



Time for reflection

Ensuring every element of her new kitchen extension worked in harmony took Anna Strong on quite a journey – but it was definitely one worth taking

Words: Ysanne Brooks Photography: Paul Craig



Opening pages (p116-117): The room's vast proportions meant the appliance bank's placement in relation to the island was key to a successful design. Sited just behind the island's cooking area, it creates a neat and effective working triangle.

Left: The island was too big to have a single-slab Silestone quartz worktop. So kitchen designer Gavin created two thicknesses, which also provided contrast. The breakfast bar is built up to 80mm thick, whereas the island's working side is 20mm thick.



Preparation is everything when engaging in a big building project. Anna Strong's dedication to getting every element perfect took her on a journey of more than two years – from moodboards and Pinterest pages, through multiple discussions with architects, builders and kitchen companies, to a light-filled extension she now describes as “the heart of our home”.

Anna's plan for her six-bedroom new-build home in Hampshire was to add on a wrap-around extension perfect for a multi-purpose open-plan kitchen-dining space. Rough architect's plans were drawn up, and she set about finding the best internal design for her and her three children – Alice, Jake and Hannah – before having the plans signed off and setting the builders in motion. This involved not just gathering heaps of ideas and inspiration from magazines and the internet, but also a visit to a local estate agent to discover whether the work would provide a financial return should she decide

to sell at a later date. Once Anna had established that creating her perfect family home would also be a good investment, she began looking at a wide range of kitchen showrooms to supply both the kitchen and furniture for a utility room. “I'm a big fan of buying local. So when I was looking for a kitchen company to help me realise my dream, I looked for one close to home and very soon found Searle & Taylor,” says Anna. “Speaking to designer Gavin Alexander, I discovered very quickly it was the right fit.”

Light was hugely important to Anna and influenced the kitchen door choice. “It was clear that, with so much sunlight pouring in from various directions, my first-choice of walnut veneer cabinets would eventually fade,” reveals Anna. As such, Gavin suggested glass-fronted Intuo cabinets in two complementary colours. “I love the reflective surface of the glass, as it really helps to bounce the light around the room – and it won't discolour over time, either.”

Key to the design was the huge island. It had to work efficiently in its own right, but also in conjunction with the room's planned pair of bi-fold doors and four large roof lights. “The skylights had a big impact on the design,” explains Anna. A ceiling extractor allows for clear sightlines, but the skylights made it tricky to line it up perfectly with the hob.

“We spent a lot of time fiddling with the island configuration to get it right,” admits Anna. “In the beginning it was rectangular, but it didn't feel quite right. Gavin must have drawn every shape of island there is! I wanted to investigate every option, just to make sure that I wouldn't regret not trying something after it was all finished. The final design we struck upon, with the two distinct areas and levels, works beautifully and I'm absolutely delighted with it.”

The design grew and developed as architects' plans were confirmed and building permissions given. “Originally, the back wall was going

to be the sink run and the appliance bank was to the left of the island. But that also got tweaked, as I felt it was looking a little too heavy,” says Anna. The attention to detail was clearly worth it, as the sink run, appliance bank, storage drawer run and island all work in harmony to create an ergonomic and beautiful kitchen, which in turn sits comfortably in the larger space.

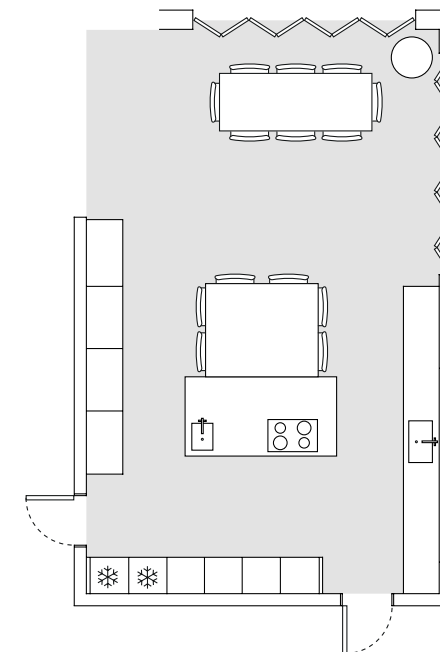
The dining table beside the bi-fold doors is actually two tables joined together. They can open up to comfortably seat 20 people – the perfect addition to a space designed for socialising. “We had a party here for 40 people, soon after the kitchen was finished, and every part worked just as I'd hoped,” smiles Anna. “There was lots of space around the island for three people to prepare the meal, and the children could safely take food to the table where guests had room to mill around and eat in comfort. It was then I knew all that hard work had been worth it.” KBB

