



How to... work with builders, architects and interior designers

Project Kitchens is a contract supplier of Siematic to the developer market with showrooms in Manchester and London. Managing director and owner **Belinda Sewell** explains why a spirit of respect and collaboration is the key factor when working with other disciplines

Project Kitchens interacts daily with architects, designers, specifiers and developers of all shapes and sizes. Each one shares the same overriding desire – to see their vision realised.

In my experience, this is not always as straightforward as you may think, given a design concept for a kitchen has to take account of practicality, space, and cost. But often, only the person who knows the kitchen product itself truly understands what is, and what is not, achievable.

Collaboration

It's important to remember that a kitchen design is a practical, yet integral, aspect of a building. It is truly the heart of any home and forms a key cog in the evolutionary process of a development.

Initial kitchen concepts can often be conceived by the architect or designer, through discussions with the client. And so, sometimes, by the time we are asked to get involved and provide insight, other parties have designed the layout for the kitchen

and become emotionally engaged. This needs careful handling and 'design respect' in relation to other sympathetic aspects of the scheme, such as materials, spatial awareness, light and shape.

You should work closely with the key influencers on a project by making contact with them early, demonstrating an understanding of their vision for the scheme and respecting their design decisions. If you can work with their initial ideas, then do, even if it presents challenges. If the material selection for a worktop is not practical for a wide range of reasons, it is your job to present alternatives.

Managing expectations

Design meetings will often involve several parties, each with their own expectations for the kitchen scheme, whether in terms of material, space, practicality, appliances or specification. These have to be managed realistically.

As experts in kitchen design and the products that you sell, you will best understand how to accommodate the most demanding expectations to deliver a design that is practical, innovative and stylish, meeting the client brief and satisfying the architect's vision.

Education

Collaborating with architects means winning their trust and respecting differences. At Project Kitchens, we offer colleagues and customers the opportunity to meet at our showrooms in Manchester and London. We also offer educational trips to the Siematic factory in Germany. This allows our contract partners to understand the history of the product, the innovation behind it and to meet the international designers we collaborate with.

Working alongside Siematic, we also hold CPD training sessions in our showrooms to help develop strong bonds with professional bodies. In addition, we have embarked on a programme of trend seminars



Above: Show flat in the 10 Leinster Square development in London's Notting Hill

to keep our contacts ahead of the competition. These events involve networking opportunities, pop-up presentations from leading experts in the field of property trends, consumer lifestyle, design, media, food, etc, and have sparked interest and debate.

Sharing information like this with clients will help you to engender an atmosphere of trust, collaboration and positivity, which delivers results for clients and builds strong relationships for the future.

Delivery

A key factor in working with architects and developers is practising what you preach. Take the vision of the architect or designer and deliver on your promises.

You should use highly-trained managers to oversee every aspect of a scheme being delivered on-site. Monitor the site carefully and keep all parties up-to-date on how a scheme is progressing, to ensure that each kitchen is installed on time and to the required standard.

This will help ensure repeat business. It doesn't mean you shouldn't express your own opinions, but fostering a harmonious relationship will help deliver the most suitable design. This will achieve the ultimate goal for all parties – a happy client. ■

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