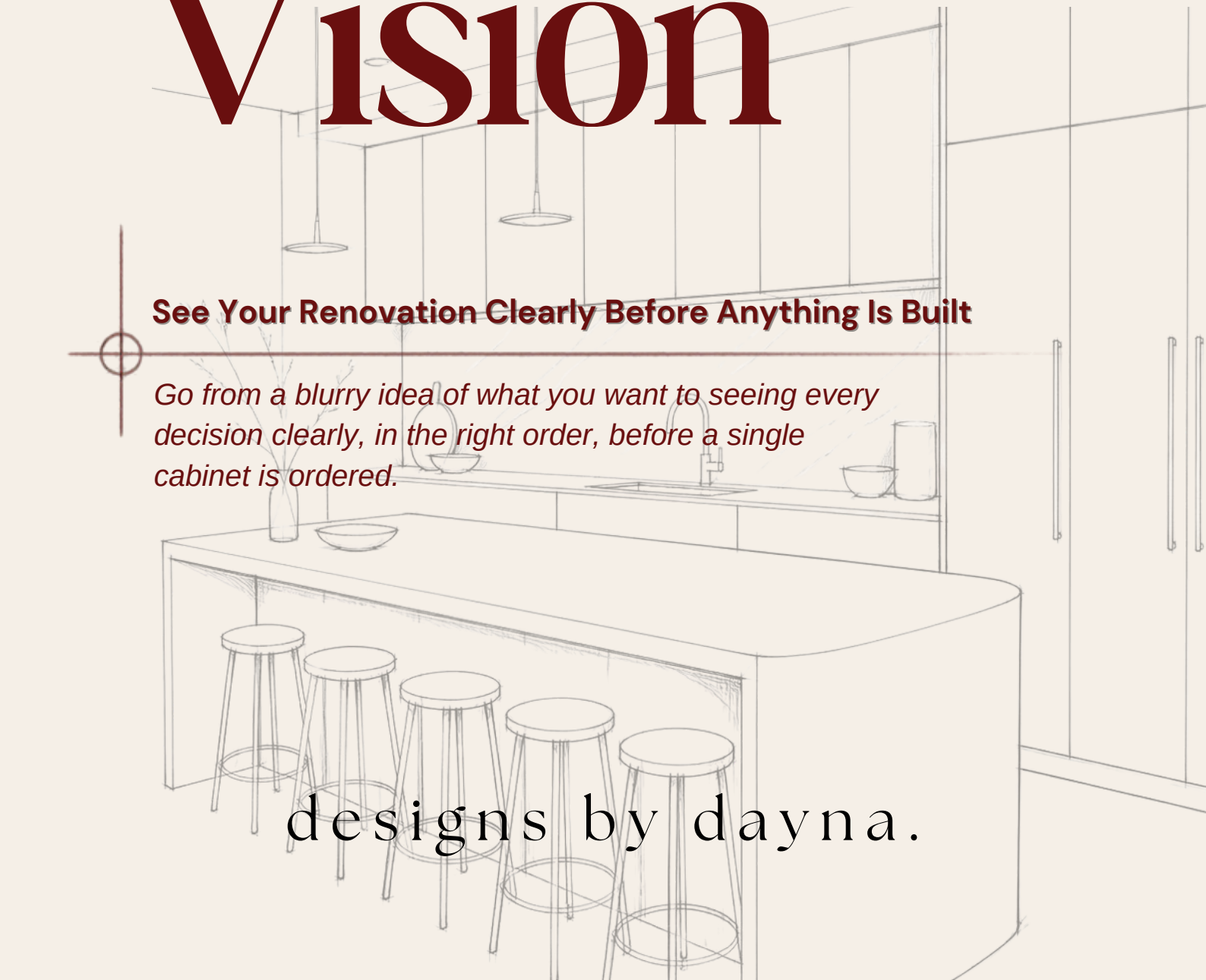
20/20 Kitchen Vision



See Your Renovation Clearly Before Anything Is Built

Go from a blurry idea of what you want to seeing every decision clearly, in the right order, before a single cabinet is ordered.

designs by dayna.

20/20 Kitchen Vision

The complete guide to understanding the renovation process and designing a kitchen that truly works for you.

This guide is designed to give you clarity from the very beginning—before decisions are made, budgets are set, and mistakes become costly.

Inside, you'll learn how to approach your kitchen with intention: how to plan your layout, create a realistic budget, choose the right professionals to work with, and understand the logistics of a renovation so you feel informed and confident throughout the entire process.

Whether you're designing it yourself or preparing to work with a professional, this is your foundation.

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PREFACE /

ABOUT THE DESIGNER

My name is Dayna Whitfield, and I'm a kitchen and joinery designer based in Sydney.

For 8 years I've had the privilege of working alongside hundreds of homeowners, helping them transform their kitchens and joinery spaces into something that not only looks beautiful, but works seamlessly for the way they live.

Through that experience I've seen firsthand how overwhelming the renovation process can feel. Countless decisions, budgets to navigate, professionals to engage, and details to manage at every turn. It's easy to feel uncertain — and that uncertainty is often where costly mistakes are made.

I've also seen a consistent pattern within the industry — spaces designed around trends rather than the people living in them. The same styles repeated, regardless of the home, the lifestyle, or the individual. These kitchens may look good, but they often lack connection, intention, and longevity.

To me, the kitchen is the heart of the home. It's where life happens — where meals are created, conversations unfold, and daily rhythms take shape. It should feel as good as it looks. It should support you, reflect you, and function effortlessly.

That belief is what led me to build a design process centred around spaces with depth, purpose, and a genuine sense of identity.

This book is an extension of that approach.
It covers everything from setting a realistic budget and understanding the renovation process, to choosing the right professionals, navigating the decisions, and developing clarity around your own style — so the choices you make are grounded in what genuinely works for you, not what's trending.

The most successful renovations are always the ones where the client feels informed, confident, and in control. That's the intention behind this guide — to give you the knowledge to approach your renovation with clarity, avoid the common mistakes, and create a kitchen that is considered, functional, and entirely your own.

LET'S GET STARTED.

INTRODUCTION

This is a practical, step-by-step guide to planning and designing your kitchen renovation — written in the order you actually need it.

Each chapter builds on the one before it. Work through them in sequence and by the end you'll have a complete project brief — a clear vision, a realistic budget, a considered design, and everything you need to brief your trades and move your project forward with confidence.

A note before you begin: resist the urge to skip ahead. The order of this guide is intentional. Finishes decisions are easier when your layout is confirmed. Your layout is easier to plan when your budget is set. Your budget is easier to set when your vision is clear. Each chapter gives you the foundation the next one builds on — and skipping steps is one of the most common reasons renovations become stressful and costly.

Work through it in order. Do the activities. Come back to it when decisions get hard.

The process follows the same sequence a professional designer works through with every client.

YOUR RENOVATION ROADMAP

CHAPTER	WHAT YOU'LL DO
01 Defining Your Vision	Get clear on your why, your needs, and your non-negotiables
02 Setting Your Budget	Understand realistic costs and where to spend wisely
03 Things to Consider Before You Start	Uncover hidden costs and plan for the unexpected
04 Kitchen Styles	Find your aesthetic direction
05 Layout & Configuration	Map out how your space will actually work

06 Appliances

Choose and plan appliances before anything is locked in

07 Finishes Breakdown

Select doors, benchtops, splashbacks, handles & lighting

08 Internals, Hardware & Cabinet Solutions

Design the inside of your cabinetry

09 Bring It All Together

Pull every decision into a complete project brief

10 Finding & Briefing Your Trades

Get quotes, ask the right questions, avoid the pitfalls

11 Working With a Designer — Is It Right for You?

Know when professional help adds value

1

DEFINING YOUR VISION

GET CLEAR BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

Before you look at a single tile, handle, or benchtop slab — this is the most important step you'll take in your entire renovation journey.

Getting crystal clear on your vision before anything else isn't just a nice exercise. It's the foundation that every single decision that follows gets built on. When you know your why, choosing between two benchtop options or deciding whether to knock out a wall becomes so much easier — because you have something to measure every decision against.

Think of this chapter as your personal design brief. Work through it honestly, take your time, and write your answers down. You'll come back to it again and again.

START WITH YOUR WHY

Before diving into the details, ask yourself the big question:

What is this renovation actually for?

Is your current kitchen driving you mad because it doesn't function properly? Do you want it to flow better with the rest of the house? Is it purely a style refresh, or are you solving a real daily problem? Maybe it's all of the above.

Understanding your why cuts through decision fatigue. When you're standing in a showroom choosing between two door profiles and you can't decide, your why becomes the tiebreaker.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

- What prompted you to do this renovation now?
- If everything went perfectly, what would make this feel 100% worth it?
- What are you most excited to change?
- What do you currently dislike about your kitchen — not just aesthetically, but the daily frustrations and annoyances?

HOW DO YOU ACTUALLY USE THIS SPACE?

This is where most people skip ahead too quickly — and then end up with a beautiful kitchen that still doesn't work for their life.

Think honestly about how your kitchen is used day to day, not how you imagine you might use it one day.

ASK YOURSELF

- What does a typical week of cooking actually look like in your house?
- How many people use the kitchen at the same time?
- Do you cook together as a couple or family, or does one person need the run of it?

How do you entertain — big dinner parties, casual Friday drinks, Sunday family lunches?

Do kids do homework at the bench? Does the bench become a dumping ground for bags, keys, and mail?

Walk through a busy moment in your current kitchen. Mentally replay it — a weeknight dinner, getting everyone ready in the morning, hosting friends. Where does it break down? Where do you lose time? Where do things pile up that you wish didn't? Where do you bump into someone else or run out of bench space?

These are your friction points — and designing them out is where a renovation really earns its money.

YOUR FLOW & ZONES

Once you understand how you use the space, you can start thinking about zones — dedicated areas of your kitchen that serve specific functions.

MAP OUT YOUR ZONES

- Entertaining / serving zone
- Drop zone (bags, mail, keys)
- Primary cooking zone
- Coffee / breakfast zone
- Baking zone
- Kids zone

Not every kitchen will have all of these — and that's fine. The goal is to identify what matters most to your life so your layout can reflect it.

STORAGE — BE HONEST ABOUT YOUR HABITS

Rather than guessing how much storage you need, think behaviourally. How do you actually live?

ASK YOURSELF

- What must be within easy reach every single day?
- What do you want completely hidden out of sight?
- Which benchtop appliances do you use daily versus weekly?
- Where does clutter consistently build up, and what's causing it?
- What's your junk zone — and what ends up there?

TICK WHAT TO STORE

- [ ] Pantry food and dry goods
- [ ] Servingware and platters
- [ ] Small appliances stored away
- [ ] Kids snacks or lunchbox items
- [ ] Baking equipment
- [ ] Small appliances on the bench
- [ ] Pet food and accessories
- [ ] Cleaning and utility products
- [ ] Bins and recycling
- [ ] Linen or tea towels

This list tells you a lot about how much storage you actually need and what types of cabinets will serve you best. We'll come back to this in Chapter 8.

YOUR NON-NEGOTIABLES

Every renovation has a list of things the client will not compromise on. Knowing yours upfront saves you from making decisions under pressure later.

ANSWER HONESTLY

What are your three non-negotiables for this kitchen — and why?

What functional compromise will you absolutely not make?

What aesthetic compromise will you absolutely not make?

Is there anything you've seen in other kitchens that you definitely don't want?

NON-NEGOTIABLES

1. _____

_____

_____

2. _____

_____

_____

3. _____

_____

_____

HOW DO YOU WANT IT TO FEEL?

This is one of my favourite questions to ask — and one of the most revealing.

Forget styles and trends for a moment. If you could describe how you want your finished kitchen to feel in three words, what would they be?

Here are some to get you started:
Warm. Calm. Refined. Timeless. Natural. Statement. Moody. Layered. Airy. Grounded. Elegant. Relaxed. Bold. Character-filled. Minimal. Decadent.

Write your three words here:

_____

_____

_____

Now ask yourself — does your current kitchen feel anything like that? If not, what's the biggest gap between how it feels now and how you want it to feel?

This exercise will become your design compass. When you're deep in decision-making and you've lost the plot a little, come back to your three words. They'll bring you back on track every time.

DESIGN DIRECTION

Now let's get a little more specific about your aesthetic direction.

ASK YOURSELF

- Do you lean more timeless and understated, or bold and characterful?
- What homes, hotels, restaurants, or spaces have you walked into and thought yes, this is exactly it? What made them feel that way?
- Are you drawn to clean-lined and minimal, or more detailed and heritage-influenced?
- Do you prioritise low-maintenance finishes, or are you happy with natural materials that develop character over time?
- Are there any existing finishes in your home — flooring, tapware, wall colours — that the kitchen needs to work with?
- What are your hard no's aesthetically?

NOTES

YOUR VISION SUMMARY

Now pull it all together. Fill this in and keep it somewhere easy to reference — this is your north star for the entire project.

MY RENOVATION IS FOR:

_____

_____

THE THREE WORDS I WANT MY KITCHEN TO FEEL:

_____ _____ _____

MY TOP FUNCTIONAL PRIORITIES ARE:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

MY NON-NEGOTIABLES ARE:

_____

_____

EXISTING FEATURES TO WORK WITH:

_____

_____

MY HARD NO'S:

_____

_____

_____

Every chapter that follows will build on what you've just defined here. When a decision feels hard, come back to this page. Your answers are your filter — and they'll make the whole process a lot clearer than you'd expect.

Let's get into it.

2

SETTING YOUR BUDGET

START WITH THE NUMBER, NOT THE DREAM

The most common mistake in a kitchen renovation isn't choosing the wrong benchtop or picking a layout that doesn't work — it's starting the process without a realistic budget and designing toward a number you discover too late.

Most people approach it backwards. They spend weeks on Pinterest, fall in love with a kitchen that costs $90,000, get a quote, and then have to either find more money or redesign from scratch with the disappointment of knowing what they originally wanted. It's a demoralising process that can be almost entirely avoided by doing this step first.

Setting your budget before anything else changes the entire experience. It gives you a clear framework to design within, makes every subsequent decision easier, and means the kitchen you design is one you can actually build.

This chapter will help you understand what a kitchen renovation actually costs in the current Australian market, how to allocate your budget across the different cost categories, where it's worth spending more and where you can save, and how to build in a buffer that protects you from the unexpected.

WHAT ACTUALLY MAKES UP A KITCHEN BUDGET

Before looking at numbers, it's important to understand what a kitchen renovation budget actually covers. Most first-timers assume it's cabinetry plus appliances — and then find out there are ten other cost categories they didn't account for.

Here are all the components that typically make up a complete kitchen renovation budget:

COST CATEGORY:	WHAT IT COVERS:
Cabinetry & joinery	Cabinet boxes, door + drawer fronts, hinges + runners, internal fittings
Benchtop & stone	Benchtop fabrication and installation
Appliances	Cooktop, oven, rangehood, dishwasher, fridge, sink + tap etc
Trades — plumbing	Disconnection, reconnection, relocation, extension, if applicable.
Trades — electrical	Disconnection, reconnection, new circuits, lighting, upgrading to bring up to code
Structural works	Wall removal, beams, permits — if applicable
Flooring	New flooring or patching if layout changes
Painting & plastering	Walls, ceiling, patching after trades work

Splashback	Supply and installation
Handles	Hardware and fixtures
Lighting	Pendants, downlights, under-cabinet strips
Design fees	Designer or consultant fees if applicable
Delivery & installation	Cabinetry delivery and installation labour
Contingency	Buffer for unforeseen costs

Every renovation will include most of these categories. Some — structural works, gas, flooring — will only apply depending on the scope of your project. But all of them need to be considered and either budgeted for or consciously ruled out before your total budget is confirmed.

REALISTIC BUDGET TIERS

THE AUSTRALIAN MARKET

The numbers below reflect the current Australian market — specifically the Sydney metro area, where construction and labour costs sit at the higher end nationally. If you're based in another state or a regional area, your costs may sit slightly lower — but the tiers are a reliable starting point regardless of location.

Kitchen size matters significantly within each tier. A compact galley kitchen and a large open-plan kitchen with an island and butler's pantry can both be mid-range projects — but at very different ends of the range. Use these tiers as a starting framework and refine from there based on your specific scope.

ENTRY LEVEL

$25,000 *to* **$35,000**

A $25–35k kitchen is genuinely achievable — but it requires going in with clear eyes. Material choices are real but limited at this level, and the project needs to be structured carefully to stay within range. This typically means keeping the layout largely in place to minimise trades costs and being disciplined about material selections throughout. Plenty of beautiful, functional kitchens are delivered at this budget — it simply requires prioritising quality of construction over premium finishes.

Typically suits: smaller kitchens, apartments, and renovations with minimal layout changes.

MID-RANGE

$35,000 *to* **$70,000**

The most common budget tier in Australian kitchen renovations. At this level there is genuine flexibility in both material choices and project scope — some layout changes are achievable, a wider range of finishes becomes available, and mid-range appliances can be selected without compromise. Where you land within this range depends on kitchen size, trades involvement, and the material selections you make.

Typically suits: medium-sized kitchens, some layout changes, and those who want meaningful material choices without a premium budget.

PREMIUM

$70,000 *to* **$120,000+**

At the premium level the full range of materials, finishes, and appliances is available. This tier also accommodates larger kitchen footprints, significant structural changes, and additions like butler's pantries or islands. Above $120,000 is not uncommon for large, fully custom kitchens — there is no practical upper limit at this end.

Typically suits: larger kitchens, significant renovations, premium material selections throughout, and projects involving structural or substantial trades work.

HOW TO ALLOCATE YOUR BUDGET

Once you have a total budget figure, the next step is allocating it across the cost categories. The percentages below reflect how a typical kitchen renovation budget breaks down — use them as a starting point and adjust based on your specific priorities and scope.

CATEGORY:	TYPICAL ALLOCATION:
Cabinetry & joinery	**35-45%**
Appliances	**15-25%**
Trades — plumbing & electrical	**10-15%**
Benchtop & stone	**10-15%**
Remaining finishes — splashback, handles, lighting	**5-10%**
Contingency	**10-15%**

A NOTE ON STONE

If natural stone is part of your vision — particularly stones with complex edge profiles, or feature applications like a full-height splashback — the benchtop and stone allocation can realistically increase to 20–25% of your total budget, and in some cases higher. Natural stone is priced per slab, and the combination of material cost, fabrication, and installation for a detailed stone package can be one of the largest single costs in a premium kitchen renovation. If stone is a priority for you, be honest about this when allocating — it will affect what's available elsewhere in the budget.

THE CONTINGENCY IS NOT OPTIONAL

Every kitchen renovation should carry a 10–15% contingency on top of the total budgeted cost. This is the buffer that absorbs the unforeseen costs that almost every renovation encounters once walls come down and cabinetry is removed. We cover exactly what those surprises look like in Chapter 3.

