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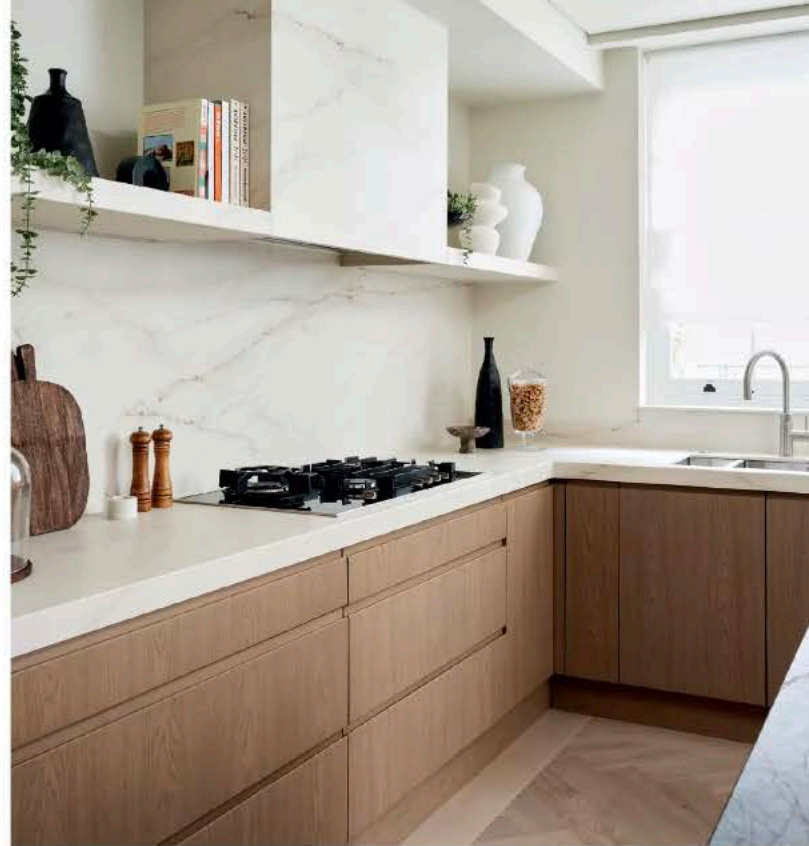




ARE NATURAL WOOD KITCHENS A GOOD IDEA?

As we continue to embrace natural elements inside our homes, there's never been a better time to enjoy the organic beauty of timber with a real wood kitchen, says **Laurie Davidson** – but how practical are they, really?





If the thought of a wood kitchen has you conjuring up images of '70s and '80s-style orange pine cabinetry – complete with matching wood ceilings – then think again. Skip ahead to current times, and the trend for wood designs is seeing all manner of stylish tones and grains. In fact, unpainted timber cabinetry has been on the rise and you'd have to have been hiding under a stone not to notice the demand for wood; not just as a building material, but as a way of embracing the whole 'outside in' trend, too.

And it's easy to see why: wood has a timeless beauty that radiates warmth and injects a slice of nature into our (often tech-filled) urban homes. Whether you opt for a rustic, country style or a sleek Scandi influence, no two trees are the same, and the unique grain of natural wood can give your kitchen a charm that's hard to beat – as well as slotting in with the popularity of sustainable design. "Raw and unpainted wood kitchens bring a warm, organic, natural aesthetic to interiors, aligning well with the growing interest in eco-friendly materials," says Rhiannon Phenix, head of design at Sola Kitchens. "This trend celebrates the authentic, unrefined look of wood grain, highlighting each piece's unique character. With people seeking comfort and connection to nature in their homes, the appeal of raw wood's warmth and tactile quality has only increased."

Of course, it could very well be that kitchen buyers are simply shifting in direction after a long period of buying painted cabinetry.

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left Designed by *Sola Kitchens* to expertly emphasise the architectural lines of the space, this kitchen features impressive expanses of solid natural oak outframe doors and drawers, handleless grooves, and a light and dark colour palette, all enhancing the dramatic play of light and shade.

above For a smoother, sleeker look, this *Pure* kitchen with veneer in Honey Oak, from £35,000 at *John Lewis of Hungerford*, ticks all the boxes. The handleless design gives it a modern, understated look, and keeping walls free of cabinetry echoes the clean lines.



“Wooden kitchens have always found favour with people who value the beauty of timber in its natural state,” muses Charlie Smallbone, founder of Ledbury Studio. “However, for many years, it has been fashionable to paint Shaker-style wooden kitchens. Frankly, I think homeowners are bored with that and want to see something different. When you paint a kitchen, obviously the desired result is a flat finish where the grain of the wood isn’t revealed or celebrated, but rather the colour of the paint takes centre stage. An unpainted wooden kitchen, on the other hand, allows the grain and nature of the timber to take the limelight, and no manufactured finish will ever create more of a show-stopping effect than that.”

But how long do we think this look is likely to last? Is it a trend that’s going to pass by, much like it did eras ago, or is it here to stay this time? Charlie believes that the return to craftsmanship and the artisanal beauty of natural materials and textures mean it’s a look that isn’t going anywhere – yet. “Wood is being celebrated for its unique imperfections that add depth and authenticity to kitchen spaces,” he says. “In addition, there is a huge variety of colours and grains inherent in natural wood which can produce a myriad of finishes. For example, the close grain of oak can be stained to a wide range of colours, or the beautiful figuring in wild walnut can create the wow factor in a kitchen design. Alternatively, textured wood finishes, whether through hand-carved detailing or treatments that highlight natural grain, can bring a sense of warmth and craftsmanship to kitchen designs. For that reason, I think wood kitchens are going to be in vogue for some years to come.”

That, in essence, is the beauty of wood: it never really goes out of style. Unlike other looks that come and go, it’s one that’s always there, even if it does forgo the limelight to a new trend every now and then. Wood kitchens aren’t without their drawbacks, however, including the care required to keep the wood looking its best. “Sunlight and ageing can discolour timbers over time, and this is pertinent to kitchens in extensions with glazed panel doors and roof lanterns where a lot of light floods into the kitchen,” explains Darren Taylor, managing director at Searle & Taylor. “Oak can take on an orange hue, while walnut will become paler when exposed to sunlight. However, there are numerous intelligent lacquers and finishes that will protect the wood from UV light.”

If you’re prepared to spend that bit of extra time maintaining your wood cabinetry, then you may want to start thinking about how to get the look right – the type of wood and cabinetry you choose and what materials you pair it with.



above Unsure about all wood? Opt for a combination like this mix of white lacquered and blond oak slatted cabinetry, designed with Scandi-style looks by *Searle & Taylor*. The warmth of the wood warms up the starkness of the white handleless cabinetry, and is echoed in both the light fittings and bar stools. *Photography Paul Craig*

left Sweet n Sour 103, Golden Garden 221, Mill Springs Blue 11C-137, from £20.75 per 0.94 litres, all *Benjamin Moore*.





left Boasting a subtle grandeur with a heritage feel, the Henley kitchen from *Neptune* is crafted from a solid white oak, which can also be painted, or you could opt for a combination of the two. Choose to add subtle mouldings with a cornice and skirting on your cabinetry or leave free for clean lines.

below The beauty of different wood grains and finishes can be seen clearly in this kitchen by *Ledbury Studio*, where natural oak cabinetry features patinated zinc highlights and book-matched oak drawers and cupboards. Teamed with a large island that has fluted oak panels on either end, plus a panelled design on the run of oak cupboards that conceal the fridge, freezer and larder, it's eye-catching, clever and creative.

