Episode 43: Kitchen Design Essentials

Flatpack vs. Custom Designed Kitchens

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Hello everyone and welcome to this episode of My Forever Home the podcast. And this is still the Kitchen Design Essential Season. We're in episode eight of this very special kitchen season and I've been having some lovely feedback which is always so nice to hear. yesterday I spoke to a lady and she said, Oh my goodness, me, there is so much information that you share in your podcasts, things that I hadn't even thought about, which is really what it's all about.

There's so much that goes into designing a home in general, but kitchens, boy. Oh boy. Do they go to a different level? Because they just need to be so many things for us, particularly in our current lifestyles, you know, they're the hub of the home. And so really there is just so much to learn today on actually going to be talking, talking to you about a flat pack kitchen versus custom designed kitchens.

Now, as an interior designer, we obviously work with custom design but it's not always possible sometimes there's budgetary constraints or, the there's an impression or an, a view about what custom design means. And so what I want to do today is actually just go through some of the differences and look, I have, I've had both and I'll go through that a little more too.

So firstly, what is the key differences between a flat pack and, a kitchen, sorry. A customized kitchen and flat pack is also perhaps called off the shelf and if you're envisaging, you know, a flat pack is something like an Ikea kitchen or a caboodle kitchen from Bunnings. And that's where there's a very defined design. You have to work within the metrics and with the measurements that they have for their cabinetry pieces and their draw pieces. And so basically your designing a kitchen using, I suppose like a Lego system almost, you need to. Use their standard measurements. And then you need to basically fit that in or a customized kitchen is exactly that it is something that is designed from scratch specifically for the space.

So it means that things are made to fish it's not a Lego system as much it is really basically customized down to the answer degree. So I suppose in general, yeah, there's definitely a better finish when it comes to customize; you've got a lot more options. And so as always, my focus here is always around forever homes, which I define as home.

You're going to be in for 10 plus years. I was talking to a client this week and she said, yeah, I wouldn't call it a forever home, but we're probably going to be here for 10 years, at least. And, you know, I said to her, I really still believe that that is still regarded as a forever home because the decision that you make and the choices that you make are not short term 10 years is a long time to live in a home.

And so what you choose, you're still going to live in that home and you still want it to be usable for you in that 10 years. So, When you've got a better design for a home that is your forever home, it means then you're going to be a lot happier in that space. So if you are looking at this forever home, which is what this podcast is all about, having a design just as you want, it is important because there's lots of little things that become bugbears or, you know, you've had to put things in a location that doesn't really work because there wasn't another option, with a flat pack design so compromising on the design elements, due to the flat pack constraints can be a really big frustration. Yeah. Particularly over time if you're going to live in that house for 10 plus years.

So I think that's something also to consider. Maybe that's a consideration then for, okay. Do I need to put a little bit more money aside for the kitchen and maybe pair back somewhere else? But look, I have had flat pack kitchens. I had a, a flat pack kitchen. I had an Ikea kitchen in my apartment in Amsterdam, and I went for the really high end.

I went for the top notch, eye care kitchen, and look, I was really happy with it. I made it; I'll put my own stamp on it by having absolutely spectacular handmade Splashback tiles so it didn't look like an Ikea kitchen and you know, don't get me wrong. The, the quality of the actual cabinetry itself is good, but where it came undone.

Is that it didn't go all the way to the ceiling. So then you got all that rotten dust on top and it gets sticky and you know, it doesn't look as good. And the other thing is it didn't go wall to wall. So that became really frustrating for me. It was a real compromise. The fact that it didn't go all the way to the wall because the cabinetry, it, they didn't have a piece.

They didn't have a piece of cabinetry that was going to fit in that space. And so that's what I mean about the compromises. If that was a custom designed, it would have gone wall to wall. And I could have had it designed to fit into that space perfectly. So that's, that's where the compromises are. I was very happy in my kitchen.

