There are safety factors to take into consideration also, always check for electrical cables and water pipes by using an electronic detector before drilling into floors and walls.

#### **Kitchen Cabinets:**

Companies selling DIY kitchens offer a wide range of designs, method of construction and budget. There are two main types of construction, which refer to the carcasses themselves. Self-assembly (also known as flat pack) and rigid carcasses (also known as pre-built units).

Rigid carcasses are generally more expensive as they are already assembled which reflects a cost at the factory, not to mention the additional cost in storage and transportation. They do however, require less work to install. Self assembly units are generally cheaper as they save on those costs mentioned with rigid units, however will require time and effort to carefully assemble if you are doing it yourself, or alternatively will bear a labour cost to your kitchen project if having them professionally installed.

It can be perceived that rigid carcasses are of better quality, however one needs to consider that most kitchen units started their life as a flat pack, whether they are constructed in the factory or on site in the home and providing the flat pack is assembled properly by gluing dowels and panels and using all appropriate fixings supplied, the rigidity will be the same.

Determining the quality of the carcass is not whether they are supplied pre-assembled or flat packed as the most widely available carcasses are made from chipboard with laminated surfaces. Prices generally reflect the standard and quality of the chipboard and laminate.

Different thicknesses (i.e. 15mm and 18mm) versus its density = overall strength of carcass. In addition, whether the carcass has a rigid back panel or simply a hardboard back panel adds to the overall strength of the unit.



The general quality is determined on how well the chipboard stands up to moisture (quality of glues used and how well the material has been compressed to gain good density) as well as quality of laminates used and quality of glues and methods used to adhere the laminate to the chipboard. These factors will determine the longevity of your new kitchen.

Another factor to consider, which may impact labour time and cost when choosing your kitchen, is whether the carcasses are colour co-ordinated or simply white.

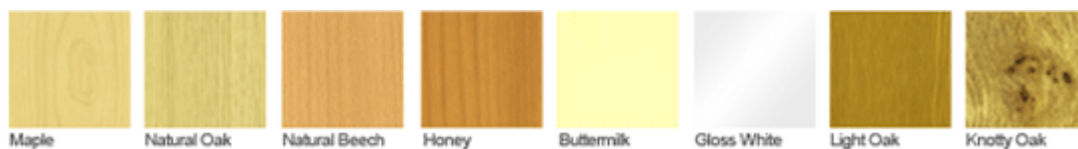
Some manufacturers supply only white carcasses, and whilst cost per unit may appear more cost effective compared to colour co-ordinated units, the overall cost may stack up the same.

For example, as found with some DIY chains, if you have wall and base units which are end units or display units, you will need to buy additional colour coordinated panels and swap them out for the white panels when assembling from flat pack. Other instances may be that the units come already assembled in white and you need to purchase additional colour co-ordinated panel cladding. These can soon add up on the cost of your kitchen project.

Aside from this, it is not every day you will be renewing your kitchen, therefore choosing colour co-ordinated cabinets in the first instance may be the smart choice, both on your pocket and the final result of your finished kitchen.

There are many colours to choose from to complement any style of door:

Examples of colour co-ordinated cabinets:



Whilst the doors are the face of your kitchen, it has to be said that the overall impact of your kitchen is far greater when fully colour co-ordinated, especially when opening the doors to reveal the same colour cabinets inside.

## Doors

As mentioned the cabinet doors are the face of the kitchen, it is important that you choose a finish and style that is both durable and one that will appeal to you for quite a number of years.

**Solid wood** is one of the most popular choices as they are most durable. Alternatively, there are good quality wood veneers available, these can be more cost effective and still give you the effect of solid wood.

**Laminate cupboard doors** have endless possibilities in style, texture, colour, and shine. They are easy to clean and work well in both a modern or classic kitchen.

There are varying qualities of laminate doors. All laminates, vinyl wrapped doors and wood veneer doors are typically glued to an MDF base profile.

When you have chosen the style of door make sure to examine the door sample carefully, taking note on how well the edges and seams are joined. Quality of glues and method of applying the laminate varies from each manufacturer.

