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KITCHEN CLASSICS

Davonport, based in Colchester, make some of the finest bespoke kitchens in the land for clients who are looking for unique design features

WORDS BY **LAUREN OLDERSHAW**

A bespoke kitchen is undoubtedly on many a wishlist for a perfect home.

And with fewer of us moving and instead opting to create an idyllic home for life, the desire for handmade excellence continues to rise.

For those seeking inspiration and a luxury experience, Colchester-based Davonport is one of the go-to showrooms.

Not only does it have its headquarters in Essex, it also has a presence in partner venues across the country, meaning it has well and truly staked its claim on the industry.

But at its heart, Davonport is very much a family-run venture, with founder and designer Richard still hands on more than 20 years after its launch.

He admits it has been a lifetime's work, tracing his passion for making beautiful furniture back to his own father Aubrey who was himself an honorary member of the British Woodcarvers Association and who taught him to carve using off-cuts of timber.

Having attended college, and earning a distinction in furniture design and cabinet making, Richard had soon set up his own workshop which proved so successful that larger premises were soon needed.

He explains working for himself gave him the freedom he needed to work to his own standards.

"Most of our customers are living in their forever homes so they don't want to spare any expense in getting exactly what they want."

The cost of a Davonport kitchen with all the trimmings can come in at around £40,000, but for most of their customers money is not a concern and the investment is always worth it. "Often our customers live in an old property, like a hall or a manor, or somewhere quirky and so a lot of thought has to go into getting round certain features.

"They are investing in it because it is forever and in many cases it really does need to be bespoke to suit the space," explains Richard. Others might come in with a specific idea of something they have seen in a hotel on a business trip which they want re-created in their home.

Pets are also a big source of inspiration for the bespoke kitchen, explains Richard, who recently created a space for a customer which had a concealed cat flap. "They also might ask for somewhere they can conceal litter trays that their cats can get to easily," adds Richard.

The modern kitchen, he explains, is so much more than it ever was. "Previously it was a separate room that someone cooked in and then that food was taken to another room, the dining room usually, to be eaten by the family. But less people are going for formal dining rooms, so they want to have a space where they can cook but also entertain and so having a versatile space is really important to them." As a result recent trends include breakfast cupboards which have bi-fold doors with which to stow away the early morning equipment such as a toaster and coffee machine.

'Most of our customers are living in their forever homes so they don't want to spare any expense in getting exactly what they want'

"Customers also want to be able to have their appliances on the side, but be able to hide them away for a sleeker look in the evening when they might have guests round.

"Handleless kitchens are also becoming more and more popular as a result of this approach – and islands too.

"They traditionally would have the sink in them, but people do not want that now. Most are going for a hob so they can stand and talk whilst cooking and when they aren't cooking it becomes another surface."







By 2005, Richard Davonport had created a working relationship with more than 20 different design studios across the UK and was employing 17 like-minded people at his workshop in Colchester.

The Davonport brand and first retail studio were borne from this success.

The business's reputation for quality kitchen furniture, beautiful designs and great customer service soon spread, thanks to praise for its designs and premium standards. Six years ago it moved to the current 1.2 acre site in Colchester comprising of a 20,000sq ft workshop, retail showroom and almost 30 employees.

Trends Davonport expect to see in the new year include patterned and coloured flooring, neutral and calm kitchens with edgy industrial touches and open shelving on walls, central islands and base units.

They also see the use of rustic natural materials such as wood and stone and fancy lighting, marble and dramatic colours to add a bit of glamour to the accessories.

Richard has two sons, Max and Oliver, who may well follow him into the business. It is already very much a family affair though with Richard's wife Jo managing the lighting and accessories department.

He also works on a regular basis with partner showrooms, and kitchen studios dotted around the M25 from Hertfordshire and London to Berkshire and Brentwood back in Essex. These are usually family-run businesses who will offer a classic and contemporary range.

At the Colchester headquarters there are eight display kitchens. "We will take the customer around and get them to look at different things and it is a pretty inspiring place to come."

Initially a site visit would take place with a designer who would be able to get an overall feel for the property. This often leads to a personal touch within the final design.

davonport.co.uk



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