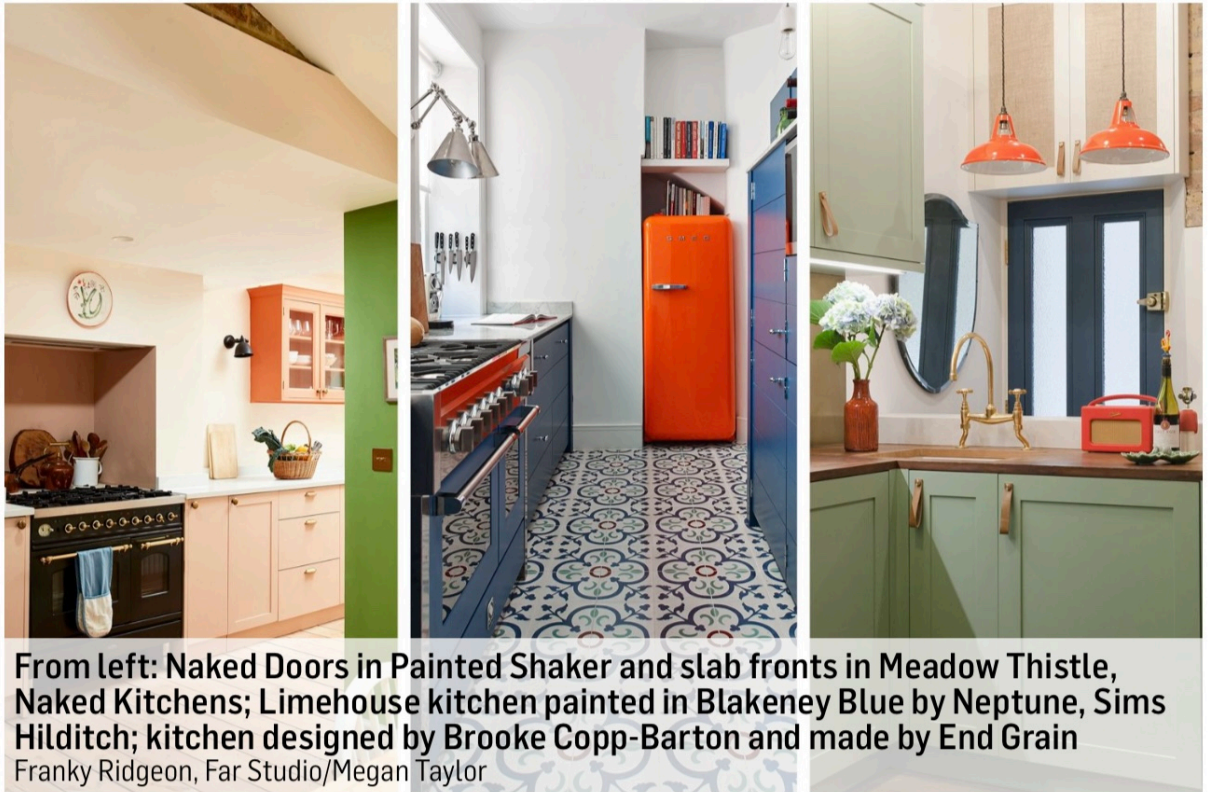


# A narrow victory

The galley kitchen beats open-plan set-ups for efficiency and entertaining guests. No wonder it's making a comeback



From left: Naked Doors in Painted Shaker and slab fronts in Meadow Thistle, Naked Kitchens; Limehouse kitchen painted in Blakeney Blue by Neptune, Sims Hilditch; kitchen designed by Brooke Copp-Barton and made by End Grain  
Franky Ridgeon, Far Studio/Megan Taylor

Galley kitchens used to be regarded as a disaster — tiny and poky, with barely enough room to open the doors, never mind swing the proverbial cat. But as our homes get smaller and space is ever more precious, the galley — which takes its name from the efficiently laid-out kitchens on narrow ships — is making a well-deserved comeback.

A traditional galley has units on both sides with a corridor down the middle, but such is the practicality of its design that the layout is often applied in larger rooms, where one of the walls is replaced with an island. This brings all the convenience of having everything within reach but is a more sociable set-up as friends and family can sit and chat while you cook.

I designed my own kitchen — nearly 10 years ago — exactly like this. The hob and oven are in the island, with the sink, fridge and a wall of open-shelf storage behind. I can unload the dishwasher without taking a single step, pivot from hob to sink to drain pasta, and grab plates, bowls and glasses from the shelves above.

At the same time an acquaintance had knocked down most of her internal walls to create a huge open-plan kitchen, living and dining space. When the work was complete she could only complain about how far she had to walk between fridge and cooker, and how suddenly someone watching television on the other side of the room meant that everyone was compelled to listen to the same show. It was the ultimate enormous designer kitchen that didn't work for anyone, whether they wanted to cook, eat or relax.

I have been a fan of tightly designed kitchens — preferably behind walls — ever since. You can tuck yourself away, listen to the music of your choice and meditatively prepare dinner without distraction while chaos reigns in the rooms around, and there's literally no space for boisterous children, enthusiastic pets or grumpy partners. It's an introvert's dream.

Whether you have a traditional galley kitchen or have adapted it with a row of cabinets along one wall, creating one that is really efficient requires a slightly nerdish attention to detail right from the start.

Just how many plates do you have and how many do you actually need? How many pans and serving dishes? Is the washing machine going in here, or can it move to the bathroom or another part of the house? Must you have a dishwasher? Will a slimline one be sufficient? Is the oven better at eye level so you can have extra cupboard space below?

The key to successful planning is to imagine yourself in the kitchen making your three daily meals and thinking about how many people might be there at any one time. Putting the kettle, toaster, mugs, coffee and bread in one place while the cereal and bowls are stored close to the fridge will help prevent traffic jams in the morning while someone else is at the other end looking for the dog food. Better still, replacing the kettle with a boiling water tap will free up precious room on the worktop.

Waste is the buzzword of the 21st century but it applies as much to space as to products. Do you need a large fridge or will a smaller under-counter one mean less wasted food? Do you tend to batch cook and freeze or do you just need a small space for cocktail ice?

Open shelves will make the space feel less enclosed but make sure your kitchenware is attractive enough to be on show. If you do want wall cabinets, consider sliding doors so you don't bash someone on the head when you open them. Then paint them the same colour as the walls so they recede.