WHERE TO SPEND AND WHERE TO SAVE

One of the most valuable things a designer brings to a renovation is knowing where additional budget actually improves the outcome and where it doesn't. Here's an honest framework for making those decisions.

WORTH INVESTING IN

CABINETRY QUALITY AND HARDWARE

Your cabinetry is the most used element in your kitchen — it's opened and closed hundreds of times a week for the life of the renovation. Quality construction, quality board, and quality hardware (Blum or Hettich as discussed in Chapter 8) will outlast and outperform cheaper alternatives significantly. This is not the place to value-engineer.

RANGEHOOD

As covered in Chapter 6, extraction rate and noise level are the two factors that determine whether a rangehood actually does its job. A rangehood that doesn't extract adequately will leave your kitchen smelling of cooking for hours after every meal. Invest in adequate extraction capacity — it makes a daily difference.

COOKTOP AND OVEN

The appliances you interact with most directly during cooking. Mid-range to premium cooktops and ovens perform measurably better than entry-level options — more even heat, more reliable temperature control, longer lifespan. Worth the additional spend for households that cook regularly.

BENCHTOP

Your benchtop is the most visible and most touched surface in the kitchen. The difference between a quality benchtop and a budget one is immediately apparent — in the material, the edge detail, and how it wears over time. Invest here if you're going to invest anywhere in finishes.

TAPWARE

As discussed in Chapter 7, cheap tapware fails — cartridges wear, finishes deteriorate, and replacement means a plumber call-out plus the challenge of matching a discontinued finish. Buy once, buy well.

WHERE YOU CAN SAVE WITHOUT SACRIFICING QUALITY

SPLASHBACK

A matching stone splashback or a feature tile wall can significantly drive up costs — often more than people expect. A stone splashback may require an additional slab, and depending on the stone, that cost alone can be substantial. Feature tiles also vary widely in installation cost — some are significantly more labour-intensive to lay, requiring specialised adhesive, sealing, and additional time that adds up quickly regardless of the tile price itself. It's always worth getting a separate estimate from your builder or tiler on installation cost before committing to a splashback material — the tile price is only part of the picture.

HANDLES

A great handle is worth having — but mid-range hardware can deliver the same visual outcome as premium hardware without the price tag. The real difference is in weight and finish durability over time, not in how it looks on the door. There are plenty of mid-range handles on the market that are genuinely good quality and won't blow the budget — it's worth exploring what's available before defaulting to the most expensive option.

APPLIANCES

Appliances can be one of the most variable costs in a kitchen renovation — you can be conservative or spend more on appliances than the kitchen itself is worth. But there are a few where top-of-the-range simply isn't necessary — the dishwasher and fridge in particular don't need to be premium to perform exactly as you need them to. The difference between an integrated and a standard counter-depth fridge, for example, can be thousands of dollars. Do your research, read reviews, and be strategic about where within your appliance budget the additional spend actually makes a difference to your daily life.

MIXING MATERIALS

Using your premium material selectively rather than throughout is one of the most effective ways to manage budget without compromising on style. If a stone benchtop is stretching the budget, use it on the island only and choose something simpler for the back bench — the island becomes a deliberate feature rather than competing with itself across every surface. The same applies to door materials — a mix of timber veneer on the island and polyurethane on the back run can deliver the warmth and character you're after at a more manageable price point.

THE HIDDEN COSTS THAT BLOW BUDGETS

The single most common reason kitchen renovations go over budget isn't poor planning — it's unforeseen costs that emerge once the existing kitchen is removed. Chapter 3 covers these in full, but the most important ones to be aware of at the budgeting stage are:

FLOORING UNDER CABINETS

if your existing flooring doesn't run beneath the cabinetry, new flooring may be needed

ASBESTOS

homes built before 1987 may contain asbestos that must be professionally removed before renovation can proceed

STRUCTURAL SURPRISES

load-bearing elements, non-compliant wiring, or deteriorated framing discovered once walls are opened

TRADES RELOCATION COSTS

moving plumbing, electrical, or gas beyond what was originally scoped

These costs are not predictable in advance — they're discoveries. Which is exactly why the 10–15% contingency exists. If you don't need it, it becomes a bonus. If you do need it, it means your renovation doesn't stall.

FINAL NOTE

Once your budget is set and your design is complete, the next step is putting it in front of the right people. Chapter 10 covers how to find a quality cabinetmaker and trades, what a complete quote should include, the questions to ask before signing anything — and the things most people don't think to ask until it's too late.

YOUR BUDGET PLANNING ACTIVITY

Use this to build your budget before moving into the design phase.

STEP 1 **Set your total budget**

My total renovation budget (including contingency):

$

My contingency amount (10–15% of total):

$

My working budget (total minus contingency):

$

STEP 2 **Allocate across categories**

Use the percentage guide above to allocate your working budget. Adjust based on your specific priorities and scope.

CATEGORY	ALLOCATION %	AMOUNT
Cabinetry & joinery	%	$
Appliances	%	$
Trades — plumbing & electrical	%	$
Benchtop & stone	%	$
Remaining finishes	%	$
Total	**100%**	**$**

STEP 3 — Identify your priorities

WHERE DO I WANT TO INVEST MORE OF MY BUDGET?

_____

_____

WHERE CAN I BE MORE BUDGET-CONSCIOUS?

_____

_____

_____

_____

STEP 4 — Confirm your constraints

Which budget tier does my total sit within?

☐ Entry level	**$25,000** *to* **$35,000**
☐ Mid-range	**$35,000** *to* **$70,000**
☐ Premium	**$70,000** *to* **$120,000+**

Does my vision from Chapter 1 align with what this budget can realistically deliver?

☐ Yes	I'm confident my vision and budget are aligned
☐ Partially	I may need to adjust some expectations or find additional budget
☐ No	I need to revisit either my budget or my vision before moving forward

A NOTE ON THE LAST QUESTION

If your vision and budget aren't aligned, that's not a problem — it's useful information. It's far better to know this now than after cabinetry has been ordered. The options are: find additional budget, adjust the scope of the renovation, or adjust the material and finish choices to bring the project within range. Chapter 7 (Finishes Breakdown) will help you identify where adjustments can be made without significantly compromising the outcome.

3

THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU START

Renovating a kitchen is rarely as simple as swapping out the old for the new. What often seems like a straightforward upgrade can reveal hidden challenges — leading to additional costs and decisions that catch even well-prepared renovators off guard.

This chapter is designed to help you go in with your eyes open.

Before we dive in, it helps to know that not every item in this chapter will apply to your renovation. Some of these are costs and considerations that come up in almost every project, while others are less predictable but worth knowing about. We've separated them accordingly so you can focus on what's most relevant to your situation.

BEFORE YOU READ ON — THE GOLDEN RULE

Always allow a contingency of 10–15% on top of your total budget.

No matter how well you plan, renovations have a way of revealing surprises once walls come down and cabinetry is removed. A contingency isn't pessimism — it's just smart planning. We covered this in Chapter 2, but it’s worth repeating here because everything in this chapter is exactly why that buffer exists.

PART ONE

THINGS THAT AFFECT MOST RENOVATIONS

These are the areas that come up regularly and should be factored into your planning from the beginning.

FLOORING

When removing old cabinetry or changing the footprint of your kitchen, it's common to find that the existing flooring doesn't extend beneath the cabinets. If your layout is changing at all, the floor may need to be patched, repaired, or fully replaced.

A quick way to check: remove a kickboard from your existing cabinetry and look underneath. If there's a gap or a different surface, factor flooring into your scope. Another telltale sign is beading — the thin strip of timber or PVC running along the base of your cabinetry where it meets the floor. If your kitchen has beading, it's almost certain the flooring doesn't run underneath.

You may also need floor levelling to create a smooth, consistent base before new cabinetry can be installed.

FLOORING SEQUENCE MATTERS:

> Solid timber and tile flooring should be installed before cabinetry. This creates a seamless, refined finish and simplifies installation.

> Floating and engineered timber flooring should be installed after cabinetry. These materials aren't designed to bear the full weight of kitchen cabinets. For the cleanest result, lay the floor after cabinetry is installed but before kickboards go on — this avoids visible gaps or beading at the base.

Note that if your renovation involves subfloor work or significant structural changes, this sequence may be adjusted by your builder. Always confirm the order of works with your trades before anything is installed.

PLUMBING

It's important to understand that every kitchen renovation will involve plumbing work at some level — regardless of how straightforward the project seems. Even if nothing is moving, your existing plumbing needs to be disconnected before cabinetry is removed and reconnected once the new cabinetry is installed. The considerations below are on top of that baseline cost, and apply when changes to the layout or services are involved.

Any change to your kitchen layout that involves moving the sink, dishwasher, or adding a gas cooktop will likely require plumbing work. The complexity and cost of that work depends heavily on your home's construction.

KEY THINGS TO CONSIDER:

What type of construction do you have?

Homes with concrete slabs or double brick walls are significantly more expensive and complex to modify than homes with timber flooring and stud walls. If you're not sure, your builder or plumber can assess this early.

Is there underfloor access?

Homes with a crawl space or raised floor make re-routing plumbing much more straightforward and cost-effective. Slab homes require cutting into concrete, which adds time and cost.

Do you need a gas connection?

A new gas connection must be arranged through your gas provider and installed by a licensed gasfitter. Extending or moving an existing line also requires a licensed professional. Some states are now restricting new gas connections, so check the rules where you live, and apartments may need strata approval. Budget for this as a confirmed cost, not a maybe.

Do you live in an apartment?

Many apartments have hot water systems or water meters housed within kitchen cabinetry, which can significantly limit your layout options. This needs to be identified and considered very early in the design process.

ELECTRICAL

The same applies to electrical — every renovation will require an electrician, even at minimum scope. Existing power points, lighting, and hardwired appliances all need to be disconnected safely before work begins and reconnected once cabinetry is installed. What follows covers the additional electrical considerations that come into play when your renovation involves changes beyond the existing layout.

Adding pendant lights, power points to an island bench, or upgrading your cooktop can all trigger electrical work — and the feasibility depends on your home's construction just as much as plumbing does.

KEY THINGS TO CONSIDER:

Wall construction

Brick and double brick walls require significantly more time and cost to chase for electrical cables than timber stud walls, which allow for easier cable runs.

Ceiling and underfloor access

Access to ceiling cavities or subfloor space is essential for installing overhead lighting or running power to island benches. If you don't have this access, some electrical changes may not be feasible without significant disruption.

Your switchboard location and capacity

In many apartments, the switchboard is located inside kitchen cabinetry, which limits layout changes significantly — moving a switchboard is a large and costly job. Even in houses, it's important to check whether your switchboard has the capacity to support any new circuits before finalising your design.

Switching from gas to electric or induction

This is increasingly common and worth planning for as a near-certainty rather than a possibility. Induction and electric cooktops need their own dedicated circuit, typically rated around 32 amps, though the exact requirement varies by model and is listed on the appliance spec sheet. If you’re moving away from gas, a new circuit will almost always need to be installed and hard-wired by a licensed electrician, and in some cases the switchboard may need upgrading. If you already have an electric cooktop, your existing circuit may be suitable, but have your electrician confirm it can handle the new appliance. If you’re planning to go induction, budget for this upfront.

BEFORE FINALISING YOUR LAYOUT

- Confirm what services are already in place
- Have your electrician assess feasibility before anything is locked in
- Factor in costs for chasing walls, installing conduits, and patching and repainting affected areas

CORNICE & SKIRTING

Removing old joinery, changing the kitchen footprint, or altering walls will often disturb existing cornice and skirting. These may need to be partially removed and replaced to match the new layout.

If your kitchen originally had cornice, you can leave it in place and install new cabinetry underneath — but this can sometimes look incomplete or mismatched, particularly with taller cabinetry.

A cleaner solution is to build a bulkhead above the cabinetry and wrap the cornice around it, creating a cohesive, built-in finish that integrates with the rest of the room.

PAINTING & PLASTER

Even in straightforward renovations, painting is almost always needed. Moving or removing walls, installing new lighting, and patching around new cabinetry all create surface work that needs to be made good.

It's also worth considering how your brand new kitchen will look against existing paintwork in the surrounding space. A fresh coat on the adjoining walls can make a significant difference to the overall result and is often an easy win for a relatively small cost.

PART TWO

LESS PREDICTABLE COSTS — BUT WORTH KNOWING ABOUT

These items don't come up in every renovation, but they're not rare either. The best approach is to be aware of them so you're not blindsided if they do appear.

UNFORESEEN REPAIRS

Once old cabinetry and flooring are removed, it's not uncommon to find issues that weren't visible before. This is exactly why the 10–15% contingency mentioned at the start of this chapter exists.

COMMON DISCOVERIES INCLUDE:

Water damage

Often found under sinks, behind dishwashers, or beneath fridges. Long-term slow leaks can damage cabinetry, flooring, and even structural framing.

Mould and rot

Damp conditions behind old splashbacks or under benchtops can lead to hidden mould or rotting materials that must be treated and removed before new work begins.

Asbestos

In Australia, homes built before 1987 may contain asbestos in walls, splashbacks, ceilings, or under old vinyl flooring. Some imported products continued to contain asbestos until as late as 2003. If asbestos is discovered or suspected, work must stop and a licensed asbestos removalist must be engaged before renovation continues. This is non-negotiable — it is a health and legal requirement.

Non-compliant electrical or plumbing

Once walls and cabinetry are opened up, it's not uncommon to find older wiring, outdated pipework, or previous DIY fixes that don't meet current Australian standards. These must be rectified before new work proceeds.

Termite or pest damage

Less common but not rare in older Australian homes, particularly in timber-framed construction. Structural or cosmetic damage from pests can require significant repair work before installation can begin.

Uneven surfaces or cracked plaster

Removing cabinetry can reveal damaged wall linings, cracked plaster, or uneven floors that need to be addressed before new cabinetry can be installed properly.

A NOTE ON SEMI-RENOVATIONS

If a full renovation feels out of reach right now, a semi-renovation — replacing cabinet doors, handles, and benchtops while keeping the existing carcasses — can be a genuinely effective refresh at a fraction of the cost.

It works well when your layout functions properly and your cabinet boxes are structurally sound. It's less suited to kitchens with functional problems, damaged cabinetry, or layouts that genuinely don't work for the way you live.

PROS	CONS
Significantly more cost-effective than a full renovation	Won't fix layout or functional problems
Much faster turnaround — days or weeks rather than months	Requires existing cabinet boxes to be in good structural condition
Minimal disruption — kitchen stays largely usable	Matching new doors to old cabinetry can be difficult
Can completely transform the look with new doors, handles, benchtops, and splashback	Hidden issues (water damage, non-standard sizing) can still add unexpected costs

MY HONEST ADVICE

Before committing to a semi-renovation, get a professional opinion on whether your existing cabinetry is worth building on. In some cases the cost difference between a semi-renovation and a full replacement is smaller than expected — and a full replacement gives you the layout and functionality you actually want.

YOUR PRE-RENOVATION CHECKLIST

Use this to identify what applies to your project before you move into the design phase.

LIKELY IN SCOPE:

- [ ] Changing kitchen layout
- [ ] Removing or adding walls
- [ ] Moving the sink, dishwasher, or fridge
- [ ] Upgrading cooktop — particularly to induction or gas
- [ ] Adding island bench with power
- [ ] Replacing flooring
- [ ] Replacing cornice or skirting
- [ ] Repainting walls or ceiling
- [ ] Purchasing new appliances
- [ ] Installing feature lighting
- [ ] Adding or adjusting plumbing or electrical

WORTH CHECKING FIRST:

- [ ] Is there flooring under my existing cabinetry?
- [ ] What type of construction is my home — slab, double brick, or timber frame?
- [ ] Do I have ceiling or underfloor access for electrical and plumbing?

- [ ] Where is my switchboard located and does it have capacity for new circuits?
- [ ] Does my home have an existing gas connection?
- [ ] When was my home built — could asbestos be present?
- [ ] Is there any visible evidence of water damage, mould, or pest activity?
- [ ] Am I in an apartment with shared or restricted services?

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR TRADES:

4

KITCHEN STYLES

FINDING YOUR DIRECTION

Before you fall down a Pinterest rabbit hole and save five hundred images that contradict each other, it helps to have a basic understanding of the most common kitchen styles — what defines them, what they feel like, and whether they're likely to suit your home.

You don't need to pick one style and commit completely. Most well-designed kitchens are a blend — a Japandi kitchen might borrow hardware detail from a Classic style, a Coastal kitchen might have the clean lines of a Minimalist one. Cohesion comes from consistency in your finishes, materials, and colour palette, not from picking a single label.

Use this chapter as a reference point. Notice what resonates and pay attention to your instinctive reactions — they're telling you something.

A NOTE ON YOUR HOME'S ARCHITECTURE

The architectural style of your house isn't a constraint — but it is a useful filter. A kitchen that works beautifully in a sleek new build can feel disconnected in a mid-century brick home, and vice versa. That doesn't mean you can't push against the architecture — sometimes the contrast is intentional and stunning — but the choice should be deliberate rather than accidental.

Ask yourself: *what is the overall feel of my home? What era was it built in? What existing features — ceiling heights, window proportions, flooring, wall profiles — will the kitchen need to sit alongside?*

You defined some of this in your Vision chapter. Come back to those answers as you read through the styles below.

The Styles

The styles below are grouped loosely by feel to make navigation easier. Use these groupings as a starting point — not a rule.

Light & Minimal

MODERN



Modern kitchens are defined by clean lines, sleek surfaces, and the absence of unnecessary detail. Cabinetry is typically handleless — push-to-open or finger-pull — creating a seamless, uninterrupted facade. Colour palettes lean neutral, with contrast introduced through black, charcoal, or warm timber accents rather than bold colour. High-gloss, matte, or woodgrain cabinetry works well here, paired with engineered stone benchtops.

Suits: New builds, renovated apartments, open-plan homes with a clean architectural language.

MINIMALIST



Taken a step further than Modern, Minimalist kitchens strip everything back to pure function and form. Clutter is designed out entirely through integrated appliances, handleless cabinetry, and push-to-open mechanisms. The colour palette is typically white, black, or grey paired with natural textures. Every element earns its place.

Suits: Compact spaces, apartments, homes where the kitchen sits within an open living area.



SCANDINAVIAN

Scandinavian kitchens are bright, functional, and quietly warm. The palette is light and neutral — often white or soft greige — with light timber accents adding texture and organic warmth. Cabinetry is understated, with flat-panel or finger-pull designs. The focus is on creating a space that feels effortless and liveable rather than designed for show.

Suits: Family homes, period homes with good natural light, spaces that feel small or dark.

JAPANDI



Japandi blends Japanese minimalism with Scandinavian warmth, landing somewhere calm, purposeful, and deeply considered. Clean lines meet natural textures — think timber, stone, and ceramics. The palette is muted, earthy, and quiet. Cabinetry is sleek and often handleless, while open space is treated as a design element in itself rather than wasted storage opportunity. This style is for those who want simplicity that feels intentional, not sparse.