It has been known in reported cases where the laminates begin to lift, when exposed to damp (i.e. located near kettle, sink) and heat (i.e. location of base units next to ovens). The same applies to the carcasses themselves.

Be prudent with your choices as you won't want the hassle in exchanging doors or cabinets, months down the line, moreover, there have been reported cases where the laminate on a particular doors started lifting, and the consumer was unable to replace that door as that particular style was end of line and was no longer manufactured. The implication is self explanatory.

Buying a new kitchen is a large investment whether you install it yourself or have it professionally fitted, so it pays to make informed choices.

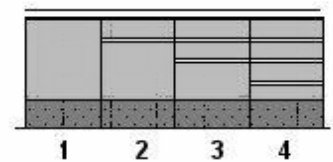
## CHOOSING UNITS

### Base / Floor Units

Once you have chosen the quality of your units, the next step is what configuration to opt for.

There are three types of basic styles used when referring to base units.

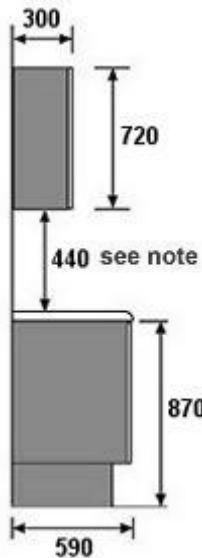
- High-Line (1) where the front is one door
- Drawer Line (2) where a drawer is at the top of the unit.
- Drawer Packs (3) and (4) consisting of 2 to 4 drawer units



Drawer pack styles vary on the drawer configuration. Typically on 3 drawer units, the top two drawers are normally of the same depth while the bottom drawer is double depth. The bottom drawer often provides storage for pots/pans. Some 3 drawers are referred as pan drawers where 2 or even all 3 are deeper to accommodate pots and pans. The drawers in 4 drawer units are usually of an equal depth. Some manufacturers even have the option for 5 drawers.

Base units are normally of a standard height and depth (front to the back) available in a range of widths - 300, 400, 500, 600, 800 and 1000mm - 800 and 1000 mm units are double width units (normally required where a sink is fitted) offering two cupboards or drawers side by side. Some suppliers also offer other sizes for more flexibility when planning your layout, these include 150, 450, 900mm units.

### In addition to the standard base units, most ranges include:



- Corner units specifically designed to use the corner space where two runs of base units meet at a right-angle. The corner units are typically either a 1000mm straight base unit which accommodate another straight base unit to butt up to it at a right angle OR a purpose built L-shaped corner unit sized between 900 – 930mm.
- Tall/larder units – sizes vary from each manufacturer (starting around 2070mm tall through to 2140mm Tall). Some ranges offer a choice of drawer/cupboard combinations.
- Appliance units to house integrated fridge/freezers, and ovens etc. More than often for fridge/freezers, these include integral doors so that the front appearance of the unit matches in with the other base units.
- Appliance doors, for integrated washing machines and dishwashers, again to blend in with the base units.
- A variety of open fronted units to fit into a run or to finish off the end of the run, such as wine racks or end display units.

**NOTE:** 440 mm refers to the spacing needed between wall units above the work top, assuming worktop depth of 40mm (Typical depth of composite worktops).

#### **Important reminder:**

If you are incorporating a tall unit within your kitchen configuration, the height of the wall unit will be governed by the height of the tall/ larder unit and the depth of your work top, therefore the spacing between your wall units and work tops will vary.

This is only set out as an example.

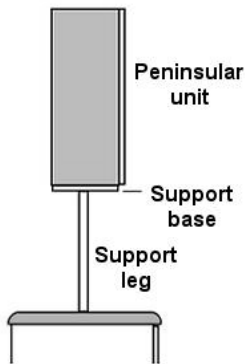
## Wall units

Standard wall units generally include one or two shelves - most ranges allow for adjustable shelf positions, either determined during installation or adjustable at any time.