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Far left: It was hugely important to Anna that both the kitchen diner and the adjoining snug were flooded with light. Two sets of bi-fold doors wrapping around the corner of the room, paired with four huge ceiling lanterns, ensure this has been achieved. “It’s great. In the winter, the sun streams in and it warms up really nicely. So much so, I don’t even need the underfloor heating on those days,” says Anna.

Left and below: While storage in a kitchen this size isn’t necessarily an issue, Anna and Gavin were keen to ensure it functioned as efficiently and ergonomically as possible. Many drawers feature internal dividers and all pull out fully, ensuring their contents are clearly visible.



Q&A

Searle & Taylor designer Gavin Alexander says...

What was the biggest challenge with the project?

The design had to include an island with a hob and sink area, plus a ceiling extractor above that would fit perfectly between two skylights. The island itself had to be larger than usual, as Anna wanted to sit six to eight people around it. So we created a double-height worktop to incorporate a larger-than-average cantilevered breakfast bar, which is also perfect for informal get-togethers in the evening.

Do you have any tips for people embarking on a similar project?

Always have a list of ideas to bring with you, but also have an open mind when you talk to a kitchen designer – they will suggest additional ideas you might want or need but haven’t thought of. Do have an idea of budget, too, as that can save a lot of time.

Any major U-turns during the project?

Sunlight will bleach the look of wooden veneered cabinets over time. This design originally used timber cabinetry, but because Anna’s kitchen was so full of natural light we agreed on a stunning glass finish that would only enhance this lovely feature in her home.



Above: "The kitchen really has become the heart of our home," reveals Anna. "The two worktop levels at the island ensure I can be safely cooking on one side while the children are playing or doing homework on the raised area."