Suits: Mid-century homes, architecturally considered spaces, those who want minimal without feeling cold.

Warm & Neutral



MID-CENTURY MODERN

Mid-century modern kitchens take their cues from the design movement of the 1950s and 60s and translate beautifully into contemporary kitchen design. Expect warm timber tones, flat or lightly profiled cabinetry, and a palette that draws on earthy naturals — olive, rust, warm white, and walnut. Hardware tends to be simple but considered, often in brass or matte black. The aesthetic sits between functional and characterful — never fussy, always intentional. Terrazzo surfaces and geometric tile details work particularly well in this style.

Suits: Homes built in the 1950s–70s, brick or weatherboard homes, those who want warmth and character without going full country or rustic.

COASTAL



Coastal kitchens draw from the relaxed palette of the beach — soft blues, whites, sandy neutrals, and warm greys. Natural textures like rattan, whitewashed timber, and woven pendants bring in organic warmth without heaviness. Cabinetry is typically shaker or panelled, benchtops lean toward light stone or timber, and large windows for natural light are a key feature where possible. The overall effect should feel breezy and effortless rather than themed.

Suits: Beach houses, homes with good natural light, Queensland or coastal-style architecture.



COUNTRY / FARMHOUSE

Country kitchens are warm, grounded, and unapologetically homely. Shaker-style cabinetry, timber benchtops, and vintage-style hardware create a sense of character that feels lived-in and genuine rather than styled. Apron-front butler's sinks, traditional tapware, and open shelving complete the look. At its best this style feels deeply personal — like it belongs to a specific family in a specific place.

Suits: Rural properties, Federation or Edwardian homes, older-style weatherboard homes.

FRENCH PROVINCIAL



French Provincial kitchens sit at the more ornate end of the warm and natural spectrum. Intricate mouldings, detailed cabinetry profiles, chandeliers or decorative pendants, and a palette of creams, dusty blues, and soft greens create a look that is elegant but not cold. Timber or stone benchtops, vintage-style hardware, and handmade-feel tiles all contribute to the aesthetic. The detail is the point here — this style rewards those who love craftsmanship.

Suits: Larger homes, Federation or Victorian architecture, those who want their kitchen to feel like a statement.



ORGANIC MODERN

Organic Modern kitchens sit at the intersection of natural warmth and contemporary restraint. Raw, tactile materials and softened forms define the style — curved cabinetry, limewash or plaster walls, chunky stone benchtops, and a palette drawn from nature: warm whites, clay, sage, terracotta, and walnut. Hardware is minimal, typically in aged brass or matte black, and open shelving displays objects that feel genuinely collected rather than styled. The result is grounded, quietly luxurious, and completely unpretentious.

Suits: Mid-century and older-style Australian homes, brick or rendered homes, those who want warmth and texture without committing to a traditional or rustic style.

Classic & Refined

CLASSIC



A Classic kitchen is refined, balanced, and built to last aesthetically as well as physically. Shaker or raised-panel cabinetry with considered mouldings and trims, a neutral palette of whites, creams, and soft greys, and natural stone benchtops combine to create a space that feels neither trend-driven nor dated. Classic kitchens are often the choice of those who renovate once and want it to still feel right in twenty years.

Suits: Most home styles, particularly period homes, those who want a timeless investment rather than a moment.



HAMPTONS

Inspired by the coastal homes of New York's east coast, Hamptons kitchens bring together the relaxed and the refined. White or soft pastel cabinetry in a shaker profile, marble or engineered stone benchtops, subway tile splashbacks, and pendant lighting over an island bench define the look. Cup handles or knobs in brushed nickel or brass complete the palette. It's a style that feels quietly luxurious without being ostentatious.

Suits: New builds, open-plan homes, those who want coastal influence without a casual feel.

Bold & Characterful

CONTEMPORARY



Contemporary kitchens are defined by their adaptability — they blend modern and classic elements, incorporate current materials and finishes, and evolve with the moment without being slaves to it. High-end finishes, smart storage, and integrated appliances are hallmarks, as is the considered combination of timber, stone, and metal for texture and depth. A contemporary kitchen is harder to define than others because it's intentionally not fixed — it's the style for those who want their kitchen to feel current without dating quickly.

Suits: Most home styles, particularly those undergoing a broader renovation or extension.

LUXE



Luxe kitchens are unapologetically high-end. Marble, brass, and gold as material and hardware choices, statement lighting, dark and moody tones or high-gloss cabinetry, and a large island with waterfall edges define the aesthetic. Nothing is accidental and nothing is budget-compromised. This style is for those who want their kitchen to feel like the most impressive room in the house.

Suits: High-end new builds, significant whole-home renovations, those with the budget and appetite for a statement.



ECLECTIC

Eclectic kitchens are the most personal of all the styles — and the hardest to execute well without professional guidance. They deliberately combine different styles, materials, eras, and influences to create something that feels entirely individual. Bold splashbacks, statement lighting, a mix of vintage and contemporary elements, open shelving with curated display pieces — the eclectic kitchen resists formula. Done well it feels like a genuine expression of the people who live there. Done poorly it just feels chaotic.

Suits: Those with a strong and confident visual instinct, eclectic homes or spaces with existing character, and those working with a designer who can hold the vision together.

MEDITERRANEAN



Inspired by the coastal regions of Spain, Italy, and Greece, Mediterranean kitchens are warm, textured, and deeply characterful. Cabinetry in natural timber or painted in soft blues, greens, or earthy whites, terracotta or patterned splashback tiles, wrought iron or brass fixtures, and arched alcoves create an old-world atmosphere that feels sun-soaked and welcoming. Natural stone benchtops, exposed timber beams, and textured plaster walls complete the look.

Suits: Homes with Mediterranean or Spanish-influenced architecture, those who want a strong sense of place and character.



INDUSTRIAL

Industrial kitchens embrace the raw and unfinished — exposed brick, concrete, metal, and dark tones create a warehouse-inspired aesthetic that is cool, confident, and deliberately undecorated. Open shelving in raw timber, stainless steel appliances, and pendant or track lighting complete the look. At its best this style feels purposeful and strong. It's not for those who want warmth as their primary feeling.

Suits: Inner-city homes and apartments, converted warehouses, those with a strong preference for dark and moody palettes.

WHAT STYLE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

Now that you've read through the styles, resist the urge to immediately decide. Instead, work through these prompts and let your answers point you in the right direction.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

- Which two or three styles did you find yourself drawn back to as you read?
- Which styles felt immediately wrong — and why?
- How do you want your kitchen to feel? Choose three words.
- What does your home's architecture and existing character suggest — and do you want to work with it or push against it?
- Do you prefer minimal and clean, or layered and characterful?
- Are you drawn to natural materials that develop character over time, or finishes that stay consistent and low-maintenance?
- What do you consistently love in homes, hotels, or restaurants you've been drawn to?
- What are your hard no's aesthetically?

TRANSLATING YOUR ANSWERS INTO A DIRECTION

Once you've worked through the prompts, use this as a loose guide to narrow your direction:

If you're drawn to clean lines and a sleek, streamlined finish: Modern or Minimalist.

If you gravitated toward light, calm, and natural: look at Japandi, Scandinavian, or Minimalist.

If you want warmth and organic texture without being rustic: Organic Modern, Mid-Century Modern, Coastal, or Contemporary.

If you love character, detail, and craftsmanship: French Provincial, Classic, Country, or Hamptons.

If you want your kitchen to make a statement: Luxe, Industrial, Mediterranean, or Eclectic.

If nothing felt quite right on its own: that's normal. Bring the elements you loved from two or three styles into your mood board and let the pattern emerge from there.

MOOD BOARD ACTIVITY

Now that you've reflected on your preferences and identified a loose direction, it's time to start collecting.

Using your journal prompt answers as a filter — not Pinterest as your starting point — begin gathering images that reflect the feeling you defined. The filter matters. If you open Pinterest without a filter you'll save everything and learn nothing.

WHAT TO COLLECT:

- Cabinetry profiles and colours that feel right
- Benchtop and splashback materials
- Hardware styles
- Lighting
- Overall kitchen shots that make you stop scrolling

HOW TO BUILD IT:

- **Digital:** Canva, Pinterest board, or a saved folder on your phone
- **Physical:** printed images, magazine clippings, material samples

ONCE YOU HAVE 15–20 IMAGES, ASK YOURSELF:

- What three words describe what I've collected?
- What colours, finishes, or materials keep repeating?
- What are my must-haves based on what I keep saving?
- Is there anything in my collection that doesn't belong — that I saved for someone else's life, not mine?

COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE:

My kitchen should feel _____, and the most important thing it needs to do is _____.

5

LAYOUT & CONFIGURATION

THE MOST PERMANENT DECISION YOU'LL MAKE

Every finish in your kitchen can be changed after the fact — doors can be repainted, handles swapped, benchtops replaced. Your layout cannot. Once the plumbing is set, the walls are fixed, and the cabinetry is installed, changing the layout means starting again. This is why layout is the decision that deserves the most time, the most scrutiny, and the most professional input of anything in this book.

This chapter covers everything you need to make a confident, informed layout decision — the common configurations, how to choose between them, how to plan what goes where, and the key dimensions and principles that separate a kitchen that works from one that looks good but frustrates you daily.

Work through it in order. Layout decisions are sequential — each one informs the next. The sequence is:

1. Understand your constraints
2. Choose your layout configuration
3. Natural Light, Visual Balance & Traffic Flow
4. Plan your zones and workflow
5. Resolve your configuration details
6. Confirm your dimensions

STEP 1

Understand Your Constraints First

Before exploring layout options, you need to understand what's actually possible in your specific space. Not every renovator has the same degree of freedom — and knowing your constraints upfront prevents you from falling in love with a layout that isn't achievable without significant additional cost.

FULLY FLEXIBLE

You're doing a complete gut renovation, your trades have assessed the space, and structural or plumbing changes are on the table. You can explore any layout option.

PARTIALLY CONSTRAINED

Some elements are fixed — a load-bearing wall that can't move, a concrete slab that makes relocating plumbing expensive, or a drain location that limits where the sink can go — but other elements can move. Your layout options are real but narrowed.

SIGNIFICANTLY CONSTRAINED

You're working within an existing footprint with fixed plumbing, fixed electrical, and fixed structural elements. Your layout options are limited to what can be achieved within those constraints — which may still be considerable, but needs to be assessed honestly.

How to find out which applies to you:
*B*efore spending time designing a layout, walk through Chapter 3 and have a conversation with your builder and plumber about what's fixed and what's movable in your specific home. This is the single most important piece of information you need before any layout decisions are made.

ACTIVITY

Understanding Your Constraints

WHICH CATEGORY APPLIES TO YOU?

☐ Fully flexible	Structural and plumbing changes are on the table
☐ Partially constrained	Some elements are fixed, others can move
☐ Significantly constrained	Working largely within existing footprint

WHAT ARE YOUR FIXED CONSTRAINTS?

STEP 2 **Choose Your Layout Configuration**

The layout configurations below represent the most common kitchen arrangements. Read through all of them before deciding — understanding the full range of options makes it much easier to identify which one suits your space, your household, and how you cook.

How to Choose Your Layout

Before diving into the individual configurations, use these questions to narrow your options:

HOW LARGE IS YOUR KITCHEN FOOTPRINT?

Single wall and galley layouts suit compact spaces. L-shape suits medium spaces. U-shape and island configurations work best in larger kitchens with adequate clearance on all sides.

HOW MANY PEOPLE COOK SIMULTANEOUSLY?

Single-cook households have more layout flexibility. Two-cook households benefit from layouts that create separation between zones — parallel galleys, L-shapes with an island, or U-shapes where zones are naturally divided.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR KITCHEN AND LIVING AREAS?

Open-plan layouts benefit from island or peninsula configurations that create a social connection between the kitchen and living space. Closed or semi-closed kitchens work well with U-shape or galley configurations where efficiency is prioritised over openness.

ARE THERE DOORS, WINDOWS, OR STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS THAT LIMIT YOUR WALL SPACE?

Every door and window reduces available wall run for cabinetry. Map your fixed elements before committing to a configuration.

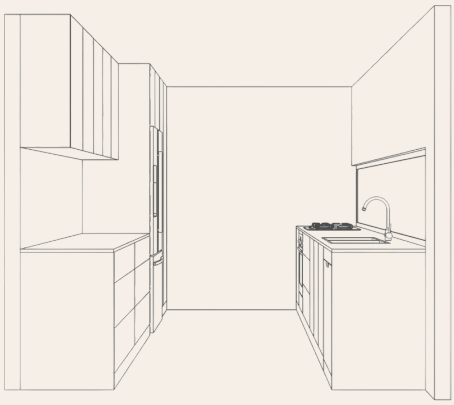
THE CONFIGURATIONS



SINGLE WALL (INLINE)

All cabinetry, appliances, and benchtop positioned along one single wall. The most space-efficient layout — ideal for compact kitchens, apartments, and open-plan spaces where the kitchen shares a wall with a living area. Limited bench and storage space is the primary constraint. Works particularly well when paired with an island or peninsula opposite.

Key Features: space-saving, minimal footprint, suits compact and open-plan spaces. Best paired with: Island or peninsula opposite for added bench space and storage.



GALLEY

Two parallel runs of cabinetry facing each other — named after the narrow, efficient kitchens found in ships. Highly functional for serious cooking — everything is within reach and the workflow is linear and logical. Works in both narrow and wider spaces depending on clearance between the two runs. Minimum 900mm between facing benchtops — 1200mm is preferable where two people cook simultaneously.

Key Features: Highly efficient workflow, maximum storage for footprint, suits both compact and larger spaces. Consider: can feel closed in if the run is long and narrow with no natural light at either end.



L-SHAPE

Cabinetry running along two adjoining walls forming an L. One of the most versatile and widely used layouts in Australian homes — creates a natural work triangle between the three main work zones, leaves the room feeling open, and handles corners well with the right internal solutions. Suits a wide range of kitchen sizes.

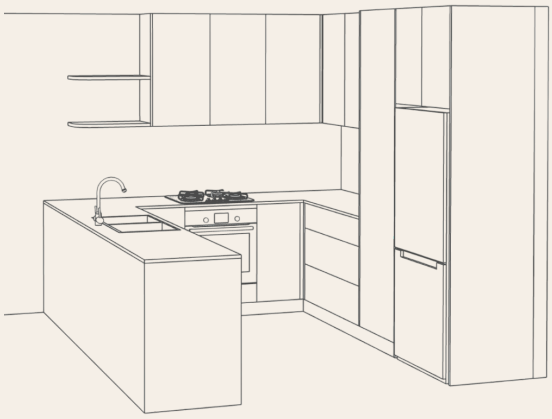
Key Features: Open and spacious, efficient workflow, flexible design, good use of corners. Best paired with: island or dining table in the open area opposite for additional bench space and social connection.



L-SHAPE WITH ISLAND

The L-shape configuration with a freestanding island bench positioned in the open area. One of the most popular layouts in contemporary Australian renovations — the island adds significant bench space, creates a social hub between the kitchen and living area, and allows multiple people to work simultaneously without collision. Requires adequate clearance on all sides of the island — see dimensions section below.

Key Features: Generous workspace, strong social connection, suits entertaining households. Requires: minimum kitchen footprint of approximately 4m x 3.5m to accommodate island clearances comfortably.



U-SHAPE

Cabinetry running along three adjoining walls forming a U. The layout with the most storage and bench space — ideal for serious cooks who want dedicated zones for prep, cooking, and cleaning without overlap. Can feel enclosed in smaller spaces — works best in larger kitchens where the U is generous enough to move within comfortably.

Key Features: Maximum storage and bench space, highly efficient for serious cooking, suits larger kitchens. Consider: the width of the U opening — too narrow and the layout feels claustrophobic; too wide and the efficiency advantage is lost.



U-SHAPE WITH ISLAND

The U-shape configuration with an island positioned in front of the open side. Creates the most generous kitchen in terms of both workspace and storage — suits large kitchens and households that cook seriously and entertain frequently. Requires the most space of any configuration — the island needs adequate clearance from the U on all sides.

Key Features: Maximum workspace and storage, suits large households and frequent entertainers. Requires: a generous kitchen footprint — this layout needs space to work well.



BACK RUN WITH ISLAND

A single run of cabinetry along one wall with a freestanding island positioned in front of it. One of the most popular contemporary kitchen configurations — the back run houses the main appliances, sink, and storage while the island provides additional bench space, a social connection to the living area, and often seating. Creates an open, uncluttered aesthetic that works particularly well in open-plan homes where the kitchen flows into a living or dining space.

Key Features: open and social, clean aesthetic, strong connection to living areas, suits open-plan homes. Requires: enough depth in the room to accommodate the back run, the island, and adequate clearance between the two — a minimum room depth of approximately 3.5–4m is recommended.

ACTIVITY

Choosing Your Layout

Using the decision questions and configuration descriptions, sketch your preferred layout option on a blank page. Include:

- External walls, windows, and doors
- Fixed elements that can't move
- Your preferred cabinetry configuration

WHICH LAYOUT DID YOU CHOOSE AND WHY?

STEP 3 **Natural Light, Visual Balance & Traffic Flow**

Before locking in your chosen configuration, run it through these three design filters. These are the considerations that separate a kitchen that feels right from one that looks right on paper but creates daily friction in real life.

Natural Light

Natural light is one of the most underestimated variables in kitchen layout planning. How and where cabinetry is positioned directly affects how much light reaches the room — and a poorly planned layout can turn a naturally bright space into a dark, heavy one.

KEY PRINCIPLES:

Sink under or near a window where possible

This is the most used position in the kitchen — the natural light makes washing up more pleasant, provides ventilation, and creates a visual connection to the outdoors. It also means the most-used position in the kitchen has the best light.

Avoid tall cabinetry and tall appliances adjacent to windows

A full-height pantry or integrated fridge positioned beside a window blocks the light path into the room. Keep tall elements to the ends of a run or against solid walls away from windows.

Consider how your layout affects light at different times of day.

A kitchen that receives morning sun from the east will feel very different from one that receives afternoon sun from the west — and the position of cabinetry, islands, and overheads relative to those windows will determine how much of that light actually reaches the work zones.

In kitchens with limited natural light

Prioritise lighter finish colours, reflective surfaces (gloss cabinetry, stone benchtops, glass splashbacks), and generous artificial lighting. A well-lit kitchen with limited natural light will always feel better than a poorly lit one — but the layout needs to support the lighting plan.

Visual Balance & Proportion

A kitchen that feels visually right isn't an accident — it's the result of deliberate decisions about how the elements relate to each other in the space. As a designer, proportion and balance are assessed before a single cabinet dimension is confirmed.

KEY PRINCIPLES:

Keep tall elements to the ends of runs

Full-height pantry cabinets, integrated fridges, and tall oven towers positioned in the middle of a cabinetry run create a visual block that interrupts the flow of the kitchen. Positioning them at the ends — or grouping them together — creates a more balanced composition.

