

The recipe for success

by Claudia
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How important is the UK for international kitchen manufacturers? We ask some of the leading brands what they need to do to survive and succeed in this market

THE KITCHEN has come a long way in the last 20 years. Once a purely functional space seen more by homeowners than their guests, it has now evolved in to the most important room in the house, thereby shifting the focus from the front to the back of many properties. For many home buyers an open-plan kitchen is often at the top of their list of priorities when considering a purchase. Add to that the fact that cooking has become a national obsession with celebrity chefs inspiring a raft of wannabe Berrys and Blumenthal. Given that London is ranked as one of the wealthiest cities in the world, it should come as no surprise that international kitchen manufacturers see the UK as a critical market for global sales.

'We supply city apartments, Victorian terraces and country houses, but the one thing links them all is that the kitchen is key,' says Simon Richmond, UK managing director at German brand Poggenpohl. 'It must function as a living space too, and therefore many customers want to invest in the best,' agrees Chanda Pandya, UK brand director at Italian kitchen manufacturer Rossana. 'Contemporary kitchens now double up as entertaining spaces. Our clients need their kitchen to be a place for

social interactions between family and friends, and as a result it has a much more elevated role at the centre of the home.'

This move towards larger kitchen spaces and therefore the need for more cabinetry has of course driven an increase in value of individual projects, but it's not the only reason why the UK tops the league when it comes to a higher spend. 'A marked difference between the UK and many other countries is that here, there is a huge demand for bespoke solutions,' says Steven Salt, UK managing director at Italian manufacturer Boffi. 'Customers want personalisation, custom detailing and finishes, and a kitchen tailored to their specific project. That's not the case in Italy, for example, where people tend to go for more standard options. Budgets are also bigger here in the UK so we present the higher end of our range, as - more so than anywhere else in Europe - it's what people are looking for.'

German manufacturer Bulthaup is also conscious of the UK's potential. 'Most of the kitchens we install in the UK have big islands,' points out Roland Spieth, director of export sales, 'and many of them are in open space situations, which is of course

exactly our concept. I think that minimalism and clear architecture has a strong tradition and is very much appreciated in the UK.'

Keith Atkins, director of design at DesignSpace London and exclusive supplier of Italian brand Modulnova in the UK, also finds that the style of his brands easily finds an audience in the UK and sees UK customers often spending more than their continental counterparts. Atkins estimates that the typical cost of a kitchen on these shores is up to twice that of the manufacturer's home market. 'Our sales strategy isn't necessarily any different, but what we actually sell is,' he says. 'As well as expensive finishes, customers specify more appliances. So instead of having an oven and a microwave, they might have two ovens, a microwave and a warming drawer. There is definitely an element of keeping up with the Joneses.'

Stylistic differences do exist between the UK and the rest of Europe but this doesn't present a problem for manufacturers. 'Significant differences in the UK are, for example, the integration of big appliances and the focus on wooden fronts,' adds Spieth. 'It seems that UK customers like to use veneers and solid wood in their kitchens. [But] this is much in our favour and our



Products

Right The kitchens from Italian manufacturer Rossana can be viewed in the recently opened showroom in London W1

Bottom and previous page Both the Blade + Fly collections from Modulnova are on display in DesignSpace London's Southwark showroom



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product system is flexible enough to deal with the differences.'

Reasons for investing in a kitchen in the first place are also based around different criteria. According to Atkins, whereas on the continent people tend to move much less, in Britain - and even more so in London and the south-east - people are still keen to buy, renovate and move on. 'Customers choose a new kitchen with the view to selling the property in three years time,' he says. 'They want it to still look good so they'll see a return on that investment, and that's what drives sales in the UK as much as anything else.'

When it comes to marketing, strategies across the board have become less about advertising and more about word-of-mouth as well building relationships directly with trade partners. 'We are accredited CPD providers for RIBA and SBID, and run regular events targeted at interior designers, architects and developers in order to create a relaxed environment for them to communicate with their fellow professionals' says Bernard Otulakowski, UK managing director at German manufacturer SieMatic. The same approach is taken by Rosanna, Boffi, Poggenpohl and DesignSpace London, which has even run a showroom event in conjunction with a well-known graphic artist. 'We also study property magazines and look at planning applications to see where buildings are being renovated or new developments are planned' adds Atkins.