

ROUND TABLE QUESTION 3

Q: Do you agree with designer Johnny Grey that the kitchen industry lacks creativity and passion?



M Shortt: I didn't see anything to turn me on in Milan. So maybe what Johnny was saying is right. But how a kitchen looks is the last thing you worry about. The whole process starts with the appliances. It should work first and be safe, then think about the cabinets.

PK: Of course Johnny Grey will say that because of the versatility of his products, they're all bespoke. He can't say that for people who produce modular products. He's unique. Johnny just does a one-off thing.

GO: But in a recession, people are looking for more creativity. They want their own stamp. It's going back towards more creativity.

BR: That's what we're doing. We might be ordering a kitchen from Germany and binning half the doors and

choosing some veneered panels to really set it off. It turns it into a hybrid kitchen. With an off-the-shelf product from Germany, you bin some bits, add some UK bits and make something that nobody else can get.

M Shortt: Wall treatment is very important. That doesn't just mean units. There are lots of other things you can do with walls. Worktops and walls, visually, are just as important as the doors, if not more important. You get the basics out of the way and then do the nice bits, which tend to jack the price up.

BR: Yes, you can give it a wow look without it costing much more. Start with a German kitchen and then get hold of some veneered or MFC panels and clad some walls and things that cost very little and make it look very different to what the Germans do as standard.

M Sproston: I would echo a lot of that. When you're dealing with modular kitchen systems, there's only so much you can do with it. Johnny Grey is a very creative person, but he works with a lack of limitations. Adding different elements makes a huge difference. It's a business that's evolving all the time, it's certainly not static.

M Shortt: But what Johnny Grey says is also true to a certain extent. A lot of kitchens look very similar. I couldn't give customers a traditional look, so I've done a deal with Design Yard in Northern Ireland and we'll be having some of their handcrafted products in our showrooms. That will probably make my wife turn in her grave, but you have to be commercial these days. It's a style we can't do with the German kitchen.

ROUND TABLE QUESTION 4

Q: Could manufacturers do more to support independent showrooms?



PK: That's a really good question. The rent in Wigmore Street is ridiculous and appliance manufacturers need to realise that the showroom space is extremely expensive and it's extremely important to have products on display. Sometimes it's so hard. You sell it if it's on display, but not if you send someone a picture of it.

As a designer, I would like to see a lot of hospitality from appliance manufacturers looking after people and taking them on training courses. They don't realise that the people who are selling their products are not the managers but the designers and salesmen. They're the people they should be looking after.

BR: Yes, it's certainly a problem. It's very often myself who needs to specify, so it's what I get turned on by.

M Shortt: Years ago, my love for Gaggenau started with a free microwave and oven at our house. People ask what I've got at home and I say Gaggenau. If I was in an appliance manufacturer's shoes and I wanted retailers on my side, that's the easiest and cheapest way.

GO: The problem with manufacturers is they don't employ home economists anymore; they're trainers, and the quality is very, very poor. They don't know how to cook, they don't know about food. This is where a lot of the manufacturers are really losing it. They employ chefs and they don't use the functions, so they're not doing anything to promote the product as such. They should go back to the home economist.

M Shortt: In Miele's defence, there are a few companies that still have them.

GO: Yes, but even Neff and Siemens seem to have stopped employing good home economists. The trainers aren't into cooking, they don't know why one function is better than another. They're manufacturing cookers with different functions and the trainers just say 'use the fan oven'.

BR: We've started doing kitchens for DIY SOS and we've had to peddle it out to every manufacturer saying, 'do

you want your appliances on telly?' and it was, 'yes, but we won't give them for free, this is your price.'

PK: A lot of appliance companies fail to realise who actually sells them. About 10 years ago, I remember Whirlpool decided to take managers on a trip to Germany. It was pointless because those people never talk to clients about the product like we do.

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Peter Kandalajt,
Roundhouse Design, London
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Q: How important is it to get the product codes right when you order appliances from manufacturers?

PK: If retailers are trained and the codes are easy to sell them with, they'll sell that product rather than anyone else's. I know salesmen who won't sell certain products because they're frightened of ordering the wrong codes and not getting the right back-up and after-sales. Nobody wants stock where they've ordered the wrong codes.

M Sproston: Yes, coding can be a problem.

BR: It is with certain manufacturers. Siemens are the worst. A single digit can get you a completely different order. Induction hobs are the worst.

PK: With the BSH group you can lose £4,000 on just being a digit out, it's ridiculous. The sad thing about it is you only realise the mistake when you've unpacked the product. They don't help you.

M Sproston: If you look at the ordering process, it would be quite easy for the manufacturers to say 'are you sure you've ordered the right thing there? How often do you look at an acknowledgment from a company and realise – hopefully – you've made a mistake, but nobody's pointed it out to you?'

PK: Getting an answer from the manufacturer on the phone is the most important thing. It's really important not to speak to five departments and then get cut off.

BR: As retailers, we haven't got time to be stuck on the phone, but it's ongoing support that's more important.

M Shortt: The bigger the company you're dealing with the bigger the problem. If you have a problem with the BSH group, an Essex girl answers the phone who doesn't even know that Dublin is in Ireland. All our products are German. They send you an order acknowledgment and you check it. If you don't, and they've made a mistake, it's your fault.

M Sproston: There's some very valid things been said there. I agree that we should get a lot more assistance back from manufacturers.

M Shortt: Make yourself valuable to a supplier and you won't have trouble getting support. I remind them how much money they've made from us.

BR: You shouldn't have to do that.

M Shortt: No, but sometimes the Germans only see things in black and white.

PK: The worst-case scenario is if a salesman phones and doesn't get help from the appliance company. He won't recommend their products ever again. We all do that.