Balance upper and lower cabinetry

A kitchen that is all base cabinets with minimal overhead storage feels bottom-heavy. One that is all overhead cabinetry can feel oppressive. The relationship between upper and lower cabinetry — including the decision to use open shelving in some areas — affects the visual weight of the whole room.

Align to architecture where possible

Centring the rangehood on a window, aligning the island with the room's axis, or running the cabinetry to a structural feature rather than stopping arbitrarily creates a sense of intention and precision that immediately elevates the result. These decisions feel intuitive to a designer — but for a first-timer, it's worth consciously asking: does this element align to something, or does it just stop?

Symmetry is powerful — but not always right

A symmetrical cabinetry composition reads as formal and considered. An asymmetrical one can feel more dynamic and contemporary. Neither is wrong — but the choice should be deliberate.

Traffic Flow & Clearance

How people move through your kitchen during cooking is as important as where the appliances are positioned. A layout that creates collision points, bottlenecks, or forces people to cross through the main work zone to reach other areas of the home will create daily frustration regardless of how well it's designed aesthetically.

KEY PRINCIPLES:

Identify the main traffic path through your kitchen

The route people take to move between the living areas, dining areas, and the rest of the home. The kitchen layout should work with this path, not across it. Positioning the fridge near the entry point of the kitchen allows others to access it without moving through the main cooking zone.

Design out collision points

The most common collision points are: the dishwasher door opening into a walkway, the oven door opening into traffic, the fridge opening into cabinetry opposite, and two people reaching across each other between the sink and cooktop. Map these conflicts before anything is fixed. In a galley or U-shape at minimum clearance, avoid placing appliances directly opposite each other — a dishwasher and oven door open simultaneously in a 900mm galley makes both unusable at once.

Plan for how your household actually moves

If children regularly move through the kitchen while meals are being prepared, the cooking zone needs to be away from the main traffic path. If you entertain frequently and guests naturally drift into the kitchen, the layout needs to accommodate people standing around the island without blocking the work zones.

ACTIVITY

Natural Light, Visual Balance & Traffic Flow

WHERE DOES YOUR PRIMARY NATURAL LIGHT COME FROM AND HOW DOES IT AFFECT YOUR LAYOUT?

WHERE ARE THE POTENTIAL TRAFFIC COLLISION POINTS IN YOUR LAYOUT?

IS THERE ANYTHING IN YOUR LAYOUT THAT NEEDS TO MOVE BASED ON THESE CONSIDERATIONS?

STEP 4 **Plan Your Zones & Workflow**

Zones are dedicated areas of your kitchen that serve specific functions. Designing your zones deliberately — rather than positioning appliances and cabinetry based on what fits — is what separates a kitchen that flows intuitively from one that creates friction every time you use it.

The Workflow Principle

The most functional kitchen layouts sequence zones around the primary cooking workflow: **fridge → prep → cook → plate → serve.** When zones follow this sequence, movement through the kitchen during cooking is natural and minimal. When they don't — when the prep zone is at one end and the cooktop at the other with the fridge in between — every cooking session involves unnecessary back-and-forth.

This doesn't mean your kitchen must be a perfectly linear sequence — the shape of your space will determine how the sequence wraps around the room. But the principle should guide where each zone lands within your layout.

THE SEVEN ZONES

1

Fridge & Cold Storage Zone
Store: fridge, freezer, cold drinks

Position near the kitchen entry point where possible — allows groceries to be unpacked and others to access the fridge without entering the main cooking zone. In the workflow sequence this is the starting point — the fridge feeds the prep zone.

Best placement: at the end of a cabinetry run near the kitchen entry, away from the cooktop and oven.

2

Prep Zone
Store: knives, chopping boards, mixing bowls, utensils, food processor

The most used zone in the kitchen — it needs the most bench space and the best light. Positioned between the fridge and cooktop in the workflow sequence. The sink typically anchors this zone — washing, draining, and prepping happen in the same area.

Best placement: central bench run with generous space on both sides of the sink. Natural light here is a priority.

3

Cooking Zone
Store: pots, pans, lids, cooking utensils, oils, spices

Anchored by the cooktop and oven. Everything used during active cooking should be within reach of this zone — pots in a drawer beneath the cooktop, oils and spices in a pull-out adjacent to it, utensils within arm's reach.

Best placement: adjacent to the prep zone, away from the main traffic path. Allow adequate benchtop on both sides of the cooktop.

4

Plating & Serving Zone
Store: dinner plates, serving dishes, glasses

The transition between cooking and eating — plates come out here, food is plated, and dishes move to the table. Positioning this zone adjacent to the cooking zone and close to the dining area minimises the distance food travels from stove to table.

Best placement: adjacent to the cooktop, closest to the dining area or island seating.

5

Cleaning Zone
Store: dishwasher, sink, cleaning products, bin

Anchored by the sink and dishwasher. The bin belongs here — adjacent to the prep zone for cooking waste and adjacent to the dishwasher for easy scraping and loading. The dishwasher should always be directly next to the sink.

Best placement: sink central to the bench run, dishwasher immediately adjacent. Pull-out bin within the same zone.

6

Pantry & Food Storage Zone
Store: dry goods, canned goods, snacks, baking supplies

Can be a dedicated pantry cabinet, a walk-in pantry, or a butler's pantry — the format depends on your space. Position near the prep zone so ingredients move naturally from storage to bench without crossing the cooking zone.

Best placement: adjacent to or within reach of the prep zone, away from heat sources.

7

Coffee, Appliance & Secondary Zone
Store: coffee machine, kettle, toaster, daily appliances, kids' snacks

Not every household needs a dedicated secondary zone — but for those with a serious coffee setup, a household with children, or anyone who entertains frequently, a designated secondary zone keeps daily rituals out of the main cooking workflow. Can be incorporated into the island, a butler's pantry, or an appliance cabinet.

Best placement: away from the main cooking zone, often at one end of the island or in a butler's pantry.

Planning What Goes Where

One of the most overlooked steps in kitchen planning is physically accounting for everything you own before the cabinetry is designed. A beautifully designed kitchen that doesn't fit your actual possessions will require compromises from day one.

BEFORE FINALISING YOUR LAYOUT:

- Take stock of your current kitchen — what works, what doesn't, what you're keeping
- Measure the storage you currently use and how it's organised
- Lay your items out on the floor to match the approximate depth of your new cabinets and estimate how much width you need for each category
- Do a kitchen purge — remove anything you don't use regularly. Designing storage around items you never use is wasted space.

ACTIVITY

Zones & Workflow

Map your seven zones onto your layout sketch. Label each zone and note what will be stored there.

Does your zone sequence follow the fridge → prep → cook → plate → serve workflow? If not, what needs to adjust?

STEP 5 **Configuration Details**

Doors vs Drawers

At the layout stage, the question isn't just which is better — it's where each one belongs. The ratio of doors to drawers in each zone shapes how the cabinetry reads visually and how easily you can work in that part of the kitchen.

As a starting point, plan drawers into your high-use zones — prep, cooking, and plating — and doors where height, bulk, or budget makes more sense. Most kitchens land on a mix, and that's exactly how it should be. We'll go deeper into the pros and cons of each in Chapter 8.

DRAWERS SUIT

Your daily zones — cooking gear, crockery, cutlery, utensils, and pantry items you reach for every day.

DOORS SUIT

Tall pantry cabinets, appliance storage, bulky items, bins, and the under-sink cabinet.

As you sketch your layout, mark which cabinets will be drawer banks and which will be doors. A run of drawers creates strong horizontal lines, while doors give a calmer, more vertical rhythm, so the mix affects how the kitchen looks as much as how it works.

Wall Cabinets vs Open Shelving

What goes above the bench has a big impact on how heavy or open your kitchen feels, so it's worth deciding where each belongs while you're still planning the layout.

WALL CABINETS

Your workhorse upper storage. Plan them where you need concealed capacity — above the prep and cleaning zones for everyday crockery, glassware, and overflow

OPEN SHELVING

Best used as a design moment rather than your main storage. Think either side of a rangehood, beside a window, or as a break in a long run of overheads.

ON YOUR LAYOUT

Mark your wall cabinet runs first, then choose one or two spots for open shelving. If you're tempted to go open throughout, read the honest take in Chapter 8 before committing. It looks beautiful styled, but it shows everything.

Ceiling Height & Cabinetry Height

One of the most commonly overlooked layout decisions — and one that needs to be made before cabinetry is quoted.

OPTION 1

Cabinetry to the ceiling
Takes cabinetry all the way to the ceiling with no gap above. Maximises storage, creates a seamless, built-in aesthetic, and eliminates the dust-collecting gap above cabinets. Requires careful planning around ceiling irregularities and is more expensive to manufacture and install. The most resolved aesthetic outcome in most kitchens.

OPTION 2

Standard cabinetry height with bulkhead
Cabinetry stops at a standard height (typically 2100–2400mm) with a bulkhead built above to meet the ceiling. A clean, deliberate finish — the bulkhead gives the kitchen a defined top line. Less storage than ceiling-height cabinetry but simpler to manufacture.

OPTION 3

Standard cabinetry height with open gap
Cabinetry stops at standard height and the space above is left open. The most budget-friendly option — but the open gap collects dust and grease and is difficult to keep clean in a kitchen environment. Generally not recommended unless the gap is large enough to use as genuine display or storage space.

The recommendation: In most Australian kitchens, taking cabinetry to ceiling height or using a bulkhead produces the most resolved result. Discuss the ceiling height option with your cabinetmaker early — it affects the entire cabinetry quote.

ACTIVITY

Configuration Details

WHICH ZONES WILL BE PRIMARILY DRAWERS AND WHICH WILL USE DOORS?

WHERE WILL YOU USE WALL CABINETS AND WHERE WILL YOU INTRODUCE OPEN SHELVING?

WHAT CEILING HEIGHT TREATMENT ARE YOU CHOOSING — TO CEILING, BULKHEAD, OR OPEN GAP?

STEP 6 **Key Dimensions**

These are the dimensions a designer references constantly throughout the layout phase. They're not rigid rules — every kitchen is different and your height, your household, and your specific space may call for adjustments. But they are the starting point from which all adjustments are made.

BENCHTOP & CABINETRY HEIGHTS

ELEMENT	STANDARD	NOTES
Benchtop height	900mm	Increase to 920-950mm for taller users
Base cabinet depth	600-650mm	This is to accommodate appliances. Can be less if no appliances.
Wall cabinet depth	320-350mm	450mm to accommodate wall microwave
Standard cabinetry height	2100mm-2400mm	Depends on sheet size. Larger sheet sizes add to the cost.
Ceiling height cabinetry	To ceiling	Pair with shadowline or bulkhead

CLEARANCES & WALKWAYS

ELEMENT	MINIMUM	RECOMMENDED
Between facing benchtops	900mm	1200mm for larger households
Around island	900mm	1100-1200mm if multiple people in space + appliances
Dishwasher door clearance	Full door extension + 400mm	Confirm no adjacent door conflicts
Oven door clearance	Full door extension + 400mm	Avoid positioning opposite a walkway

ISLAND BENCH DIMENSIONS

ELEMENT	STANDARD	NOTES
Island Depth (working surface)	600-900mm	
Island depth (working + seating)	900-1200mm	
Seating overhang	300-400mm	Minimum for comfortable knee clearance
Island Length	1200mm minimum 2000-2500mm standard	If you have the space, make the island to suit slab size (won't require joins)
Bar stool height (900mm bench)	650-700mm seat height	If you are having a thick stone profile, it will eat into the height for stools. Keep this in mind.

SPLASHBACK & LIGHTING HEIGHTS

ELEMENT	MINIMUM	RECOMMENDED
Splashback height - electric cooktop	600mm	
Splashback height - gas cooktop	650mm	
Microwave in wall cabinet	450-500mm above benchtop	Safety - don't go higher than eye level
Wall oven height (to top of oven)	1700-1850mm from floor	Brings oven cavity to comfortable working height
Pendant height above island	700-800mm above benchtop	Bottom of pendant at or below eye level

6

APPLIANCES

PLAN YOUR APPLIANCES BEFORE YOU PLAN YOUR KITCHEN

The most common appliance mistake in a kitchen renovation isn't choosing the wrong brand — it's choosing too late.

Appliance decisions need to happen before your cabinetry is designed, not after. Every appliance you select has specific dimensions, clearance requirements, ventilation needs, and service connections that directly affect how your cabinetry is built and where your plumbing and electrical points are located. A rangehood chosen after cabinetry is ordered may not fit the space. An oven selected after electrical is roughed in may require a circuit that can no longer be easily added. An integrated fridge specified late may mean the cabinet opening is the wrong size.

THE RULE IS SIMPLE:

Lock in your appliances, then design the cabinetry around them.

You don't need to have purchased everything before design begins — but you need to know what you're getting. Have your appliance list confirmed and your spec sheets downloaded before your cabinetmaker draws a single cabinet.

SET A SEPARATE APPLIANCE BUDGET

Appliances are one of the most significant costs in a kitchen renovation and one of the most commonly underestimated. A full appliance suite — cooktop, oven, rangehood, dishwasher, and fridge — can range from under $5,000 at the entry level to well over $30,000 at the premium end. That range is wide enough that without a dedicated budget allocation, appliances can quietly blow out your overall renovation budget before cabinetry quotes have even come in.

Set your appliance budget separately from your cabinetry and trades budget. Decide early what proportion of your overall budget goes to appliances — and stick to it.

UNDERSTANDING QUALITY TIERS

Not all appliances are created equal — and the difference between a $500 and a $3,000 version of the same appliance is not always obvious from looking at it. Here's a broad framework for understanding what you're actually paying for at each tier:

ENTRY LEVEL	MID RANGE	PREMIUM
Functional and reliable for everyday use. Fewer features, simpler controls, and less refined finishes. Perfectly adequate for a household that uses the kitchen for straightforward daily cooking. Brands in this tier include Euromaid, Chef, and Westinghouse.	Better build quality, more cooking functions, improved energy efficiency, and more considered aesthetics. The sweet spot for most renovators — you get meaningfully better performance without paying for features you may never use. Brands include Bosch, Fisher & Paykel, Smeg, and AEG.	Engineered to a higher standard across every component — motors, seals, controls, and finishes. Significantly better performance, longer lifespan, and more sophisticated features. Worth the investment for households that cook seriously and use their appliances daily. Brands include Miele, V-Zug, Gaggenau, and Wolf.

THE HONEST ADVICE

Don't spend equally across every appliance. Invest more in the appliances you use most — the cooktop, oven, and rangehood — and be more budget-conscious on appliances that do a straightforward job regardless of price point, like the dishwasher.

APPLIANCES

What to Consider

COOKTOPS

Gas

Preferred by serious cooks for its instant, visual heat control. Requires a licensed gasfitter to install or extend, and some states are now restricting new connections, so check local rules. If your home doesn't have gas, factor in the connection cost as a significant expense.

Induction

The fastest-growing cooktop choice in Australian renovations. Heats only the cookware, so the surface stays relatively cool, making it safer and easier to clean than gas or ceramic. Requires a dedicated hard-wired circuit, typically rated around 32 amps (check the spec sheet for your model). If you're switching from gas, this almost always means a new circuit installed by a licensed electrician, so budget for it as a confirmed cost. Note: induction requires magnetic cookware, so check your existing pots and pans before committing.

Ceramic / Radial Electric

A solid entry-level option. Heats via electric elements beneath a flat glass surface. Slower to heat and cool than induction, and easier to clean than gas. Also requires a dedicated hard-wired circuit, but if you're replacing an existing electric cooktop, your current circuit can often be reused, which makes it the most straightforward option from a services perspective.

Integrated Cooktop Ventilation (Bora and similar)

An increasingly popular alternative to overhead rangehoods — the extraction system is built directly into the cooktop, drawing steam and cooking vapour downward rather than upward. Eliminates the need for a canopy or overhead hood entirely and is particularly useful where ceiling ducting is not possible. Requires specific base cabinet planning and its own dedicated ventilation duct path.

OVENS

Key functions explained:

FAN-FORCED / CONVENTIONAL

A fan circulates hot air throughout the oven cavity for even, consistent cooking. The standard in most modern ovens — more efficient and more even than conventional heat.

Conventional: heat from elements at the top and bottom of the oven without a fan. Creates distinct heat zones — useful for specific baking applications but less versatile overall.

PYROLYTIC SELF-CLEANING

The oven heats to an extremely high temperature (around 500°C) to incinerate food residue, reducing it to ash that can be wiped away. Eliminates the need for oven cleaning products. A genuinely useful feature if you cook frequently.

STEAM

Injects steam into the oven cavity during cooking — keeps food moist, improves bread crusts, and is increasingly used for reheating. Available as a dedicated steam oven or as a steam-assist function within a standard oven.

SOUS VIDE

Precise low-temperature cooking typically associated with restaurant kitchens — increasingly available as a function in premium residential ovens.

AIR FRY

A high-speed fan function that circulates hot air at high intensity to crisp food without oil. Available in many mid-range and premium ovens as a dedicated mode.

Placement options:

UNDER-BENCH

Positioned beneath the cooktop. The most space-efficient option and the most common in smaller kitchens. Requires bending to access — less ergonomic than wall-mounted options.

WALL OVEN

Installed within tall cabinetry at a height that brings the oven to waist or eye level — around 900–1850mm from the floor. More ergonomic, easier to check and remove food safely, and creates a more considered cabinetry composition. Requires a tall cabinet allocation.

STACKED DOUBLE OVEN

Two ovens installed within a single tall cabinet — increasingly common in households that cook in volume or entertain frequently.

FREESTANDING OVEN/COOKTOP COMBINATION

A single unit combining cooktop and oven in one freestanding appliance. Suits smaller kitchens, budget-conscious renovations, and those who want a classic cooking aesthetic.

INTEGRATED VS FREESTANDING

One of the most significant appliance decisions you'll make — and one that needs to happen before cabinetry is designed.

Freestanding appliances are self-contained units that sit within the cabinetry but aren't built into it. They're easier to install, easier to replace, and less expensive. The trade-off is that they're visible — the appliance face is part of the kitchen's aesthetic rather than hidden behind it.

Integrated appliances are built into the cabinetry behind a custom door panel that matches your cabinetry finish. The appliance disappears into the joinery — you see only a seamless run of cabinet doors. This creates a significantly more refined and minimal aesthetic but comes with higher cost, longer lead times, and more complex installation. Integrated appliances also require specific cabinetry dimensions that must be confirmed with your cabinetmaker before anything is built.

Semi-integrated sits between the two — the appliance is recessed into the cabinetry with a visible control panel at the top but a door panel on the lower portion. Common in dishwashers.

If a fully integrated kitchen is part of your vision, confirm which appliances will be integrated before design begins — it affects almost every cabinet in the kitchen.



