



MOVING PARTS, BARE ESSENTIALS

Luxury designer kitchens are taking a turn for the minimal and mobile to ensure integration with both space and lifestyle.

STORY **ELIZABETH KERR**



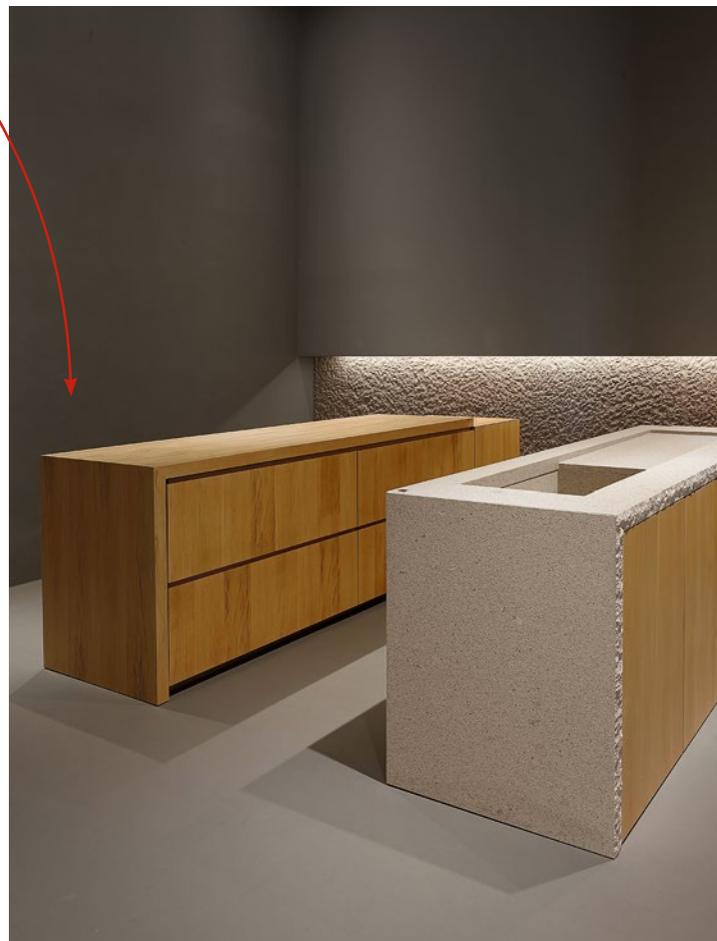


It appears the days of wandering the streets of Wan Chai in search of a cabinet knob or handle that vaguely matches the ones on the kitchen at home are over. Kitchens are going seamless, and as much as they're getting "smart" (at least where appliances are concerned) they're also becoming an even bigger part of the home – even in space-deprived metropolises in Asia. Sleek is the new standard, with a good dose of integrated living. "This is a kitchen but you wouldn't mind having it in your living space," says Denise Lau, executive director of premium interiors supplier Colourliving, describing the store's latest addition by Minotti Cucine. "When it's not in use you just roll it back, and nothing suggests it's a kitchen."

Whether elegantly unadorned or dressed up in fashion runway patterns, the world's finest kitchen manufacturers have one thing in common: they're keeping it simple without sacrificing function. Renewed emphasis on the kitchen crosses lines of gender, geography and income. Ikea has become an international powerhouse because of its commitment to "democratic design" and affordability. "Our clients appreciate lifestyle related to health and they appreciate a better kitchen, with better design," says Andrew Tang, Colourliving's senior business development and communications officer.

And, at the risk of sounding retrograde, an increasing number of men have been showing

THIS PAGE
Minimalist design with compartments that can be hidden brings a sense of sleekness to the often cluttered kitchen space.





an interest in kitchens, according to Christiane Danielsmeyer, director of marketing for kitchen manufacturer Poggenpohl. “With the development of P’7340 Design by Studio F A Porsche in 2007, [we] intended to live up to that trend. Our co-operation with Porsche Design enabled us to design a luxurious, engineered kitchen whose sleek and functional design language specifically addresses male customers.”

Danielsmeyer may be on to something, as many of the best-designed, best-built and most eye-catching kitchens now share an understated, vaguely masculine look; all neutral colours leaning to darker tones, raw materials and geometric shapes. Country French is definitely out. Which is not to say that the likes of Fendi Casa, Armani Dada, Minotti Cucine and Poggenpohl are chasing away women. Quite the contrary. The latest kitchen trends are inclusive, with a focus on open concept living and the integrated lifestyle that Lau emphasises. Doorknobs are a dying breed, drawers no longer require handles to grab onto and rolling a workspace or breakfast nook over stovetops or basins is the norm.