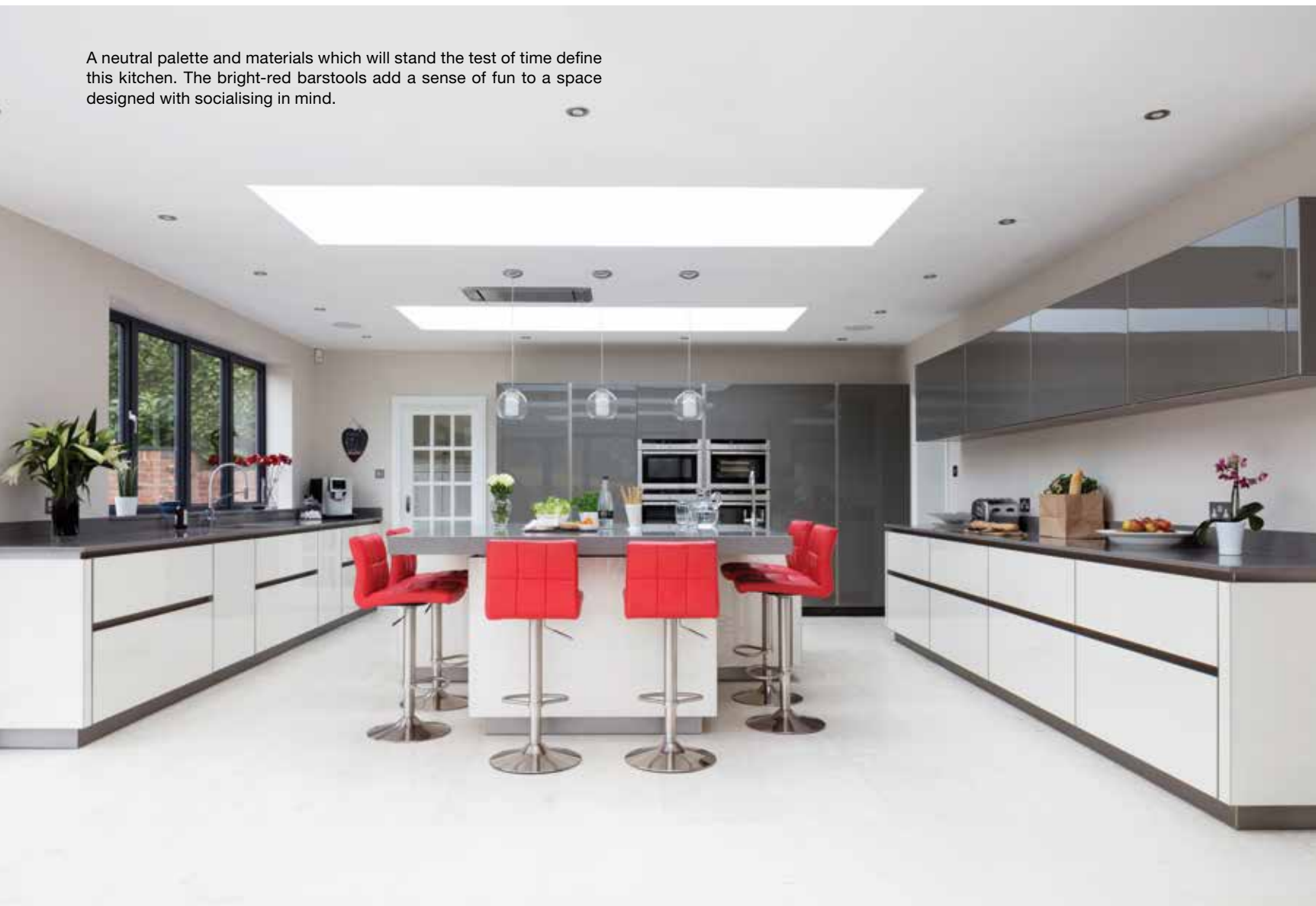
Right: Rather than spoil the island's clean lines with standard sockets, a discrete pop-up retracts into the worktop until needed. It's a great solution for small appliances and for charging tablets and smartphones.

Far right: Elegant grey Gris Expo composite worktops and upstands from Silestone coordinate beautifully with the two-tone kitchen cabinetry.



In addition to the prep sink on the island, a larger sink was placed in the run of cabinetry below the window, with the dishwasher sited to one side.

A neutral palette and materials which will stand the test of time define this kitchen. The bright-red barstools add a sense of fun to a space designed with socialising in mind.



Adding a sink and Quooker boiling-water tap to one side of the island means everything Anna needs to cook is close to hand.



SourceBook

DESIGN

Kitchen Gavin Alexander, Searle & Taylor (01962 850851 or searle-taylor.co.uk)

KITCHEN

Cabinetry Intuo glass-fronted gloss in Panna and Quartz colourways, Searle & Taylor, as before

Appliances Combi-microwave, two single combi-steam ovens, two warming drawers, five-zone induction hob, integrated larder fridge, integrated freezer, integrated dishwasher, all Neff (0344 892 8989 or neff.co.uk); Ceiling extractor, Westin (01484 421585 or westin.co.uk)

Sinks Undermounted PKX11070 and PKX11035, both Franke (0161 436 6280 or franke.co.uk)

Taps Wave in chrome and Doric Triflow mixer in chrome, both Franke, as before; Pro3 boiling-water tap, Quooker (020 7923 3355 or quooker.com)

Worktop Gris Expo 20mm and 80mm composite, Silestone (01256 761229 or silestone.co.uk)

Flooring For similar try Porcelanosa (01923 815200 or porcelanosa.com)

Pendant lights For similar try Eglo Bolsano ceiling pendant, Lighting Direct (0843 317 7824 or lighting-direct.co.uk)

Barstools Atlantic Shopping (0121 230 1644 or atlanticshopping.co.uk)

Dining table and chairs For similar try Oak Furniture Land (0800 440 2254 or oakfurnitureland.co.uk)

Hanging chair For similar try John Lewis (0345 604 9049 or johnlewis.com)

COST

Intuo kitchens from Searle & Taylor start from £30,000