RANGEHOODS

The rangehood is the most underestimated and most under-researched appliance in most kitchen renovations — and one of the most impactful on daily liveability. A rangehood that doesn't extract adequately will leave cooking smells, steam, and grease in your kitchen long after you've finished cooking.

DUCTED VS RECIRCULATING:

DUCTED

Draws cooking vapour through a duct and exhausts it outside. By far the more effective option — always choose ducted where physically possible. Requires a confirmed duct path to an external wall or roof before selecting a model.

RECIRCULATING

Filters air through charcoal and returns it to the kitchen. Used where ducting outside isn't possible — apartments or internal walls. Functional but significantly less effective. Charcoal filters require regular replacement.



Confirm with your builder or cabinetmaker that a duct path to the outside is achievable before selecting a model — it affects which rangehoods are feasible and how much cabinetry space the duct will consume.

DISHWASHERS

Size: Standard dishwashers are 600mm wide. Compact options at 450mm are available for smaller kitchens. Confirm the opening width in your cabinetry before purchasing.



MICROWAVE

Placement options:

BUILT INTO WALL CABINETRY

Positioned within overhead cabinetry at approximately 450mm above the benchtop. This is the lowest comfortable height for most users — only go higher if you are tall, as reaching into a hot microwave above eye level is a safety concern.

BUILT INTO UNDER-BENCH CABINETRY

Concealed below the benchtop. Keeps it out of sight — works well if microwaves are used infrequently.

STACKED ABOVE WALL OVEN

A common and practical configuration in tall oven cabinetry that maximises the use of the vertical run.

APPLIANCE CABINET OR BUTLER'S PANTRY

Completely removes the microwave from the main kitchen view. Best suited to those who want a clean, minimal main kitchen aesthetic.

COMBINATION MICROWAVE/OVEN

A single appliance that functions as both a microwave and a conventional oven — useful in kitchens where space for a separate oven and microwave is limited.

Always provide a landing zone — a section of benchtop or a pull-out shelf directly adjacent to the microwave for placing hot dishes safely.

FRIDGES

Style options:

FRENCH DOOR

Two doors on top, freezer drawer below. The most popular configuration in Australian renovations — provides excellent visibility and access to the refrigerator section with the freezer less frequently accessed below.

BOTTOM MOUNT

Single door on top, freezer drawer below. Similar logic to French door — keeps the most-used section at eye level.

SIDE-BY-SIDE

Fridge and freezer in equal vertical columns side by side. Provides easy access to both sections but typically offers less usable shelf space than French door configurations.

SINGLE DOOR TOP MOUNT

The most traditional configuration. Freezer on top, fridge below. Least ergonomic of the options — requires bending to access the fridge section — but the most affordable.

STANDARD DEPTH VS COUNTER-DEPTH

Standard fridges project beyond the depth of surrounding cabinetry — often by 100–150mm. Counter-depth (or integrated-depth) fridges are designed to sit flush with the cabinetry line, creating a significantly more built-in, cohesive appearance. Counter-depth fridges cost more and generally offer less internal storage volume — but for those prioritising a seamless kitchen aesthetic, the difference in appearance is substantial.

PLUMBED WATER CONNECTION

Fridges with integrated ice makers or water dispensers require a cold water connection. If the fridge is located near the sink, this can typically be routed discreetly through the cabinetry. If it's located elsewhere — such as in a butler's pantry — assess whether the connection can be brought from underfloor, above ceiling, or through wall cavities depending on your home's construction.

ADDITIONAL APPLIANCES WORTH PLANNING FOR

These are increasingly common in Australian kitchen renovations and all require either plumbing, electrical, or specific cabinetry planning. If any of these are on your wish list, they need to be confirmed before design is finalised.

STEAM OVEN

Installed in a tall unit or below the bench, often stacked with a wall oven. Plumbed models need a cold water connection; tank-fed models only need power. Allow for the extra tall cabinetry early in the design.

WARMING DRAWER

Installed in a base cabinet or tall unit to keep food warm before serving. Requires a dedicated electrical connection. Most useful for households that entertain frequently.

PLUMBED COFFEE SYSTEM

Integrated espresso machines from brands like Miele and V-Zug require both a plumbed water connection and a dedicated electrical circuit. One of the most commonly forgotten appliances in the planning phase — if this is something you want, flag it early.

WINE FRIDGE / BAR FRIDGE

Requires electrical connection and adequate ventilation clearance within cabinetry. Confirm ventilation requirements from the spec sheet before the cabinet is built.

ZIP / BILLI BOILING WATER TAP

Requires both plumbing and electrical connection, plus a small under-sink tank that takes up under-bench cabinet space. One of the most popular kitchen additions in Australian renovations right now — plan the under-sink cabinet around it if it's on your list.

WORKFLOW & PLACEMENT

The Work Triangle — A Guide, Not a Rule

You'll likely encounter the concept of the work triangle early in your renovation research — a design principle that positions the fridge, sink, and cooktop in a triangular arrangement to minimise movement during cooking. It's a useful concept, but not a rule. In open-plan kitchens, larger kitchens, or households where multiple people cook simultaneously, the work triangle can be impractical or irrelevant. Use it as a starting point for thinking about flow — not as a constraint on your layout.

PLACEMENT GUIDE

REFRIGERATOR

Place it near the kitchen entry so groceries can be unloaded, and others can grab a drink, without crossing the cooking zone. Keep it at the end of a run so it doesn't break the cabinetry line or block natural light. Hinge the door so it opens toward the kitchen, not away from it.

SINK

Keep it central to the main work zone and within easy reach of the cooktop, because you'll regularly carry heavy pots of boiling water between the two. Place it under or near a window for light and ventilation where possible. Allow at least 400mm of benchtop on each side for drying, prep and general workspace.

DISHWASHER

Place it directly beside the sink, on whichever side suits how you naturally move and which hand you load with. Make sure the door opens fully without blocking a walkway, clashing with an adjacent drawer or door, or crowding whoever is at the sink.

COOKTOP

Allow 300–400mm of benchtop on each side for resting pots, utensils and safe clearance. Don't place it directly beside the sink, because water splashing onto a hot surface is a safety risk and the two zones compete. If space is tight, keep at least one side clear.

OVEN

Under a cooktop, make sure the drawer or cabinet below has adequate heat protection. Wall-mounted, set the base of the oven cavity around 900–1200mm from the floor for safe, comfortable use. Keep it out of walkways and away from doorways, because an open, hot oven door in a traffic zone is a hazard.

MICROWAVE

Refer to the placement options covered in the appliance selection section above. Regardless of where it's positioned, always plan a landing zone immediately adjacent for safely placing hot items.

BENCHTOP APPLIANCES

Be honest about what you use daily and what you use occasionally. Daily items like the kettle, toaster and coffee machine belong in a dedicated benchtop zone or a powered appliance garage, clear of the main prep area. Store occasional appliances in a cabinet or drawer.

Planning for Compromises

Every kitchen has constraints, such as structural elements, existing services or limited space. Confirm with your trades what can and can’t move before you finalise your layout. Some compromises are minor. Others, like a fixed drain on a concrete slab, will shape your layout no matter what your plans show.

When you have to compromise, put function before aesthetics. A beautiful kitchen that doesn’t flow will frustrate you every single day.

READING APPLIANCE SPECIFICATIONS

What You Need to Know

You don't need to become an expert in reading technical specification sheets — your cabinetmaker will work through the dimensional details professionally. What you do need to understand is the principle: every appliance has specific requirements that directly affect how the cabinetry around it is built and where services need to be located. These requirements live in the spec sheet.

Before your cabinetry is designed, download the spec sheet for every appliance you've selected and share it with your cabinetmaker. The spec sheet will contain the information they need — cutout dimensions, clearance requirements, ventilation specifications, and service locations.

THE KEY THINGS YOUR CABINETMAKER WILL LOOK FOR:

- Overall dimensions and cutout or opening size required
- Minimum clearances for ventilation and heat
- Power, gas, or water supply location
- Door swing or hinge requirements

The key thing you need to look for: confirm that the appliance you've chosen is actually compatible with the cabinetry configuration you want. An integrated fridge that requires a specific opening height, a rangehood that needs a specific duct diameter, or an oven that needs a minimum side clearance can all affect the cabinetry design if they're confirmed too late.

APPLIANCE PLANNING ACTIVITY

Use this to consolidate your appliance decisions before moving into the design phase.

STEP 1 **Confirm your appliance list**

APPLIANCE	FREESTANDING OR INTEGRATED	BRAND / MODEL (IF KNOWN)	SPEC SHEET DOWNLOADED
Cooktop			☐
Oven			☐
Rangehood			☐
Dishwasher			☐
Fridge / Freezer			☐
Microwave			☐
Steam Oven			☐
Warming Drawer			☐
Coffee System			☐
Wine / Bar Fridge			☐
Zip / Boiling Tap			☐

STEP 2 **Reflect on your current setup**

WHAT FRUSTRATES YOU MOST ABOUT YOUR CURRENT APPLIANCE LAYOUT?

_____

_____

_____

ARE THERE TRAFFIC FLOW ISSUES THAT AFFECT HOW YOU USE THE KITCHEN?

WHICH APPLIANCES DO YOU USE DAILY AND WHICH RARELY COME OUT?

DO YOU PREFER APPLIANCES HIDDEN, INTEGRATED, OR ACCESSIBLE ON THE BENCH?

STEP 3 **Placement Priorities**

Mark what appeals to you:

APPLIANCE STORAGE:	**BUILT-IN OPTIONS**
☐ Appliance garage with pocket doors for daily-use appliances	☐ Wall-mounted oven
☐ Dedicated appliance cabinet for less frequently used items	☐ Fully integrated fridge
☐ Appliances accessible on the bench at all times	☐ Fully integrated dishwasher
	☐ Built-in microwave or combination oven
	☐ Integrated cooktop ventilation

BONUS PROMPTS:

Use this space to explore your thoughts further:

WHAT IS YOUR NON-NEGOTIABLE WHEN IT COMES TO APPLIANCES?

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO INVEST MORE OF YOUR APPLIANCE BUDGET?

WHERE ARE YOU COMFORTABLE SPENDING LESS?

7

FINISHES BREAKDOWN

THE DECISIONS THAT DEFINE HOW YOUR KITCHEN LOOKS AND FEELS

Finishes are everything you see and touch in your kitchen — the door material, the benchtop surface, the splashback, the handles, the sink, the tapware, and the lighting. They're the layer that sits on top of your layout and configuration decisions, and they're where the aesthetic vision you defined in Chapter 1 finally becomes tangible.

These decisions are made after your layout is locked in — not before. It's tempting to start here because finishes are the most visually exciting part of the process, but choosing a benchtop before you know your layout is like choosing a paint colour before you've decided which walls are staying. Get the structure right first, then come to this chapter.

A FEW THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU START:

Budget varies enormously across every category. Throughout this chapter you'll see a cost guide ranging from $ to $$$$. Use this as a relative indicator within each category rather than a fixed dollar amount — a $$$$ benchtop and a $$$$ door material do not cost the same in absolute terms. As a general guide: $ represents the most budget-conscious option in that category, $$$$ represents the premium end, and everything in between is a sliding scale of quality, durability, and aesthetic refinement.

You don't have to spend equally across all categories. In fact, the most considered kitchens rarely do. Decide early where you want to invest and where you're comfortable saving — your vision summary from Chapter 1 will help you make that call.

DOORS

Your door material is one of the most significant finish decisions you'll make — it affects both the aesthetic and the budget more than almost anything else in the kitchen. Here's a breakdown of every major option available in the Australian market.

Laminate / Melamine

The most budget-friendly door option. Made from resin-impregnated decorative paper bonded to a particleboard or MDF substrate using heat and pressure. Edges are finished with a matching 1mm edge tape for protection against chipping.

PROS:	CONS:
• Affordable with a wide selection of colours, textures and finishes available • Scratch resistant, moisture resistant, easy to clean • Available in woodgrain, matte, and gloss	• Visible edge tape — not a seamless finish • Edges can peel or chip over time • Less premium in appearance than other options

Cost: $

Popular Brands Laminex, Polytec, Formica

Acrylic

Made by bonding acrylic sheets to an MDF substrate, then sealed along the edges for protection against delamination, UV damage, and moisture. Best suited to flat-profile doors — the material doesn't lend itself to profiled designs.

PROS:	CONS:
• UV resistant — won't fade or yellow over time • Scratch-resistant and easy to clean • High-gloss finish is one of the most reflective available	• Fingerprints visible, particularly in darker colours • Visible edges — not a seamless finish • Limited to flat profiles only

Cost: $$$

Popular Brands Polytec, StyleLite, Nikpol

Thermolaminated

Made from moisture-resistant MDF with a durable decorative vinyl surface heat-moulded over the substrate. Creates a seamless, fully profiled door with no visible joins — which is why it opens up the full range of door profiles including shaker, v-groove, and fluted.

PROS:	CONS:
• Seamless finish with no visible joins • Wide range of door profiles available • Available in matte, satin, high-gloss, and woodgrain	• Can peel or warp near heat sources over time • Harder to repair if damaged

Cost:	$$$
Popular Brands	Polytec, Tesrol

Two-Pack Polyurethane

Considered the premium painted finish option in the Australian market. Made from moisture-resistant MDF coated in a two-pack polyurethane paint system, creating a smooth, seamless surface with no visible edges. Available in any paint colour from any brand, making it the most flexible option for custom colour schemes. Also supports the full range of door profiles.

PROS:	CONS:
• Smooth, seamless finish with no visible edges • Fully customisable in any colour • Available in matte, satin, and high-gloss • Full range of door profiles available • Can be repainted if you want to update the colour later or to fix wear and tear.	• Can chip on edges if impacted — though repairable • More expensive door option due to manufacturing time • Longer lead times than other materials

Cost:	$$$ - $$$$
Manufacturer	Custom — your appointed joiner

Timber Veneer

Made by applying a thin layer of genuine timber to a stable MDF or particleboard core, then sealed with a clear lacquer for protection. Gives the warmth and character of real wood at a more accessible price point than solid timber.

PROS:	CONS:
• Real timber layer with authentic woodgrain • More affordable than solid timber • Available in a wide range of timber species	• Limited capacity for refinishing — veneer is thin and must be treated carefully • Can dent or scratch more easily than other materials • Cannot be significantly sanded back like solid timber

Cost: $$$ - $$$$

Popular Brands New Age Veneers, Briggs Veneer, Bord Products

Solid Timber

The most premium door option — made entirely from natural wood with no composite materials. Each piece is selected for grain, colour, and strength. Increasingly used as an accent material rather than across an entire kitchen.

PROS:	CONS:
• Genuinely premium natural look and feel • Can be sanded and refinished over time • Can be painted or stained to change colour • Very durable with proper care and maintenance	• Requires sealing and ongoing maintenance • Higher cost investment • Can move or expand slightly with humidity changes

Cost: $$$$+

Popular Brands Farmer's Doors

DOOR PROFILES

Door profiles are the shapes and surface details routed or formed into your cabinet doors. They are one of the most powerful ways to define your kitchen's character — the difference between a flat door and a shaker door can shift an entire aesthetic.

It's worth knowing upfront that profiles are only available in certain materials. Thermolaminated, polyurethane, and solid timber all support the full range of profiles. Laminate, acrylic, and veneer are generally limited to flat profiles.

There are hundreds of profiles available — too many to catalogue here. What's more useful is understanding the groups they fall into, what each group communicates aesthetically, and which kitchen styles they suit.

Flat Profile

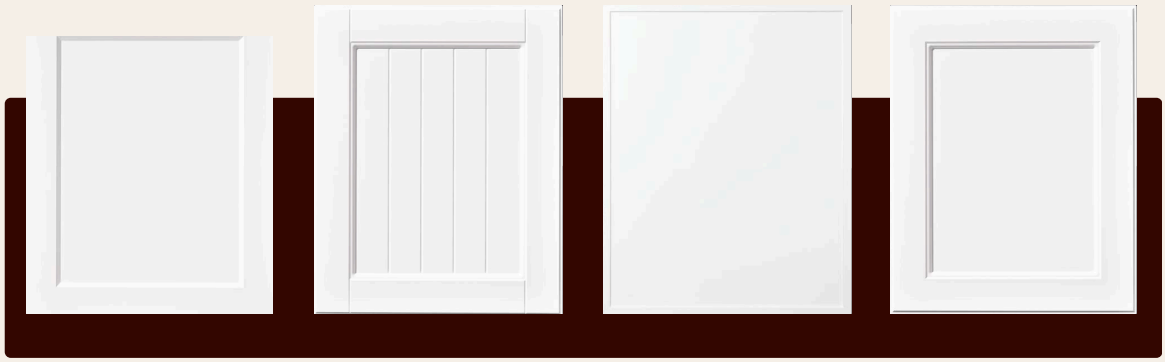
A completely smooth, undetailed door with no routing or surface features. The most minimal and contemporary option. Works best with handleless or integrated handle systems — adding a traditional bar handle to a flat door can feel disconnected; something with more character will complement it.

Suits	Modern, Minimalist, Japandi, Scandinavian, Organic Modern.
Available in	All door materials.

Shaker (Recessed Panel) Profiles

The most versatile and enduring profile group. Defined by a recessed centre panel within a flat frame — the depth and proportion of that recess is where the variations emerge, from a subtle 5mm shadow line to a deeper, more traditional inset. Shaker profiles are the baseline for an enormous range of kitchen styles and pair well with almost any handle type.

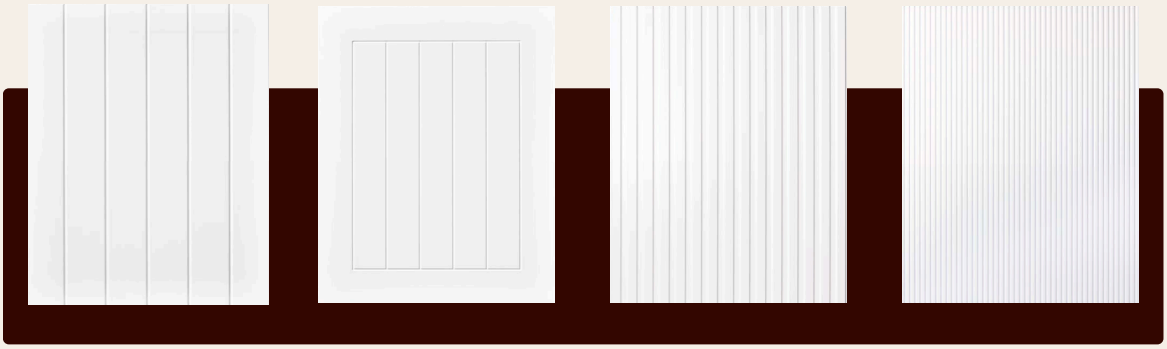
Suits	Hamptons, Classic, Contemporary, Coastal, Country.
Available in	Thermolaminated, polyurethane, solid timber.