Of course, style counts for a lot. Fendi Casa Ambiente Cucina has teamed up with manufacturer SCIC for its latest line, which incorporates the same lifestyle elements with a new twist. “This is totally different. We integrate and coordinate. You can create a complete look and it’s a living kitchen, it’s not only functional. It has its own attitude, coming from fashion,” says Lorenzo Marconi, managing director of SCIC. Marconi admits each brand has its style and that Fendi “has a glamorous feel that’s classic. It’s luxurious and has a point of view. We integrate precious woods, stone and fabric. As a whole it gives the impression of the Fendi brand.”

True to form, the four Fendi Casa kitchen suites (Villas Livia, Ada, Giulia and Domizia) are defined not only by their sliding doors, swing-out shelves, retractable countertops and soft-touch drawers, but also for their typically Fendi finishes: leather, wood and marble to go along with eucalyptus, ivory galuchat



COURTESY/ARMANI DADA



“YOU CAN CREATE A COMPLETE LOOK AND IT’S A LIVING KITCHEN, IT’S NOT ONLY FUNCTIONAL. IT HAS ITS OWN ATTITUDE, COMING FROM FASHION”

— Lorenzo Marconi, SCIC

(shark skin), iguana, crocodile, onyx and mother of pearl lacquer. Anything less wouldn’t be Fendi, after all.

At the other end of the spectrum is Armani Dada. Working with the Molteni Group’s Dada brand, founded in the 1920s, and known for its ultra-clean lines (a visit to Hong Kong rooftop bar Armani/Prive says it all), the three kitchens by the famed Italian designer and the Mesero-based manufacturer – Slide, Checkers and Bridge – are the picture of elegant Armani-ism, marrying sophistication and comfort. The Slide series is the funkier, informal option that is the star of its space, with horizontal panelling and sliding marble worktops. Checkers is designed for large spaces, and is a more austere choice, boasting a dramatic geometry that, in an expansive area, looks like its namesake checkerboard. The ultra-modern Bridge line reminds chefs and diners of the bridge between the “technical” area of the house and the dining area, through a simple

partition that can move to blend in with its surroundings.

Emphasising its legacy of stonework, Minotti Cucine is making waves with the “Mediterranean minimalism” of its the totally customisable Atelier line, among others. “It’s a double island concept where everything is centred around the islands. You can mix and match the stones and the wood,” notes Lau. “In a way it’s very Japanese and it has a tranquillity to it that contrasts really well with the rough texture.”

Heavily influenced by the Lessinia white stone of the surrounding area of its birthplace in Verona, Minotti Cucine’s handle-less pocket doors and rollback statement pieces are designed to be seen, without being inflexible. Natural cedar, Hokkaido stone, cement and split-face panelling are just the tip of the iceberg. The company’s nearby quarries make the selection of rock and stone almost limitless, thereby increasing the tactile nature of the designs: drawers and doors swing open at



a touch, stone basins make for a seamless, holistic feel. Adding to the effortless glamour, sensor-activated lighting and recommended smart technology and hands-free appliances make Minotti Cucine's kitchens the kind where parties will gather – and linger long into the evening. “Fendi appeals very much to developers as a branding tool for their projects,” reasons Lau, adding, “Minotti Cucine is more for end-users. [Their designs are] very personal. But having said that, some small house developments want individualism, too.”

While it may seem that the Italian kitchen dominates (no surprise given the country's cuisine) Germany has been known to demonstrate more than a little know-how regarding design and engineering for the culinary

arena. Best known for ultra-high performance automobiles (like the legendary 911), Porsche has applied its design aesthetic – in style and function – to compatriot Poggenpohl's P'7340 and the updated P'7350 kitchen series. When so many manufacturers went with fashion labels, Poggenpohl opted for the decidedly industrial Porsche and its design group. It was a good fit. “In 2005 Porsche Design was searching for a partner capable of implementing their idea of what a modern kitchen should look like,” says Danielsmeyer. “In Poggenpohl they found a partner with similar brand values: high standards, first-class quality and a clear language of form. That's what unites our two brands.”

Not surprisingly, Porsche kitchens are notable for their

steely aesthetic and innovative interpretation of horizontal lines. One of the P'7350's most particular characteristics is the industrial mitring of the fronts and carcasses, which merge for a boggling vertical line. It's a classic bit of pure engineering that is simultaneously heavily industrial, chic and tactile. Elsewhere, the brushed aluminium blades of the vertical trim give a bit of visual texture to the surfaces and a touch of personality to the neutral tones. Poggenpohl refers to the P'7350 as kitchen architecture for good reason. And that's the key: all four share flawless functionality to go with their architecture, and a sense of unity, with people and space – the ultimate indulgence. Finishes Lau, “When we go about selecting brands, we always remember we are curating a luxury lifestyle.”

BELOW
The modern kitchen is as much about cooking as it is a lifestyle statement designed to bring family and friends together.

