

What women want

Britta O'Boyle meets the directors of Arlington Interiors in Leeds and views the first UK display of RWK's Jette Joop kitchen furniture, designed to appeal to women



Directors of Arlington Interiors (from left to right) Ben Russell, Richard Bates and Nick Tindall

Although misogynists may argue a woman's place is in the home, few could counter that its very heart – the kitchen – is frequently designed with a masculine look and appeal. Now German designer Jette Joop has created a self-titled furniture collection for RWK to attract female admirers. If anything could encourage women to scurry back to the scullery, this stylish furniture collection would certainly be it. At least, that's what Leeds retailer Arlington Interiors hopes, as it is home to the first Jette Joop display in the UK.

A feminine touch

The whole concept of the Jette kitchen is inspired by semi-precious stones and it is estimated to start at around £20,000. It is specifically aimed at women and the cabinets feature angled sides with bespoke walnut interiors. Purple glass splash backs, drawer sides

and shelves - all featuring a bird motif and the Jette signature - are elements which have been designed to appeal to more feminine tastes.

Arlington Interiors director Richard Bates says: "Jette designed the kitchen because traditionally kitchens have been aimed at men. The linear look, especially the German look, is very masculine and there isn't really a feminine element to them. That's what Jette is trying to introduce with the birds and the glass. The signature of the Jette kitchens is the glass and the angles, especially. We've seen angles in kitchens before and we've seen islands in similar shapes, but they have been a shape, not particularly functional. You can see we've got handleless, fully-functioning drawers within those areas."

Although it has been predominantly designed for women, a masculine appeal can



The distinct angles of the Jette Joop kitchen are carried through from the cabinet to the chamfered worktop



Arlington Interiors is based on an industrial estate in Leeds and is home to the first display of RWK's Jette Joop kitchen in the UK



Jette Joop kitchen collection is inspired by semi-precious stones and starts at £20,000

also be created within the choice of acrylic or ceramic fronted doors and wood finishes. The purple glass is also available in jade green or a dark red and customers can select doors from a range of textures and finishes.

Moving business up-market

It is hoped this top-end range will help propel the Arlington Interiors business into the upper price tier of kitchen retail. Following an MBO in 2004, the business (owned and staffed by its directors Ben Russell and Nick Tindall, along with Richard Bates), was targeting the contract sector. And it had been successful with a contract for 112 kitchens soon after its launch. But following the recession, the contract

market has dwindled. Richard explains: "The lower end seems to have dropped off. With the Jette kitchen, we are creating a high end showroom, creating the £20,000, £30,000 or £40,000 kitchen. We have high expectations. We know people's budgets have shrunk and we are putting out a product that is high-end but there are still big spenders. It is aspirational. I feel someone could come in here and say 'wow I would love this but I also like what else you've got'. So you can also sell from it. Not everybody is going to want a £1,600 carbon fibre tap, but you can sell from that to something else. It all helps."

Setting display standards

But of course to attract the top-end clients, it's not only how the



Jette Joop personally chose all the finishes for the kitchen and even decided how it should be displayed

kitchen looks but how it is presented which is of key importance. And Arlington Interiors redesigned its showroom to cater for the Jette Joop furniture collection. The area of the showroom where the Jette 'lifestyle' is displayed was originally two separate rooms, one a fully-functioning kitchen and the other a presentation area. The directors spent seven weeks remodeling the area to meet the standards set in place by Jette herself, and they have made sure everything within the area is available for customers to buy.

Richard explains: "It is part of the deal that RWK has with Jette herself. She is very



Designed to have a feminine touch, the splashbacks come with bird motifs and are finished with Jette Joop's signature

particular about how it is displayed, what you can have as a finish and how it is designed into a space. The finish of the room is completed to her exacting standards. We have kept it true to what she wants". He continues: "What we are trying to achieve with the room, is that anything we put in it, is available to our customers. So if they want a glass table, they can have that. If they fancy glass partitions, we can supply that. Even down to the slate on the walls, we sell slate walls. We can do the whole thing. It's like that throughout most of the showroom, but we have really

concentrated on it in the Jette Joop part."

Customer feedback

Now that the Jette Joop area is complete, Nick and Richard are able to get up off their hands and knees laying floor and fitting cabinets, and get back to selling kitchens. And, this is what they are accomplished at doing. Richard explains a key to the company's success is not only preparing the customer for the work ahead but also striving to get feedback, following the project, in a bid to further improve their business: "When we do a customer presentation we can show them photographs of a project that is similar or involves a similar amount of work, which preconditions them that at some point their house is going to be a bit of a mess." He continues: "We then go out and chat to them about their experiences, what aspects they liked and what aspects they felt needed work. It is good to have a bit of honest feedback."

And this way of working has served them well, as the business is frequently recommended by its customers. Ben Russell comments: "Our success must be down to something we have been doing



Even though the island unit is angled, it still boasts usable space, as this profiled drawer shows. Each drawer has the Jette logo and bird motif

right because of the amount of recommendations we get". He admits: "We have been a lot more pro-active in the downturn, with regards to advertising." But he counters: "Word of mouth is still our biggest [draw of business] as you can't beat a customer raving about your business." Trading in these times is still

undoubtedly tough, and the directors point out it is still hard getting consumers to commit to a purchase, but they are confident the Jette Joop kitchen will drive sales. Whether their kitchens are designed for men or women, the company is sure that it can and will continue to deliver whatever its premium-end customers want.

Jette Joop

Jette Joop was born in Braunschweig, in Germany and studied design at the Art Centre College of Design in California, USA. After graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree, she worked for Polo Ralph Lauren in New York, among other fashion designers. In September 1997, she founded her own company, now JETTE GmbH, located in Hamburg and Berlin. She explains her design ethos: "My creations are intended to bring joy to people and beautify their everyday lives, yet remain affordable at the same time. Nothing more, nothing less."

JETTE GmbH is a licensing company for design and lifestyle. In addition to JETTE jewellery and watches, the brand also includes fashion, fragrance, shoes, leather goods and eyewear.



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