V-Groove Profiles

Defined by one or more vertical grooves cut into the door face, creating a linear, panelled appearance. Can range from a single centre groove to a dense series of narrow channels across the full door width. Adds texture and visual interest without the traditional weight of a shaker profile.

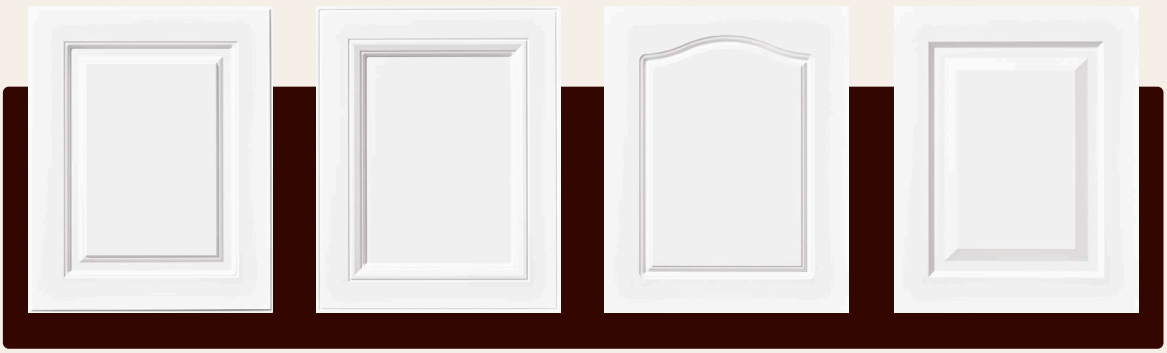
Suits	Coastal, Country, Hamptons, Contemporary.
Available in	Thermolaminated, polyurethane, solid timber.



Traditional Detailed Profiles

A broader category encompassing raised panels, arched tops, beaded edges, and ornate moulding details. These profiles communicate craftsmanship and heritage — they're the most decorative option and suit kitchens where the joinery is meant to feel like furniture.

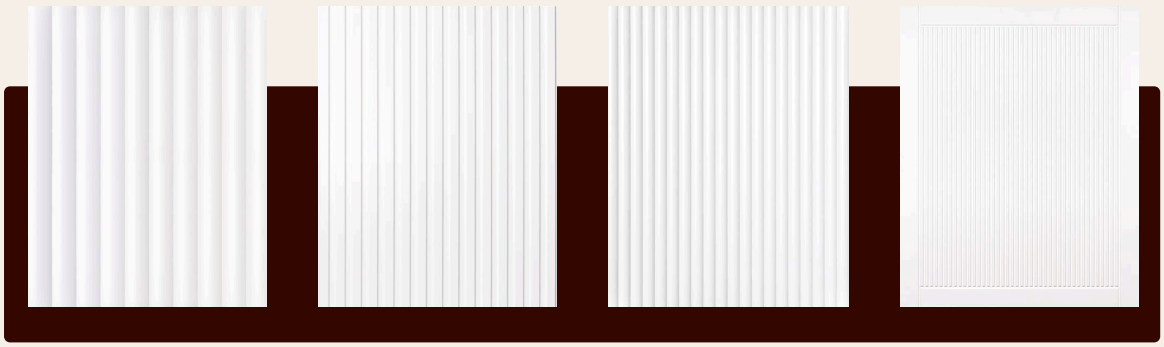
Suits	French Provincial, Classic, Country, Mediterranean.
Available in	Thermolaminated, polyurethane, solid timber.



Fluted & Cove Profiles

Two closely related profiles that work in opposite directions — fluted features raised rounded ridges that project outward, while cove is the inversion, with channels that recess inward for a softer, more shadowed effect. Both add texture and visual rhythm to a door face and work particularly well as an accent on a pantry, island, or feature cabinet rather than across every door in the kitchen.

Suits	Contemporary, Organic Modern, Japandi, Mid-Century Modern.
Available in	Thermolaminated, polyurethane, solid timber.



Insert Profiles

A framed door with an insert of almost any material — glass, reeded glass, rattan, cane, linen, fabric, mesh, or lattice. Used selectively on upper cabinets, a pantry, or a feature cabinet to break up solid cabinetry and introduce material contrast. The insert choice drives the style outcome — glass reads refined, rattan and cane lean warm and natural, mesh and lattice sit more contemporary.

Suits	Most styles, used as an accent. Particularly effective in Classic, Hamptons, Country, Contemporary, and Organic Modern kitchens.
Available in	Thermolaminated, polyurethane, solid timber.



Curved & Architectural Profiles

The most bespoke and distinctive profile category — encompassing arched doors, scalloped edges, and fully curved fronts. These are statement details that push a kitchen beyond the standard. Require skilled joinery and are typically custom made.

Suits	Organic Modern, Contemporary, Eclectic, French Provincial.
Available in	Polyurethane, solid timber.



BENCHTOPS

Your benchtop is one of the highest-use surfaces in your home — it needs to work as hard as it looks. Here's every major benchtop option available in the Australian market.

Laminate

Made by layering decorative paper over a particleboard core, sealed with a hard-wearing resin. Modern laminate benchtops have improved significantly in quality and appearance — the best options convincingly replicate stone and timber at a fraction of the cost.

PROS:	CONS:
• Most affordable benchtop option • Wide range of colours and textures including stone and timber looks • Low maintenance and stain resistant	• Can scratch, chip or burn easily • Edges may peel over time • Can warp if exposed to sustained moisture

Cost: $

Popular Brands Laminex, Polytec, Formica

Solid Timber

A benchtop made from natural timber, offering warmth and organic character that no manufactured material fully replicates. Requires ongoing maintenance to keep it in good condition. It will patina over time and only look better with age.

PROS:	CONS:
• Warm and genuinely natural aesthetic • Can be sanded and refinished over time • Works well in both modern and rustic kitchens • Sustainable resource	• Requires regular oiling or sealing • Can stain, scratch, or warp from sustained moisture exposure • Not heat proof — trivets required

Cost: $$-$$$$

Popular Species Oak, Blackbutt, Spotted Gum, Walnut, Jarrah

Engineered Stone

A manufactured surface made from mineral materials, resins, and pigments. Since Australia's 2024 ban on high-silica engineered stone, the major brands have released silica-free versions — so it remains one of the most popular benchtop choices for its durability, aesthetic range, and relatively accessible price point. Always confirm the product you choose is compliant.

PROS:	CONS:
• Durable, scratch resistant and non-porous • Available in a wide range of colours and patterns • Low maintenance and easy to clean • Can be finished with various edge profiles	• Not heat proof — hot pots can cause permanent damage • Priced in ranges — cost varies significantly between collections • Can chip on impact at edge

Cost: $$ - $$$

Popular Brands Caesarstone, YDL, Stone Ambassador, Talostone

(all brands are fairly equal in quality, but prices can vary)

Porcelain / Sintered Stone

Made from natural raw materials — clay, feldspar, silica, and mineral oxides — compressed and fired at extreme heat and pressure to create an exceptionally dense, hard surface. A fundamentally different material to engineered stone despite sometimes being displayed alongside it in showrooms.

PROS:	CONS:
• Extremely hard, scratch and impact resistant • Water, stain, and heat resistant • UV resistant — suitable for outdoor kitchens • Available in very large slab formats and ultra-thin profiles	• Limited edge profile options • Can't be curved in a mitred form • Thin profiles prone to chipping • Requires specialist fabrication and installation • Premium price point

Cost: $$$

Popular Brands Dekton, Neolith, Artedomus + most engineered stone brands

Natural Stone (Marble, Quartzite, Dolomite, Limestone, Granite, Travertine)

Cut and polished from naturally occurring stone, each slab is unique. The most premium and characterful benchtop option — and the one that requires the most ongoing care.

PROS:	CONS:
• Unique natural beauty — no two slabs identical • Timeless appeal that adds genuine value to a home • Wide range of stone types and movements available • Can be finished with various edge profiles	• Porous — requires regular sealing, especially marble • Most expensive benchtop category • Can stain or etch if not sealed and maintained • Heavy — may require additional cabinet support

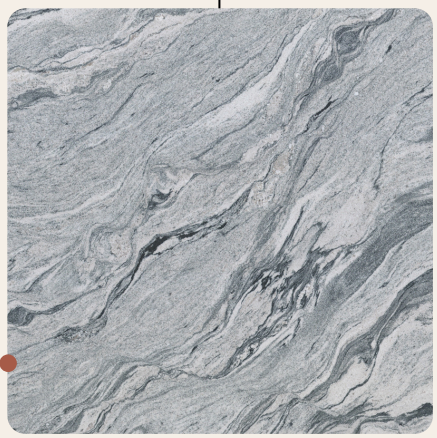
Cost:	$$$$+
Popular Choices	Carrara Marble, Super White Dolomite, Taj Mahal Quartzite, Calacatta Marble, Statuario

NATURAL STONE COMPARISON GUIDE

Not all natural stone is created equal. Marble is the most well-known — and the most high-maintenance — but it represents just one end of the spectrum. Several natural stones are significantly harder, less porous, and far more forgiving in a kitchen environment.

GRANITE

One of the hardest and most durable natural stones available. Low porosity, excellent heat and scratch resistance, and minimal maintenance requirements make it one of the most practical natural stone choices for a busy kitchen. The aesthetic is more varied and less veined than marble — speckled and granular in character.



Maintenance

Low — seal once a year and wipe clean daily.

QUARTZITE

The stone most often mistaken for marble — similar soft veining and movement, but significantly harder and less porous. A genuinely practical choice for those who love the marble aesthetic but want far better durability and stain resistance in daily use.



Maintenance

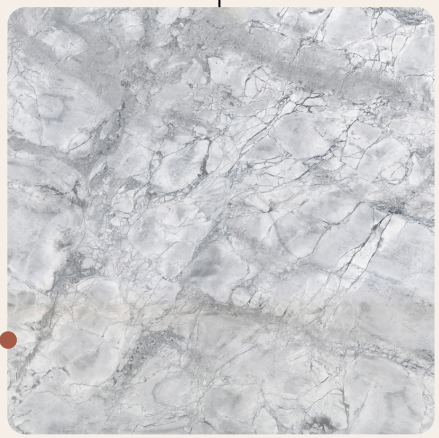
Low to medium — seal regularly and it will perform beautifully.

DOLOMITE

Sits between marble and quartzite in both appearance and performance. Softer and more luminous than quartzite, more resilient than marble. A good middle-ground option for those who want a refined, soft aesthetic without the full commitment of marble maintenance.

Maintenance

Low to medium — similar care requirements to quartzite.

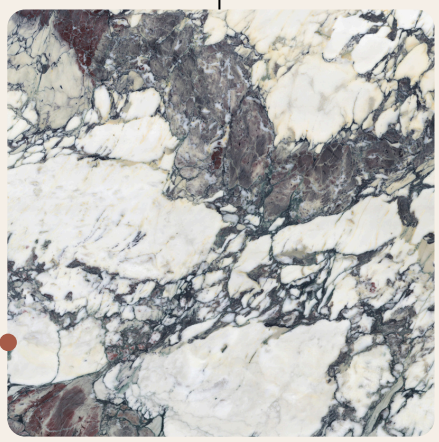


MARBLE

The most coveted and the most debated natural stone in kitchen design. Soft, porous, and prone to etching and staining — but undeniably beautiful and completely irreplaceable in its aesthetic. Marble develops a patina over time that many people come to love. Best suited to those who either use their kitchen lightly or genuinely embrace the lived-in character it develops.

Maintenance

High — requires regular sealing and careful daily use.



LIMESTONE

Soft, warm, and textural — limestone has a quiet, matte character that suits organic and Mediterranean aesthetics beautifully. However it is highly porous and relatively soft, making it better suited to lower-use surfaces or feature areas rather than a primary work surface.



Maintenance

High — not recommended as a primary benchtop in a busy kitchen.

TRAVERTINE

Characterised by its natural pitting and earthy, warm tones. Creates a rustic, aged aesthetic that works particularly well in Mediterranean, country, and organic modern kitchens. Like limestone, its porosity and softness make it better suited to lower-use applications.



Maintenance

High — requires filling, sealing, and careful ongoing care.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

If you love natural stone but have concerns about maintenance, start with granite or quartzite — both deliver the beauty of natural stone with significantly less upkeep. Dolomite is a strong middle-ground option. Marble, limestone, and travertine reward those who appreciate the character these stones develop over time and are willing to care for them accordingly.

Corian / Solid Surface

An acrylic-based manufactured material that is cast rather than cut — meaning it can be formed into seamless benchtops with integrated sinks, curved edges, and continuous runs with no joins. Less common than stone but increasingly popular in contemporary and minimalist Australian kitchens for its seamless finish and repairability.

PROS:	CONS:
• Fully seamless with no visible joins • Integrated sink options available — no join at the sink cutout • Repairable — scratches and minor damage can be sanded out • Non-porous and easy to clean	• Can scratch more easily than stone • Not heat proof • Less variation and natural character than stone

Cost:	$$$
Popular Choices	Corian, Staron

Concrete

A custom-made benchtop created by pouring and curing a cement-based mixture in place or off-site. Delivers a raw, tactile aesthetic that no other material replicates.

PROS:	CONS:
• Strong, durable and heat resistant • Completely customisable in colour, texture, and form • Adds a raw, industrial, or organic feel	• Requires sealing to prevent staining and cracking • Heavy — requires additional structural support • Must be made by a specialist concretor

Cost:	$$$ - $$$$
Made by:	Specialist Concretor

Stainless Steel & Metal Sheets

A benchtop fabricated from a single sheet of metal. Once mainly a commercial-kitchen material, it's now appearing in residential spaces too — especially industrial, contemporary, and minimalist kitchens, where it's embraced as a design statement. Stainless steel is most common, though other metals can work just as well.

PROS:	CONS:
• Extremely hygienic and easy to clean • Heat and water resistant • Seamless fabrication including integrated sink options • Incredibly durable — will outlast most other benchtop materials	• Scratches and scuffs over time — develops a patina • Shows fingerprints and water marks readily • Can feel cold or clinical in warmer, natural kitchen styles • Loud — pots and utensils are noisier on metal than stone

Cost:	$$$ - $$$$
Made by:	Specialist Metal Fabricator

Metal options:

STAINLESS STEEL

The most practical and durable. Hygienic, heat resistant, and timeless in an industrial or contemporary kitchen.

BRUSHED BRASS / AGED BRASS

Warmer and more characterful. Suits luxe, organic modern, and Mediterranean kitchens. Will develop a patina over time that adds to its character.

COPPER

The most distinctive option. Naturally antimicrobial, develops a rich living patina, and suits country, rustic, and eclectic kitchens. Requires the most ongoing care of the metal options.

ZINC

Soft, matte, and industrial in character. Develops a beautiful grey patina over time. Popular in French Provincial and rustic European-influenced kitchens.

NOTE

Metal benchtops are custom fabricated to your measurements. Thicker gauges feel more substantial and resist denting. Patina develops over time as part of the material's character — if you want a surface that stays looking new, metal may not be right for you.

SPLASHBACKS

The splashback sits between your benchtop and overhead cabinets — it protects the wall and contributes significantly to the overall visual character of the kitchen. Here are all the major options available in Australia.

Tiles

The most popular and versatile splashback option. Ceramic, porcelain, or glass tiles in an enormous range of sizes, shapes, colours, and patterns. From simple subway tiles to handmade terracotta, the range of what's available in the Australian market is vast.

PROS:	CONS:
• Enormous variety of styles, sizes, and price points • Durable, heat resistant and easy to clean • Budget-friendly options available at the lower end	• Grout lines require ongoing cleaning and maintenance • Installation is more time-consuming than sheet options

Cost:	$-$$$$
Popular Choices	Tile Cloud, Di Lorenzo Tiles, Artedomus

Stone (Natural or Engineered)

Using the same stone as your benchtop for the splashback creates a seamless, continuous look with no grout lines and minimal visual interruption. Particularly effective with statement stones that have strong veining or movement.

PROS:	CONS:
• Elegant and seamless — no grout lines • Durable and heat resistant • Simplifies selections — matches existing benchtop	• Expensive, particularly for natural stone • Requires professional installation • Will require joins if the run exceeds slab size

Cost:	$$ - $$$$
Popular Choices	*see above

Glass / Mirror

A single seamless panel of back-painted or mirror glass. The simplest splashback to keep clean — no grout lines, no texture, just one continuous surface.

PROS:	CONS:
• Seamless and extremely easy to clean • Reflective surface enhances light and makes the space feel larger • Customisable in any colour or finish	• Can crack if struck with significant force • Shows cooking mess and splatter immediately

Cost:	$ - $$
Popular Choices	Painted glass, smokey mirror, matte glass, bronze mirror

Natural Stone Cladding

Sandstone, slate, limestone, or travertine used as a wall cladding rather than a polished slab. Adds raw texture, depth, and an organic quality that is completely different to a polished stone splashback.

PROS:	CONS:
• Unique natural texture and genuine character • Heat resistant and long lasting • Adds warmth and an organic, architectural feel	• Porous — requires regular sealing • Textured surface is harder to clean thoroughly • More labour-intensive to install than other options

Cost:	$$$
Popular Choices	Eco Outdoors

Venetian Plaster / Limewash

An increasingly popular option in organic modern and contemporary Australian kitchens — particularly in areas away from the cooktop where heat and grease exposure is lower. Applied by hand, creating a soft, layered, textural finish that is entirely unique to the wall it's on.

PROS:	CONS:
• Creates a completely unique, handcrafted finish • Works beautifully in organic modern, Japandi, and contemporary kitchens • Seamless — no joins or grout lines	• Not suitable directly behind a cooktop — heat and grease will damage the surface • Requires a skilled applicator • Needs sealing in a kitchen environment

Cost:	$$$ - $$$$
Made By	Specialist Plasterer / Painter

NOTE

Best used away from direct heat — ideal for the splashback wall behind a sink or preparation area rather than behind the cooktop.

Stainless Steel & Metal Sheets

A sheet of professionally fabricated metal creating a seamless, professional-grade splashback. Common in commercial kitchens, increasingly used in residential kitchens where the material is embraced as a design feature. As with metal benchtops, stainless steel is the most practical option but other metals can be used to striking effect — particularly when coordinating with a metal benchtop or tapware finish.

PROS:	CONS:
• Extremely heat resistant and hygienic • Easy to wipe clean • Seamless — no grout lines • Available in different metals to suit different aesthetic directions	• Scratches over time and shows fingerprints • Industrial aesthetic may not suit all homes • Patina develops over time — not for those who want a consistent finish

Cost:	$$$ - $$$$
Made By	Specialist Fabricator

Window Splashback

A fixed or opening glass window positioned behind the benchtop. Maximises natural light, creates a connection to the outdoors, and eliminates the need for a wall finish entirely.