It suited me really well, but the other, you know, the, the other thing is that I was able to personalize that now in my apartment in London, I had the equivalent of a caboodle kitchen. And I found that that was, you know, a little bit more comp, a little bit more customizable. And I had, thermal wrap.

So that's not always the case with flat pack kitchens. And again, I was really happy with that. It, it didn't look it. It went wall to wall and then, you know, there was a little, a few workarounds that we had to do. So ideally I wanted a cupboard to finish all the way to the corner. And of course they didn't have a cover that was going to fit that length.

So I had to do, some compromise design in that regard. And I think that is almost always the case with a flat pack kitchen. They will be compromises in design elements just because they don't have the cabinetry in the particular size that you need it to fit into that space. And I think that's where sometimes it can look there in very flat pack, depending on how obvious it is or it, it's just not servicing you as you would ideally want it to. And that's where I think the design functionalities and compromised. So let's go through flatpack you know, overall. So I think that the, one of the key limitations is the height of the cabinetry. So you can't take it to the ceiling.

They work off standard ceiling height. So you're not standard cabinetry Heights. You're not necessarily going to be able to go as high as you would like. And again, like I was saying, you get all that rotten sticky dust at the top, which is not very nice so there are; you're always working with standard sizes.

So cupboard carcasses will be a certain size. Sure. They come in multiple sizes, but they are fixed sizes. And the same with your draw wits, they are always going to come in, fixed with there's not, well, I don't want to have it 20 centimeters. I want to have it 18. So it fits a space that won't be possible.

And I think that's the biggest, biggest limitation with flat pack. not all the cabinetry components that they have, go to suit the measurements of your kitchen. And that's where an either an aesthetic compromise is, is apparent or it's a functionality compromise that's apparent. And I think that that, well, it depends on how obvious that is static compromises.

The functionality compromises can really let you down in the long-term. The other thing is that, that they often don't have solid backs. And what I mean by that is they'll have a flimsy backing board. If you think about, some of the Ikea kitchen, sorry, some of the Ikea pieces, like you, Billy bookcase and so forth, they've got that really thin to about four mil backing board.

A lot of the flat pack kitchens have that rather than being 16 mil carcass and that obviously gives it durability. It gives it strength and it obviously is then going to give it, much longer longevity. So that's an important thing to consider you are eliminating your choice of materials, your colours, and your finishes.

So, two pack kitchens is not something that you can do with a flat packet you know, certain material types like melamine and laminate. Sometimes you can get thermal wrap, far less often than, with a

customized kitchen. And I suppose this, again comes back to. If you're going to be in that house as a forever home, do you really want to compromise on the finish?
Be it the color or the feel that you want, or the ease of cleaning, all those sorts of things, and how long it's going to last. That's something else that you need to think about my philosophy with everything. And I don't think everyone needs to have this philosophy I've always been, and I don't know whether that's the European blood that is instilled in me, but I've always been a, you buy it once you buy it right. So I used to, when I first moved out of home, I saved and I saved and I saved to buy this piece of furniture or this or that. So that I, I had really good quality. And I mean, I left home at 20. I still have my cutlery set from when I was 20. I've added to it and I've got another one as well, but I still use that today as a day on a daily basis.

And I had it on gee, I'm really digressing now on time. I suppose the point that I'm trying to make is that sometimes it's worth waiting, particularly if you're renovating, maybe waiting that little bit longer. Yeah. To be able to put a bit of extra money in to get the quality that's going to last you for how long, you know, when it's a forever home, this is going to be a kitchen that needs to last you for a long time.

And well, you know, it's not always possible. I know when I, you know, renovated in equal in both London and Amsterdam; I'm just thinking about the Amsterdam one I wasn't really aware of what else was available at that time. And I think that's also because I was in a foreign country. It wasn't as obvious to me.

