

a kitchen designer

For its size, the kitchen is one of the most complex spaces in the house to design. A good designer is worth more than a fancy fridge any day.

words Vicki Holder

Mal Corboy's striking design has some cabinets in Resene Black White while others are glass, back-painted with Resene Double Caffeine.



- Resene Black White
- Resene Del Toro
- Resene Double Caffeine
- Resene Quarter Pravda

Left This design by Adaleen Griffiths of Fineline Kitchens features Resene Quarter Pravda on the cabinets.

Unless you're one of the lucky few who can afford to eat out every night, your kitchen will be the busiest area of your home. Nowadays, it often features prominently as a part of the open-plan living area, so not only must it be a hardworking, practical, robust space that works well, but it also has to look great.

A beautiful and well-planned kitchen will also add to the value of your home when you come to sell.

Given the kitchen's important role in a home, when you are building or renovating, it's worth investing in the services of a kitchen designer to make sure you get it right. But how do you go about hiring a good one? And once you've made your selection, what does the process involve?

Some companies which make and supply kitchen cabinetry will offer a 'free' design service when you order a kitchen. But be aware that not all of the so-called designers are qualified or experienced. They may simply be sales consultants with some design flair or good knowledge of kitchen layout.

While professional kitchen designers may use preferred cabinet makers and other suppliers, they will act independently, and design a kitchen according to your brief, not according to the limitations of the materials available.

Kitchen designers Mal Corboy of Mal Corboy Design and Adaleen Griffiths of Fineline Kitchens share advice.

The choosing

Do your research by looking through home design magazines and collect a scrapbook of kitchens and ideas that appeal. Conversely, also take note of things you don't like. Go to home shows or the Home Ideas Centre. Take note of the designers whose work you like.

Ask friends who have recently built new kitchens for referrals.

Look for experienced, certified kitchen designers with National Kitchen & Bathroom Association (NKBA) qualifications. This is a four-year course that covers all aspects of kitchen design. The qualification is kept current with ongoing training for a practising certificate. It ensures designers are knowledgeable about the products and up to date with design trends. If you work

with an NKBA member, when disputes arise, a mediation service is provided to try to resolve issues.

Make sure the designer has been in the industry for a while, continuously, and they haven't just returned after doing something else. They must have current knowledge of the latest building codes, products and suppliers.

Look at examples of the designer's work on their website, in a portfolio and magazines to see if it appeals. If they can only show you a couple of examples, ask why. Remember, you want an experienced designer.

Speak to the designers who interest you. It's important to have a conversation to gauge if you think you can work with them. Ask for references from former clients and make sure you phone them.

Hire someone you feel comfortable with and respect, as you'll be spending a lot of time together over the next few months. A kitchen may occupy a confined space but it contains so many elements and design details, that there are many opportunities for things to go wrong. Good communication is



top tip

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crucial, otherwise the design process can be extremely difficult.

Discuss the budget so you know what to expect. Be prepared to pay well for good design. There's no such thing as a quality, cheap kitchen. A \$10,000 and a \$40,000 kitchen may look the same when first created, but several years later, the quality kitchen will still look good. You need to create a kitchen of a quality that matches the rest of your home.

Discuss the timeframe to ensure they can complete the project within a given time.

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And the using

Talk to the designer about your lifestyle, your wants and needs. Show them the rest of your home so they are familiar with your personal style and preferences.

Don't feel intimidated by the designer. Express your opinions but be prepared to listen as they have a lot of knowledge.

Establish the ground rules right from the start. Check charges and stages of progress and what the designer expects of you to avoid any misunderstandings. Test their listening skills. Don't just assume they've heard everything you have asked for. Check they understand.

Be prepared to change your mind and tastes. You're bound to learn about things during the process that you don't already know.

Be trusting. Some ideas may sound off the wall, but if you're convinced you've selected a good designer who knows what they're talking about, then you can be pretty sure they'll get it right.

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Don't show the design to all your friends and family. Everyone has an opinion and if you're swayed by those, the design will end up being compromised. Remember, it's your kitchen, not anybody else's.

Check that the designer has regularly used the kitchen manufacturer. Ask to go to the workshop to see that it's tidy and well-organised. Mistakes are often made in messy environments.

Work as a partnership. To get the very best kitchen for you, stay involved every step of the way. This means visiting product and appliance showrooms with the designer and helping to make choices rather than leaving it all up to someone else.

Meet regularly to review progress and discuss any issues so there are no unexpected surprises along the way.

Remember, you are the boss and the designer is working for you, not the other way around. Don't abdicate responsibility. **H**