As with the base units, wall units are available in a number of widths to mirror the base units. These include: 300, 400, 500, 600, 800 and 1000mm (800 and 1000 mm units being double width units offering two cupboards). Again, some suppliers also offer other sizes for more flexibility when planning your layout, these include 150, 450, 900mm units

In addition to standard wall units, some ranges include:

- As with the base units, corner wall units specifically designed to use the corner space where two runs of cupboards meet at a right-angle. These are either a straight wall unit which accommodate another straight wall unit to butt-up to it at a right angle OR an L-shaped corner unit sized between 600 – 630mm comprising of 2 x 300mm doors OR a diagonal corner unit sized 600-630mm with typically 1x 400mm door.
- Extra tall wall units (about 900-1080 mm tall) dependant on manufacturer. These units could prove invaluable for providing additional storage space, especially in a small kitchen with high ceilings.
- Tall units which sit on the worktop, also known as wall dresser units, (about 1180 – 1210mm Tall dependant on manufacturer) typically featuring a decorative glazed door giving the 'Welsh Dresser' effect.
- Wall bridging units, also known as flyover units, typically used between two wall units where a tall appliance is housed such as an American fridge freezer.
- Various open or glass fronted units to fit into a run or to finish off the end of the run. These include, Glass wall units, plate racks, wine racks, cookery book display racks, wall end displays,



A variation of the wall unit, which is termed as the 'peninsular' style unit fitted above the base units, of which are not actually fitted against a wall. The backs of these units are finished off in the same fashion as the side panels in order that they are presentable as they are expected to be visible. In some ranges they have a door on the front as well as the back in order to access the kitchen cabinet from either side. To mount peninsular units, special support bases and legs are required to support the weight and yet keep the worktop clear for use.

One would incorporate a peninsular style unit if, for example, you had an L-shape style featuring in the middle of the kitchen and wanted more wall cabinet storage, or simply designed as a feature to house your glassware.

## WORKTOPS:

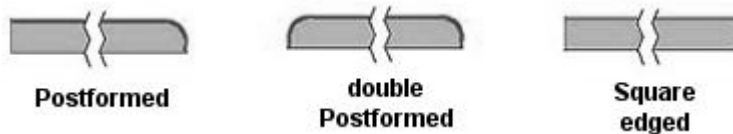
The worktop is exposed to heavy duty wear and tear compared to the rest of the surfaces in the kitchen. It has to endure hot pots and pans, knives during food preparation and water. Therefore your worktop has to be made of the most durable material you can afford. Where possible, protect your worktop from hot pans by using trivets and protect from knives by using chopping boards.

### Postformed Worktops:

For those of you planning to install your own kitchen, a postformed worktop would probably be your first choice!

These are generally as follows:

- 40mm x 600mm widths and in varying lengths from 1500 to 3500mm for base units
- 40mm x 900mm widths for breakfast bars
- There are three basic styles available, as shown below.



They are constructed out of high density chipboard with the latest technology laminate coating applied by hot melt adhesive seal, making them highly durable, heat and water resistant.

**NOTE:** These work tops are extremely heavy – it is recommended that they are handled by 2 people to avoid injury to yourself and damage to your kitchen.

**Postformed** and **Square edged** worktops have one finished front edge for use on top of base units where the unfinished back edge is butted to the wall.

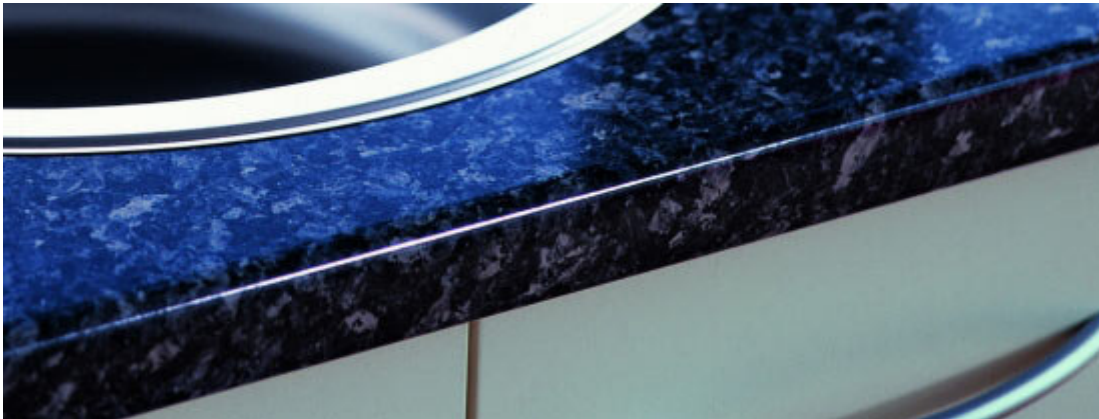
**Double postformed** are used for breakfast bars and islands.