PROS:	CONS:
• Maximises natural light • Creates a beautiful view and sense of openness • Minimal maintenance — just clean glass	• Expensive due to custom glazing and installation • May require blinds or tinting for privacy or western sun • Structural implications if opening an existing wall

Cost:	$$$$
Made By	Specialist Fabricator

HANDLES

Handles are one of the most underestimated finish decisions in a kitchen — they're the jewellery of the space, and the wrong choice can undermine an otherwise well-considered design. Here's every major option available.

Door Mounted Handles

The most traditional and versatile option — a bar, knob, or cup handle mounted directly to the door or drawer face with screws. Available in an enormous range of styles from basic to bespoke.

PROS:	CONS:
• Timeless and available in every style and finish • Easy to grip and use for all ages • A style to suit every kitchen aesthetic	• Protrude from the surface — easier to catch on clothing • Fingerprints visible on some finishes

Cost:	$ - $$$
Popular Choices	Momo Handles, Lo & Co, Kethy, Handle House, Touch Handles

Edge Pull Handles

Attach to the edge or top of the door or drawer for a discreet, barely-there look. Give the functionality of a handle without the visual weight.

PROS:	CONS:
• Minimal and discreet — suits modern aesthetics • Available in multiple finishes • Functional without the visual bulk of a full handle	• Can be harder to grip, particularly for elderly users • Installation requires precision • Some profiles require door to be routed to fit

Cost:	$ - $$
Popular Choices	Momo Handles, Lo & Co, Kethy, Handle House, Touch Handles

Finger Pull (J-Pull or Sharknose)

A recessed groove or curved edge built directly into the cabinetry door profile, allowing doors and drawers to be opened without any external hardware at all.

PROS:	CONS:
• Completely handle-free — very clean aesthetic • Easy to clean with no external components • Reduces risk of clothing catching	• Can be harder to open on heavy drawers • Can collect dust and grease in the groove over time

Cost: $

Made By: Chosen Joiner

Push-to-Open

A touch latch mechanism that allows cabinetry to open with a light push — no handle required. Works best on wall cabinets and lighter doors.

PROS:	CONS:
• Completely handleless — sleek and minimal • Simple to use • Works well on wall cabinets to reduce visual clutter	• More fingerprints on door faces due to frequent pushing • Less suitable for heavy drawers or base cabinets

Cost: $

Made By: Chosen Joiner

Recessed Handles

Handles routed directly into the door face, sitting flush with the surface. Give the grip of a handle with none of the visual protrusion.

PROS:	CONS:
• Seamless flush appearance • No protruding elements • Available in timber, metal, or coloured finishes to match cabinetry	• More expensive due to custom joinery required • Can be difficult to retrofit into existing cabinetry

Cost: $$

Made By: Chosen Joiner

Matching Lip Handles

A long handle running the full length of the door or drawer, made from the same material as the cabinetry itself. Creates a completely integrated look — the handle is part of the door rather than applied to it.

PROS:	CONS:
• Seamlessly integrated — high-end and intentional • No external hardware required • Comfortable to use with a modern, considered aesthetic	• Custom joinery required — more expensive • Can collect dust and grease in the recess over time

Cost: $$ - $$$

Made By: Chosen Joiner

SINKS & TAPWARE

Sinks and tapware are among the most used surfaces in your kitchen and among the most visible. They deserve as much consideration as your benchtop or cabinetry — and like everything else, the range in quality and price is significant.

Sinks

Undermount

Fitted from below the benchtop so the rim sits underneath the stone or surface. Creates a seamless transition from benchtop to sink with no lip to collect grime. The most popular option for stone benchtops.

Overmount / Topmount

Sits on top of the benchtop with the rim visible. More straightforward to install and works with any benchtop material — including laminate, which cannot accommodate an undermount. Less seamless visually but practical and cost-effective.

Integrated / Flush

The sink and benchtop are formed from the same material — most commonly Corian/solid surface or stainless steel. Creates a completely seamless surface with no join and no ledge to clean around. A premium option that works particularly well in minimalist and contemporary kitchens.

Butler's / Apron

A deep, wide sink where the front face of the sink is visible below the benchtop, forming part of the cabinetry facade. Most commonly in ceramic or fireclay. A signature feature of country, farmhouse, and classic kitchens.

Sink Materials:

STAINLESS STEEL

The most common and practical. Durable, heat resistant, and easy to clean. Quality varies significantly between grades — look for 1.2mm gauge or thicker. Available in different finishes to match tapware.

STONE / COMPOSITE

Made from stone particles and resin. Available in a wide range of colours, resistant to staining and chipping. Brands include Franke and Blanco.

CERAMIC / FIRECLAY

The classic material for butler's sinks. Beautiful and durable but can chip if heavy items are dropped. Requires a sturdy cabinet to support the weight.

Cost: $$$ - $$$$

Popular Brands Franke, Blanco, Clark, Oliveri, Abey, ABI Interiors

Tapware

Tapware is not an area to underspend. A $150 tap and an $800 tap can look identical on the shelf — the difference is in the cartridge quality, the weight of the fitting, the durability of the finish, and how it feels after five years of daily use. Cheap tapware often fails within a few years, requiring a plumber to replace it and potentially matching it to your existing tapware finish — which can be difficult if that finish has been discontinued.

Finish Options:

MATTE BLACK

One of the most popular current choices. Suits contemporary, modern, and organic modern kitchens. Shows water spots more than some other finishes.

BRUSHED NICKEL

Warm, versatile, and forgiving of water marks. Works across a wide range of styles.

BRUSHED BRASS / AGED BRASS

Adds warmth and character. Suits classic, Hamptons, country, mid-century, and organic modern kitchens.

CHROME

The most traditional and arguably the most durable finish. Classic, clean, and timeless.

GUNMETAL / BRONZE

Darker and moodier. Suits industrial, contemporary, and luxe kitchens.

Types:

MIXER (SINGLE LEVER)

The most practical for a kitchen. Controls both temperature and flow with one lever.

SEPARATE HOT AND COLD

More decorative, suits traditional or French Provincial styles. Less practical for daily kitchen use.

PULL-OUT OR PULL-DOWN SPRAY

A mixer with an extendable spray head. Highly functional for rinsing and filling large pots. Worth considering if your sink is not under a window.

Cost:	$$$ - $$$$
Popular Brands	Brodware, Astra Walker, Rogerseller, Caroma, Oliveri, ABI Interiors

LIGHTING

Lighting is one of the most impactful and most underinvested areas of kitchen design. It shapes how the space feels at every hour of the day, supports the work you do in the kitchen, and can either elevate or undermine every other finish decision you've made. The best kitchen lighting is layered — it combines different types of light for different purposes rather than relying on a single overhead source.

COLOUR TEMPERATURE

Before choosing any light fitting, understand colour temperature — it affects the entire feel of the space.

WARM WHITE (2700–3000K)

Creates a soft, inviting, residential feel. Best suited to kitchens where warmth and ambience are a priority. Works particularly well with timber, stone, and earthy finishes.

COOL WHITE (3500–4000K)

Crisper and more clinical. Better for task-focused areas but can make a warm-toned kitchen feel cold if used throughout.

RECOMMENDATION:
For most residential kitchens, 2700–3000K throughout, with 3000–3500K under-cabinet task lighting if you want slightly more clarity at the bench.

Downlights or Surface Mounted Downlights

Your primary ambient light source — positioned across the ceiling to evenly illuminate the whole room. Recessed downlights are sleek and minimal. Surface-mounted options add character in spaces with concrete ceilings or a more industrial look.

Placement tip

Position downlights slightly in front of your overhead cabinets rather than behind them — this avoids your body casting a shadow on the benchtop when you're working.

Under Cabinet Lighting

One of the most functional lighting decisions in a kitchen. LED strips or mini downlights positioned beneath overhead cabinets illuminate the benchtop for food preparation without harsh shadows. Also create ambient glow when the main lights are dimmed in the evening.

Profile options

Recessed LED strip profiles sit flush with the underside of the cabinet for a cleaner look. Surface-mounted strips are easier to install but more visible. Discuss with your cabinetmaker which option suits your cabinet design.

Pendant Lighting

Pendants over an island bench or dining table serve both as functional task lighting and as a visual feature. They're one of the most statement-making elements in a kitchen and one of the easiest ways to introduce your personal style.

Sizing and spacing guide:

- For a 2400mm island, two pendants is standard. For 3000mm or longer, consider three.
- Pendants should hang approximately 700–800mm above the benchtop surface.
- The bottom of the pendant should sit at or below eye level to avoid glare.
- Pendants in a kitchen should provide real light — avoid purely decorative pendants that don't actually illuminate the bench below them.

Island Bench LED Strip Lighting

LED strip lighting applied to the underside or around the base of an island bench creates a floating effect — adding subtle depth and visual interest, particularly in the evening. Works best in contemporary, modern, and organic modern kitchens where the island itself is a design feature.

DIMMABLE LIGHTING

Choose dimmable light fittings — it costs little extra at the electrical stage and gives you enormous flexibility in how the space feels, from bright and functional at 7am to warm and ambient at dinner time.

Discuss this with your electrician before final plans are drawn — adding dimmers later is costly and may not be possible, depending on your fittings.

YOUR FINISHES & STYLE DISCOVERY ACTIVITY

Use this to pull together your finish preferences across every category before moving into the design phase.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

What feeling or mood do I want my kitchen to evoke?

Which finishes and materials am I most drawn to?

Are there colours or textures I love or strongly dislike?

What finishes already exist in my home that the kitchen needs to work with?

Where do I want to invest more of my budget, and where am I comfortable saving?

Finishes Checklist — tick what resonates:

CABINETRY

- ☐ Flat Profile
- ☐ Shaker or V-Groove
- ☐ Fluted or Architectural Profile
- ☐ Finger-pull or handleless
- ☐ Woodgrain Finish
- ☐ Polyurethane (painted finish)
- ☐ Melamine
- ☐ Timber Veneer or Solid Timber

BENCHTOPS

- ☐ Laminate
- ☐ Engineered Stone
- ☐ Natural Stone
- ☐ Solid Timber
- ☐ Porcelain / Sintered Stone
- ☐ Corian / Solid Surface
- ☐ Concrete
- ☐ Stainless Steel

SPLASHBACKS

- [ ] Plain Tiles
- [ ] Feature Tiles
- [ ] Stone (matching benchtop)
- [ ] Glass or Mirror
- [ ] Natural Stone Cladding
- [ ] Window
- [ ] Stainless Steel
- [ ] Venetian Plaster / Limewash

HANDLES

- [ ] Door Mounted (bar, knob or cup)
- [ ] Edge Pull
- [ ] Finger Pull (j-pull or sharknose)
- [ ] Push-to-open
- [ ] Recessed
- [ ] Matching Lip

FLOORING

- [ ] Solid Timber
- [ ] Engineered / Floating Floor
- [ ] Tiles
- [ ] Vinyl / Hybrid

LIGHTING

- [ ] Downlights
- [ ] Surface Mounted Downlights
- [ ] Under Cabinet LED Strips
- [ ] Island Bench LED Strip
- [ ] Feature Wall Sconces

BUDGET REFLECTION

WHERE DO I WANT TO INVEST MORE OF MY BUDGET?

WHERE AM I COMFORTABLE USING MORE BUDGET-FRIENDLY OPTIONS?

ARE THERE SPECIFIC BRANDS, PRODUCTS, OR FINISHES I ALREADY LOVE?

8

INTERNALS, HARDWARE & CABINET SOLUTIONS

What's Inside Your Cabinets Matters As Much As What's Outside

Most people spend months choosing their door profile, benchtop, and handles — and give almost no thought to what happens inside the cabinet. This is one of the most common sources of post-renovation disappointment.

The inside of your cabinetry — the cabinet boxes themselves, the hardware that makes doors and drawers open and close, and the internal fittings that organise the space — determines how functional your kitchen is every single day. A beautifully finished kitchen that doesn't work well on the inside will frustrate you within weeks of moving back in.

This chapter covers three things: the cabinet boxes (called carcasses in the trade), the hinges and runner systems that operate them, and the internal fittings and storage solutions that make them genuinely functional. Work through each section and use the activity at the end to note what you want to discuss with your cabinetmaker.

One important thing to know before you begin: internal fittings are almost always optional upgrades. Unless you specifically request and quote them, your cabinetry will arrive with standard adjustable shelving inside and nothing else. Everything in this chapter beyond that baseline needs to be asked for, specified, and priced separately. Don't assume it's included — confirm it in writing with your cabinetmaker before anything is built.

PART ONE

THE CABINET BOX (CARCASS)

The carcass is the structural box of your cabinet — the sides, base, top, and back that form the shell your doors and drawers attach to. In most kitchens the carcasses are never seen, but their quality directly affects how long your kitchen lasts and how well it performs, particularly in areas exposed to moisture.

Board Material

Not all cabinet boxes are built from the same material — and the difference matters significantly in a kitchen environment.

STANDARD PARTICLEBOARD

The most common and most budget-friendly carcass material. Perfectly adequate in dry areas and for wall cabinets. However particleboard has limited resistance to moisture — if it gets wet and stays wet, it will swell and deteriorate. Not recommended for base cabinets directly under sinks or dishwashers without additional protection.

MOISTURE RESISTANT (MR) BOARD

MR board is manufactured with a moisture-resistant additive — identifiable by its green core when cut. Significantly more resistant to moisture swelling than standard particleboard. The minimum recommended specification for base cabinets in a kitchen, particularly near water sources.

HIGH MOISTURE RESISTANT (HMR) BOARD

A step above MR board — denser, harder, and more resistant to sustained moisture exposure. The best specification for under-sink cabinets and dishwasher-adjacent cabinetry. Worth the additional cost in any area of the kitchen where a slow leak or splash exposure is plausible.

THE PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION:

Ask your cabinetmaker what board specification they use as standard, and specifically request MR or HMR board for all base cabinets as a minimum. Most quality joiners will use this as standard — but it's worth confirming.

Construction Method

How a cabinet box is joined affects its structural integrity and longevity. Dowelled and glued construction is the strongest method — components are joined with wooden dowels and glue, creating a rigid, durable structure used by quality custom joiners. Cam-lock construction, used in flat-pack and some semi-custom cabinetry, uses mechanical fasteners rather than glue and dowels — faster to assemble but less rigid over time, particularly in heavily used drawers and tall units.

Ask your cabinetmaker

How are your cabinet boxes joined? A quality custom joiner should be using dowelled and glued construction as standard.

INTERNAL COLOUR OPTIONS

The inside of your cabinets doesn't have to be white. Incorporating a considered internal colour is a subtle design detail that adds a bespoke quality to open cabinetry and creates a moment of visual interest every time a door or drawer is opened.

Standard white melamine

The default for most kitchens — clean, neutral, and perfectly appropriate, particularly in lighter-coloured kitchens or where budget is a priority.



Matching cabinetry colour

Using the same colour inside as outside creates a seamless, high-end appearance — particularly effective in open shelving or glass-front cabinets where the interior is visible.



Woodgrain finishes

A warm timber interior adds depth and natural character to the inside of cabinets — particularly effective as a contrast to a painted exterior. Polytec and Laminex both offer woodgrain melamine options suitable for carcass lining.

Contrasting colours

A bold interior in charcoal, black, or a deep tone against a light exterior creates a considered design moment. Most effective in open shelving, glass-front cabinets, or pantry interiors where the colour is actually seen.



PART TWO

HINGES, RUNNERS & SYSTEMS

The hardware that operates your doors and drawers is not an area to compromise on. Cheap hardware fails — soft-close mechanisms stop functioning, drawer runners start sagging under load, hinges lose their tension and doors drop out of alignment. In a kitchen used daily, inferior hardware will show its limitations within a few years.

BLUM

Blum is the industry benchmark — an Austrian manufacturer used by the majority of quality joiners in Australia for good reason. Their hinge and runner systems are engineered to exceptionally high tolerances, their soft-close mechanisms are reliable over tens of thousands of cycles, and they carry a lifetime warranty on most products. If your cabinetmaker is specifying Blum hardware, you're in good hands.

HETTICH

Hettich is a quality alternative — another European manufacturer producing hardware to a comparable standard. Also widely used by reputable Australian joiners. If your cabinetmaker specifies Hettich rather than Blum, this is not a concern — both are quality choices.

Avoid unbranded or generic hardware bought purely on price — the savings at installation are small, but the cost of replacing failed hardware down the track is not. The specific hinge or runner for each cabinet is your cabinetmaker’s call, based on door weight, configuration, and the system they work with. Your job is simply to confirm Blum or Hettich is used throughout.

LIFT-UP SYSTEMS (BLUM AVENTOS)

The Blum Aventos range allows wall cabinet doors to open upward and out of the way rather than swinging outward at face height. Available in manual and electric options. Particularly useful if you want full-height vertical wall cabinet doors to match the proportion of base cabinets, or if you find constantly opening and closing eye-level doors uncomfortable.



BOX SYSTEMS (DRAWER SYSTEMS)

The box system is the structural side profile of a drawer — what you see when you open a drawer and look at its sides. Blum offers several systems (Legrabox, Tandembox) in different heights, colours, and configurations. Your cabinetmaker will have a preferred system — what matters is that you discuss your storage intentions with them early, as some internal organisers and dividers are system-specific and need to be confirmed before manufacturing begins.



POCKET DOOR SYSTEMS

Pocket systems allow cabinet doors to fully open and slide back inside the cabinetry, concealing them completely when open. Ideal for appliance cabinets, butler's pantries, and bar areas — any space you want to open up fully when in use and close away completely when not.



PUSH-TO-OPEN MECHANISMS

Push-to-open requires a specific internal touch-latch mechanism — it's not simply the absence of a handle. If you want push-to-open cabinetry, this needs to be specified as part of the hardware package, not assumed. Confirm with your cabinetmaker that the correct mechanism is included in their quote.



DOORS VS DRAWERS

One of the most fundamental storage decisions in kitchen planning is drawers versus doors — or a considered mix of both. It affects how your kitchen functions every day, so it's worth understanding the trade-offs before cabinetry is designed.

Drawers are almost always more functional than doors for base cabinets — full-extension drawers let you see and reach everything without bending or digging to the back of a shelf. Most experienced designers default to drawers below the bench, reserving doors for specific situations where they suit the storage need or the aesthetic. The right answer is usually a considered mix, tailored to the function of each zone.

DRAWERS

Full-extension drawers have become the go-to choice in modern Australian kitchens for good reason — they make everything accessible, visible, and organised.

BENEFITS:

- Full-extension runners mean everything is visible and reachable — including items at the back
- Ideal for pots, pans, plates, cutlery, and pantry goods with internal dividers
- Ergonomic — no bending or crouching to access lower cabinets
- Creates a streamlined, modern aesthetic

CONSIDERATIONS:

- More expensive than standard door cabinets
- May not suit oversized or bulky appliances without careful planning
- Not all drawer sizes are functional/practical

Drawers work best for Everyday crockery, cutlery, pots and pans, pantry food, utensils, and anything accessed daily.