But also It was, I had a little bit of that instant gratification I wanted to move in that was renovated. so I waited before I moved in so that everything could be renovated. And I think sometimes it's better to wait a poster that instant gratification looks, I know that You know, everyone's got a budget too, and sometimes it might be worth saving that little bit longer to get what you really want.

I think it's the design compromises that I'm more worried about and that the materials are going to last than other things. So also with a flat pack kitchen, I really did digress there. I, I I'm sorry about that. That happens sometimes so your hinges in your hardware, in these flight packs. So, so you draw runners and so forth.

They're not necessarily going to be as good quality they won't have a lifetime guarantee. We always work with hardware that has a lifetime guarantee like bloom or HITECH and so forth because we know that those draw runners they can, they've got a bigger capacity in terms of Keala wise the soft close mechanism is nicer.

The way they are close, the drawers is much nicer. It's not crunchy and grainy. Which over time, that's how they end up being and you've got to replace the whole thing Yeah. Anyway, so sometimes it's just a, it's just better. Yeah. To wait and pay that little bit extra so that you're not, then I suppose it's a, a false efficiency in the end because you've got to replace it in in five years' time.

Now one thing that's really sometimes gets forgotten is that it's very time consuming to install an eye care or a caboodle or a flat pack kitchen. So I know for example, with the Ikea kitchen that I

installed, I had to get a very specific Ikea kitchen installer because just a normal, you know, handyman or a normal cabinet.

Oh, they won't touch them. I mean, I know what it's like to install and create something from Ikea. It's got a million pieces and instructions that you almost need a PhD to understand. I do so, it's very time consuming. And if that's something that you have, you've got time and you really enjoy putting all those things together.

Cause I know some people do then that may really suit you, but you need to understand that the labour costs involved to pay someone else to then pull all of that together can actually labour costs is a lot more and that can then mean that this flat pack kitchen seen on the face of it. More cost effective, but actually when you're adding in the installation cost, it actually makes it almost the same as a customized kitchen, depending on a lot of elements.

Of course so don't forget about the labour costs and factoring that in to the overall cost of the whole kitchen and also be aware that a lot of people may not even want to serve you to install those kitchens because they are very time consuming. I know in Europe they had, you know, people that they would recommend.

That would do an Ikea kitchen. That's all they did because there's a, I suppose that became their specialization also be mindful of ordering a kitchen online. There's no room for error. You need to be absolutely down to the millimetre precise with your measurements so you've got that other risk element that you're not getting a cabinet maker to measure it up for you. It's their responsibility to get those measurements, Right? So I order window treatments online. I see it all the time. They're a little bit short. They're a little bit shy of the window. If you're measuring it yourself, you need to take full responsibility and the risk.

And let's think about it. This is a lot more expensive than installing some window treatments. So just be mindful. There's no room for error if you're ordering online. And also if you're ordering online, make sure you're getting the samples because what you see online color-wise is very different than what it can be in real life.

So sometimes a flat pack kitchen can feel a little bit like you're trying to fit a square peg into a round hole to make it work. Because you can't get it exactly as you, we want it because of the measurement. So I suppose that that's just, things to be mindful of with flat packs, with customized kitchens.

And by that, I mean, they are designed and built by, well, sorry, they're built by cabinet maker so they can cut things to size. They can that's probably the key thing. They can make things to size and that's really critical when you know, you're measuring and you want things. Well, the wall, you want to be able to have it fit wall to wall so that it looks right.
It functions, right? And so this is what a cabinet maker can do now. It's very different from having a cabinet maker design your kitchen versus having art designer design your kitchen. A designer is

actually design, signing it with a whole lot of things in mind where a cabinet maker is putting in cabinetry to fit that space.

So that's just an overall view of designing a customized kitchen, but I suppose some of the key things to consider it, it's not just about, the material, but, and how many cupboards or drawers you're going to fit into that space? Kitchen design is about how it works, how it flows and how, and where you access, what you need in terms of your food prep.