## Fitting your worktop:

1. Where two postformed worktops meet at right-angles, for the professional finish, one would need to mitre a male joint in one work top and a female joint in the other. The Mitre would be cut using a router and specialist worktop jig. Biscuit joints and connector bolt slots would also need to be routed. The 2 worktops would then be butted together using adhesive and biscuits (flat wooden plate 20mm in diameter), then tightened up using worktop connector bolts located in slots made to the underside of the worktop giving you a seamless join.
2. For the DIY enthusiast who wishes to take an easier route, an accessory strip is available which will cover the postform (curved front edge) of one top where it butts-up and runs alongside at right angles with the other worktop. If choosing this method, ensure you seal the unfinished edge of the worktop to prevent moisture or water entering as this will swell the chipboard. Liberal coating of PVA sealer should to the job.

There is a vast choice of finishes for the postformed worktop surface:

- Textured or smooth surface.
- High gloss or matt finishes
- Wood, marble, granite and stone effect designs with an array of different colours and shades.



## Solid wood worktops:

Choosing solid wood as an option would need to be installed in the same fashion as described in (1) above, for a seamless join.

Solid wood worktops are made from hard woods for durability, ranging from Iroko, Cherry, Oak, Beach and Maple. The solid wood option, whilst they look beautiful when installed requires maintenance. They are not as heat resistant and stain resistant as postformed worktops and will require regular oiling, to maintain waterproofing. For stubborn stains, burns or deep scratches, the only resolve would be to sand down the worktop and re-oil to waterproof. Mineral or Danish oils are recommended.

## Granite Worktops

These are specialist worktops and would need to be installed by the professionals

**Please contact Refresh for further information regarding Granite worktops and splash-backs.**

## Cornices, Pelmets and plinths

Most ranges offer decorative Cornices (for above wall units) and Pelmets (for below wall units), for that truly fitted look and give the effect that the units are one piece of furniture. The cornice and pelmets are typically constructed out of MDF and foil wrapped with the corresponding colour or wood grain effect. Choosing a more expensive kitchen featuring solid wood doors, the cornice and pelmets may be available in solid wood also, which will give a perfect match to the doors in both colour and grain.

The plinth (between the floor and the bottom of the cupboard/drawers - typically 15cm in height) adds to the finishing touch at the bottom of floor units. Alternatively, for those of you who wish to attain an ultra modern look to your kitchen, Decorative feet may be fixed to the base units replacing the plastic ones. A large range of feet are available in the market place, from brushed steel to white.

Example of styling without the use of plinths:



## Accessorise .....

Most ranges offer a wide selection of accessories, from lighting to storage rack systems, waste bins and spice racks ..... the choices are endless !

Now that you are more familiar with the types and styles of kitchens and differences in qualities available in the market this gives you an informed choice ! The next stage is planning your kitchen.

Why not contact Refresh and benefit from our **free planning** and **design service**. On choosing Refresh™ to supply your DIY Kitchen, you will take advantage of our unique consultation service.

**Refresh™ offer a FREE one day, on-site consultation with a qualified experienced installer** to help you on your way and overcome the technical aspects of installing your own kitchen. Refresh also offer continued support throughout your project giving appropriate advice in helping you complete your project.

Should you however decide that the DIY route is too much hassle, then appoint Refresh™ to supply and fully install your kitchen, which will include full on-site project management of all services and final inspection on completion.

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