Your storage, your cleaning and so forth. And so fitting cabinetry into a void and a space. And you will have heard me talk about this on the master class, if you were, on that one. But feeding cabinetry into a space is very different than designing cabinetry into the space because the design is thinking about flow and accessibility and all those things about what you need to do in a kitchen.

So much of the customized kitchen design when it's done well is about the thinking behind the design rather than fitting cabinetry into a space. And so I suppose what I'm talking about here is just not the customization of the design to make it fit, but it's around, I suppose the customization of the cabinetry, I should say, to make it fit.

But it's around the thinking behind the design to make it work. That's another element all together. And that's also; we've really good customized kitchen design. So when you've got it fully customized, it means that you can choose any colour. You like, you can choose any material you like, and you can choose any designers.

Fix it, you might like additional hardware features, retractable doors or, bi-fold door, appliance cupboard. You've got drawers that can fit in a space. You, you don't have to make do when the sizes don't fit, you can completely get it customized defeat. So it looks right. Sometimes I need to be dependent on our sheet sizes of the material that we're using and standard sizes are generally 1200 wide by 2440 high, although there are also sheet sizes that are 27 high so when you've got a really high, you can have it in one and shade at 2,700, it really depends on the material and also down to the brand as well. But your cabinet maker or designer would be able to advise you on that.

Whether the material that you're really keen on comes in the shape size that you need it to be and also then there are ways to design around that as well, and also the thicknesses of the board. So you have 16, 1825 and 33. And you may be thinking, yeah, well, it's, you know, standard cabinetry is 18.

However, when you may want to have contrasting shelves and things like that generally, we have them thicker than your standard sheet sizes of 18. So then you might go up to 25 or 33 mil. So it means that you're working with different thicknesses of materials to get a more customized look and to, I suppose, get accent points, highlighted a little bit more too hundred percent adjustable.
You can have what you want. Where you want it pretty much anyway I mean, sometimes there are compromises in terms of, Oh, I really want the fridge on the end, but I've got a window there you know, and that's something that you'd go through your designer with in terms of what those, you know, tweaks may be, but pretty much it's all adjustable.

You've got all these adjustable shelves, and adjustable Heights and wits and so forth. So that can all be made to suit you. The other great thing that I like is that you can add little details, your little, you might want a specific draw size, or you might want to have a, a utility draw. That's got charges in it, or you may want to have a very specific bin system.

We've just designed a kitchen where they have. You know, to compost bin systems, one that goes into the wormery and one that goes into standard compost, and then they've got their normal, recycling and then they've got their waste. So that's not something that you'd really be able to get in a flat pack.

And so we've customized their bin system so that it works very specifically for them but there are also all sorts of other things. You know, how you want your, the internals of your drawers or how you want the internals, of your other. so your big saucepan drawers or your cutlery drawers. All those sorts of things have got customizable elements to them as well.

It also means that when you're going through the design process, you can really liaise with your designer about really, we really want this, and what's the knock on effect that sort of conversation you don't generally have. I know that there's consultations with care designers and also at caboodle, you can sit down and sort of talk about what the design aspects are.

But as an example, this week with the same kitchen design that we did, you know, they really wanted their microwave in a particular location. And so we've actually managed to be able to change, shelve depths and talk to them about, okay, so how big is the microwave? And, you know, can we actually change the microwave size so that we get this, functionality, which is what they are really after.

So, because we were having a dialogue about what they needed and where they needed things to go, we could actually tweak things and move things around and of course, because it's adjustable. That was all completely okay to do. You can add into this design features that are not available in a flat pack.

So it might be the retractable doors that I was talking about. It might be the bloom pantry drawer system, which is, you know, these are all specific, hardware features from these particular companies that are really, really well thought out. And you might want to have, a mirrored front that has a lift up so that there isn't a, you know, a seam in there, or you might want a particular type of glass, or you may want to, a type of electronic system for your shelves.

And generally speaking, those sorts of high end pieces are not available in flat pack kitchens. That's when you need to go, upper level. I think the key thing is, that you've got, it's a hundred percent suited to how you need your kitchen to work. And that for me is the design element. That's so important that it's not next necessarily going to be drawn out in a flat pack conversation or even you trying to design it online.

There are lots of conversations that go on, to get the customized kitchen exactly. As you need it in terms of what your lifestyle is and you know, you can choose materials that are then going to have a longer life than perhaps the flat pack materials may have. And if this is your forever kitchen, your forever home kitchen, having materials that are going to stand the test of time is certainly something that is going to be a really good investment.

So look if there's no, absolutely no dispute that I am very much for a customized kitchen, just because. It is a room that needs to work super hard. I would prefer when we're liaising with clients, that there is possibly a, a, a compromise elsewhere, that then enables you to get what you need in your kitchen, because it is such an important element of any home, because it works so hard for us.

It's not just a kitchen; it's an area that we are entertaining in. It's an area that we are. Doing homeworking where, you know, having a wine, where, you know, catching up with friends, it is, it's an area it's a social space, so it just needs to work so hard for you. And I think that this is one of the key parts of your home that you need to get right and so I would always encourage clients to, if there was one thing you were going to customize in your home and everything else was there off the shelf, I'd say that that is going to be your kitchen for all the reasons that I've just stated. It's really funny. We, well, not funny, but I thought I'd just share with you anyway, that, I've been going through the kitchen consultations from the webinar and wow.

Have I been meeting some really interesting people? I've met people that are doing passive house, which is fantastic. I've meeting people that, they've got their kitchens half-finished and it's like, oh, goodness me. I don't think this is exactly what we wanted and I've been doing kitchen sanity checks for people.

I'm not quite sure that it's all going to work out. And I think something that's come up very much. So in the last couple of weeks, just by talking to a lot more people about kitchens off the back of the webinar, the master class is. I hear this, my gut feeling tells me it's, something's just not quite right.

I'm not entirely happy with it, but I can't put my finger on it, go with that gut. And I know that I spoke about this the other day, on the forever home, live, go with your gut because if he guts saying it's not quite right. I reckon the guts right? And so if it's not quite right, don't start building it.

Don't think that it's going to get better when it's built. It's not; it'll probably get worse because you already knew in advance. It wasn't quite right now, if this is a house that you're going to flip in a year or so, it's probably not as important. You only have to live with it for a year or so, but we are talking forever homes here.

And as I go on and on about it, it is a house and a kitchen that you need to been for many, many years. And if you got saying it's not right, get a second opinion, get it redesigned because you want to make sure that you can't wait to get into that new kitchen. And if you don't have this, I can't wait to start cooking in that kitchen.

Then you know that that kitchen is not designed well enough for you. It's not meeting your needs. So don't so go with your gut and, and make sure that you get it right. So it, look, I hope that that gives you a bit of an overview on, you know, the differences between flat pack and custom. I don't want you to get the wrong idea that I'm, you know, I'm not a fan.

I think that there's a lot more the flexibility. Yes Flexibility comes with a cost, but then flexibility on a forever home kitchen. I think it's worth it flat pack, I think has got it's definitely got its place in the market and, and I've used them. So, you know, I know for sure, just hand where it, where it full down.

And I know that you know that they can also last for years and years and years. There's no issue there. It's just about more around the design. Elements that you might have to compromise on that are not going to suit your requirements when you're in that kitchen, don't forget you know, if you want to take this further, we are always here.

You can always book a chat to me on the website top right hand corner. There's a little button book, a chat at whitepebbleinteriors.com.au I'll put the link in the show notes you can always book a chat with me, happy to talk about issues you've got and how we may be able to help you there are so many different services that we can provide for your kitchen.

So, by all means get in contact. And next week we are going to be talking about the all-important, very passionate about this joinery design and internal elevations. Alright! Bye for now!

END OF TRANSCRIPT

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