DOORS

Traditional hinged doors are still a practical and appropriate choice in the right situations — particularly when paired with clever internal fittings.

BENEFITS:

- More cost-effective than drawer systems
- Better suited to large, tall, or bulky items that don't stack well in drawers
- Timeless aesthetic that suits a wide range of kitchen styles

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Items at the back are harder to reach without internal pull-outs
- Requires bending and crouching to access lower shelves
- Contents less visible without opening the door fully

Doors work best for

tall pantry cabinets, appliance storage, bulk items, bin systems, cleaning products under the sink, and areas where budget needs to be managed.

THE BEST OF BOTH

A thoughtful kitchen design almost always includes a mix of drawers and doors — drawers in the high-use zones for everyday items, doors where the storage need or budget calls for it. The internal fitting solutions covered in this chapter work with both — pull-out shelves, vertical dividers, and organisers can make a door cabinet just as functional as a drawer one when specified correctly.

WALL CABINETS VS OPEN SHELVING

The decision between wall cabinets and open shelving affects both the visual weight of your kitchen and your practical storage capacity. Neither is universally right — the best kitchens typically use both deliberately rather than defaulting to one throughout.

WALL CABINETS

The traditional and highly functional choice for upper kitchen storage — concealed, organised, and consistent with the lower cabinetry.

BENEFITS:

- Maximum concealed storage for glassware, pantry overflow, and everyday items
- Keeps the space tidy — mismatched crockery and clutter stays hidden
- Creates design continuity — seamlessly matches lower cabinetry

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Can make smaller kitchens feel closed-in if used heavily throughout
- Items at the back of deeper cabinets can be harder to access

THE 600MM RULE

The standard gap between the benchtop surface and the base of overhead cabinets is 600mm (600mm for electric cooktop & 650mm for gas cooktop). Designers sometimes raise this to 650–700mm to accommodate taller bench appliances, to suit taller users, or to give the kitchen a more open feel. Confirm this measurement with your cabinetmaker before anything is built — it affects both the visual proportion of the kitchen and what can comfortably sit on the bench beneath.

OPEN SHELVING

Open shelves have become one of the most popular design choices in contemporary Australian kitchens — and one of the most commonly regretted when not approached honestly.

BENEFITS:

- Visually lightens the space — particularly effective in smaller or darker kitchens
- Creates a styling opportunity for ceramics, glassware, and curated objects
- Easy access to frequently used items

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Requires constant tidying — clutter is immediately visible
- Less overall storage capacity than closed cabinetry
- Items collect dust and grease if not cleaned regularly

THE HONEST REALITY

Open shelving looks beautiful when styled intentionally and maintained consistently. If your current kitchen is consistently cluttered or disorganised, open shelving will amplify that rather than solve it. Be honest with yourself about your habits before committing to open shelving throughout.

A BALANCED APPROACH

The most considered kitchens use wall cabinets as the primary upper storage and introduce open shelving deliberately in one or two targeted locations — flanking a rangehood, adjacent to a window, above a coffee station, or as a break in a long overhead cabinet run. This approach gives you the storage capacity of wall cabinets with the visual lightness and personality of open shelving without the maintenance commitment of an entire open kitchen.

PANTRY LAYOUTS

A well-designed pantry is one of the most functional — and most satisfying — features of a kitchen. Whether you're working with a tall cabinet pantry, a walk-in, or a full butler's pantry, the internal layout makes an enormous difference to how the space works every day.

The pantry format available to you depends on your kitchen footprint and layout — not every kitchen can accommodate a walk-in or butler's pantry. Work with what your space allows, and design it as intentionally as the rest of the kitchen.

TALL CABINET PANTRY

A full-height cabinet (typically 2100–2400mm) with either shelving, internal drawers, or a combination of both behind a single or double door. The most common pantry solution in Australian kitchens — space-efficient, flexible, and available in every budget range.

INTERNAL CONFIGURATION OPTIONS:



ALL SHELVING

Adjustable shelves across the full height of the cabinet. Easy to see contents at a glance, great for jars, baskets, and small appliances. The most budget-friendly option. Items at the back of lower shelves can be hard to access without a pull-out solution.



ALL INNER DRAWERS

Full-extension drawers behind the pantry door. Everything is completely accessible — even items at the back and bottom. The most functional option for those who want maximum organisation. More expensive than shelving and reduces vertical storage for tall items.



HALF SHELVING, HALF INNER DRAWERS

Adjustable shelves in the upper portion for tall items and jars, drawers in the lower portion for heavier and smaller items. The most practical and versatile configuration for most households — balances visibility, accessibility, and cost.



INTEGRATED BENCHTOP

For larger tall cabinet pantries, consider a section of benchtop inside the cabinet — a dedicated zone for small appliances, a coffee station, or food prep that keeps the main bench clear. Can include power points and task lighting. Needs a deeper cabinet and a bit more floor space, but significantly boosts the pantry's functionality.

BLIND CORNER PANTRY

A pantry built into a corner of the kitchen, accessed through a single door that opens onto a larger-than-expected L-shaped interior wrapping around the corner. It's one of the most effective ways to use space that would otherwise be wasted — a smart fit where there's no room for a dedicated pantry footprint. The interior can be all shelving, inner drawers, or a mix, and in larger corners a section of benchtop can create a concealed appliance or prep zone. From the outside it reads as a standard tall cabinet; inside, it delivers far more storage than it suggests.

Best suited to kitchens with available corner space and a limited pantry footprint — particularly at the end of a cabinetry run where two walls meet.





APPLIANCE CABINET / APPLIANCE GARAGE

A cabinet zone for benchtop appliances — kettles, toasters, coffee machines — behind doors that open onto a powered, ventilated space where appliances stay plugged in and ready to use. Keeps the main benchtop clear without sacrificing daily access.

Pocket or bi-fold doors work best here, opening fully clear of the workspace rather than swinging into it. Confirm power points are planned inside the cabinet with your electrician before it's built.



WALK-IN PANTRY

A walk-in space for food storage — typically a small room or alcove off the main kitchen, fitted with floor-to-ceiling shelving, inner drawers, a benchtop, and sometimes a sink, depending on space. It's the most generous storage option available, but only worth it if there's room to move comfortably and the discipline to keep it organised.

Minimum recommended size: around 1200mm wide x 1800mm deep to function as a genuine walk-in. Below that, a tall cabinet pantry usually serves you better.



BUTLER'S PANTRY

A separate room or alcove fitted out like a second kitchen — benchtop, sink, storage, often a dishwasher — keeping prep mess and overflow storage out of sight of the main kitchen.

Best suited to households that entertain often, or anyone after a clean, minimal main kitchen. Plan plumbing and electrical early — it needs to be in scope before trades are engaged.

BENEFITS:

- Keeps mess and prep completely out of the main kitchen
- Can include sink, dishwasher, fridge, and full storage
- Perfect for entertaining — dishes and prep stay hidden
- Creates a clean, minimal main kitchen aesthetic

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Requires significant extra floor space
- Needs plumbing and electrical planned from the start
- Can become a clutter zone without a proper storage system

CHOOSING YOUR PANTRY FORMAT

Use this to identify which pantry solution suits your space and habits:

IF YOU HAVE...	CONSIDER...
• Limited space but need storage • A narrow gap beside the main run • Daily appliances cluttering the bench • Enough room for a dedicated space • A separate room or large alcove	• Tall cabinet pantry with half shelving, half drawers • Pull-out pantry unit • Appliance cabinet with pocket doors • Walk-in pantry with a mix of shelving and drawers • Butler's pantry — plan plumbing and electrical early

PART THREE

INTERNAL FITTINGS & CABINET SOLUTIONS

This is where your kitchen storage goes from functional to genuinely considered. Standard cabinetry comes with adjustable shelving — everything below is an upgrade that must be specifically requested, quoted, and confirmed with your cabinetmaker.

Work through this section with your storage habits from Chapter 1 in mind. The best internal fittings are the ones that solve a real problem in how you use the space — not the ones that look impressive in a showroom.

DRAWERS ORGANISERS & DIVIDING SYSTEMS

Blum's Orga-Line range and third-party suppliers including Kesseböhmer and Rev-A-Shelf offer a comprehensive range of internal drawer dividers and organisers that can be mixed and matched to create a completely customised layout. Options include:

CUTLERY ORGANISERS

Individual inserts for forks, knives, spoons, and serving utensils in various configurations

KNIFE BLOCKS

Integrated in-drawer knife storage that keeps blades protected and accessible

SPICE INSERTS

Angled inserts that display spice jars face-up for easy reading

PLATE AND BOWL ORGANISERS

Vertical or horizontal configurations for storing crockery in deep drawers

POT AND PAN DIVIDERS

Vertical dividers that stand pots and pans upright for easy access

The key to getting this right is knowing what you're storing before you specify the organiser. Bring your actual cutlery, utensils, and crockery dimensions to your cabinetmaker or measure them before finalising the organiser layout.





INNER DRAWERS

A drawer within a drawer — a shallower internal drawer that sits above a deeper drawer, creating two distinct storage zones within a single cabinet. Useful in pantry cabinets where you want to store different categories of items at different depths, and in deep drawers where a second layer makes better use of the full height.



PULL OUT BIN

An integrated pull-out bin in a base cabinet, available in a range of configurations:

- Single bin — one large waste bin
- Double bin — waste and recycling in one pull-out
- Triple bin — waste, recycling, and compost
- Sensor-activated — lid opens automatically as you approach

Place the bin within easy reach of the main prep zone, typically next to the sink. Confirm cabinet width against the bin unit's dimensions with your cabinetmaker before specifying.



PULL OUT PANTRY

A tall, slim cabinet fitted with full-extension shelving that pulls out completely to reveal its entire contents. Maximises storage in narrow spaces and eliminates the frustration of items being pushed to the back and forgotten. Particularly effective in the 150–300mm width range where a standard door cabinet would have limited usability.

CORNER SOLUTIONS

Corners are the most challenging storage problem in kitchen design. A few solutions exist, each with trade-offs.

Magic corner / fold-out system — A hinged unit that pulls forward and out as the door opens, bringing items from the back of the corner into reach. One of the most functional corner solutions, making full use of the depth without digging into a dark back corner. Needs a specific cabinet configuration — confirm dimensions with your cabinetmaker.

Le Mans / swing-out unit — Two kidney-shaped shelves on a pivot that swing out as the door opens. Good visibility and access, and works in a slightly smaller opening than the magic corner.

Corner drawers — Full-extension drawers that open diagonally, making complete use of the corner. They keep the look of standard drawers from the outside, suiting all-drawer kitchens well. One of the pricier corner solutions, but arguably the most elegant.

Lazy Susan / rotating shelf — A classic rotating shelf that spins items from the back into reach. The most budget-friendly option and still widely used — less effective than the magic corner or Le Mans for full access, but functional and straightforward.





SHELF LAYOUTS & VERTICAL DIVIDERS

Not every cabinet benefits from a pull-out or specialised fitting — sometimes considered fixed shelving is the right answer.

Options include

- Adjustable shelving — the standard default. Shelf heights can be changed as your storage needs evolve.
- Fixed dividers — vertical partitions fixed within a cabinet or drawer to create dedicated slots for baking trays, chopping boards, cutting mats, and similar flat items. Simple, effective, and often underspecified.
- Integrated shelf lighting — LED strip lighting inside tall pantry cabinets or open shelving makes contents visible and adds a considered design detail.







PULL-OUT SHELVES & RACKS

A pull-out shelf or rack within a standard door cabinet converts what would otherwise be hard-to-access storage into fully visible, fully reachable space. Available in single-tier and multi-tier configurations. Useful for oils, spices, chopping boards, baking trays, cleaning products — anything that benefits from being pulled forward rather than reached for.



SINK DRAWER

A drawer fitted above the sink plumbing with a U-shaped cutout routed into the base to accommodate the pipes. Converts what is typically dead space directly under the sink into
usable storage — the front portion of the drawer and down the sides of the U-shape provide useful accessible space for sponges, cloths, and small cleaning items.



KICKBOARD DRAWER

A shallow drawer fitted into the kickboard space at the base of the cabinetry — the 100–150mm gap between the bottom of the cabinet and the floor that is otherwise wasted space. Useful for storing flat items — platters, baking trays, chopping boards — and occasionally doubles as a step stool for reaching high shelves. Accessed by pressing or lifting the kickboard panel.



PULL OUT SHELF

A pull-out shelf with a lock in a kitchen cabinet is a slide-out surface designed to stay securely in place when extended, preventing unintentional movement during use.



WINE RACK

A built-in wine rack stores bottles horizontally within cabinetry — either as a dedicated cabinet section or integrated into a pantry or butler's pantry. Available in fixed timber configurations, metal insert systems, and modular formats. Requires a cabinet width and height that accommodates standard 750ml bottle dimensions — confirm sizing with your cabinetmaker.

ACTIVITY

Design Your Cabinet Interiors

Now that you understand what's available, use this activity to identify the internal solutions that will genuinely improve how your kitchen works for you.

STEP 1 **Reflect on your current storage**

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST FRUSTRATIONS WITH YOUR CURRENT KITCHEN STORAGE?

ARE THERE ITEMS YOU CONSTANTLY STRUGGLE TO FIND OR REACH?

WHERE DOES CLUTTER CONSISTENTLY BUILD UP AND WHY?

DO YOU NEED MORE HIDDEN STORAGE, MORE OPEN DISPLAY AREAS, OR BOTH?

STEP 2 **Confirm your carcass specification**

Questions to ask your cabinetmaker:

- [ ] What board material are you using for base cabinet carcasses — standard particleboard, MR, or HMR board?
- [ ] What jointing method do you use for cabinet box construction?
- [ ] What hardware brand are you specifying — Blum or Hettich?
- [ ] Is soft-close included as standard across all doors and drawers?
- [ ] Are internal fittings quoted separately or included?

STEP 3 **Prioritise your internal fittings**

Tick what appeals and mark your priority level — essential, would like, or nice to have:

DRAWER ORGANISATION

- [ ] Cutlery and utensil organisers
- [ ] In-drawer knife block
- [ ] Spice inserts
- [ ] Plate and bowl organisers
- [ ] Pot and pan dividers

CABINET SOLUTIONS

- [ ] Built-in wine rack
- [ ] Integrated shelf or cabinet lighting
- [ ] Integrated power in drawers or appliance cabinets
- [ ] Lift-up wall cabinet doors (Blum Aventos)
- [ ] Pocket door system for appliance or pantry cabinet

CABINET SOLUTIONS

- [ ] Inner drawers
- [ ] Pull-out bin system
- [ ] Pull-out pantry
- [ ] Pull-out shelves or racks
- [ ] Vertical dividers for trays and boards
- [ ] Sink drawer
- [ ] Kickboard drawer

CORNER SOLUTIONS

- [ ] Magic corner / fold-out system
- [ ] Le Mans / swing-out unit
- [ ] Corner drawers
- [ ] Lazy Susan

STEP 4 **Internal Colour Preference**

- [ ] Standard white — clean and neutral
- [ ] Matching cabinetry colour — seamless and high-end
- [ ] Woodgrain interior — warm and natural
- [ ] Contrasting colour — bold and considered

Bonus Prompt: Open every drawer and cabinet in your current kitchen. Note what works, what frustrates you, and what you wish existed. That list is your brief for this chapter.

9

BRING IT ALL TOGETHER

YOU'VE DONE THE WORK — NOW LET'S MAKE IT REAL

If you've worked through this book chapter by chapter, you've done something most renovators never do — you've thought your kitchen through properly before a single quote has been requested or a single decision has been rushed.

You know your why. You have a clear vision and a defined aesthetic direction. You've mapped your layout, understood your constraints, planned your zones, considered your appliances, and worked through your finishes. You have a level of clarity about your project that most people only arrive at after the renovation is complete — when it's too late to change the things that didn't quite work.

That preparation is going to save you money, save you stress, and produce a significantly better result.

Now it's time to pull everything you've gathered into one place — a complete project document that you can take to your cabinetmaker, your trades, and anyone else involved in bringing this kitchen to life.

YOUR PROJECT SUMMARY

Before moving into the finishes schedule, take a few minutes to complete this summary. It captures the key decisions you've made throughout the book in one place — and it's the first thing to share with any professional you engage.

MY RENOVATION IS FOR:

_____

_____

THREE WORDS MY KITCHEN SHOULD FEEL:

_____

_____

MY LAYOUT CONFIGURATION:

_____

_____

MY TOP THREE FUNCTIONAL PRIORITIES:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

MY NON-NEGOTIABLES:

_____

_____

_____

MY CONFIRMED APPLIANCES:

_____

_____

_____

DOOR MATERIAL AND PROFILE:

BENCHTOP:

SPLASHBACK:

HANDLES:

SINK AND TAPWARE:

MY BUDGET RANGE:

MY TIMELINE:

QUESTIONS I STILL NEED TO ANSWER:

CREATING A FINISHES & FIXTURES SCHEDULE

A finishes and fixtures schedule is the document that captures every material and product selection across your project in one organised, easy-to-reference format. It's what keeps your selections clear and consistent, prevents miscommunication with your trades and suppliers, and ensures nothing gets missed or forgotten as the project progresses.

In the kitchen this includes your cabinetry, benchtop, splashback, tapware, handles, internal fittings, appliances, and lighting. If your renovation extends beyond the kitchen it can also capture flooring, wall finishes, skirting, cornices, and any other element being updated across the home.

Your schedule should be simple and easy to read at a glance. A well-organised schedule typically includes:

- Tag — a code that links the selection back to your drawings or layout plan (e.g. BT-01 for benchtop, PP-01 for painted polyurethane doors)
- Location — where the item is used (e.g. Kitchen, Butler's Pantry, Laundry)
- Product Name / Type — a clear description of the item including material, finish, and colour
- Image — a visual reference of the product or finish
- Finish / Colour / Comments — notes on texture, tone, edge profile, or any specific details the supplier or installer needs to know
- Supplier — where the product is coming from
- Revision — version tracking so you always know which version of your schedule is current

JOINERY SCHEDULE

TAG	LOCATION	PRODUCT NAME/ TYPE	IMAGE	FINISH / COLOUR / COMMENTS / CODE	SUPPLIER	REV
PP-01	KITCHEN	POLYURETHANE		COLOUR: DULUX 'LEXICON ½' FINISH: SATIN DOOR PROFILE: SHAKER STYLE W/ V GROOVE POLYTEC 'FARNBOUROUGH' STYLE	APPOINTED JOINER	A
MEL-01	KITCHEN	MELAMINE WOODGRAIN		COLOUR: 'BOSTON OAK' FINISH: WOODMATT	POLYTEC APPOINTED JOINER	A
BT-01	KITCHEN	SINTERED STONE		40MM MITRED EDGE COLOUR: 'CALACATTA VERDE' FINISH: MATT	SMART STONE APPOINTED JOINER OR STONE MASON	A

HOW TO BUILD YOUR SCHEDULE

START EARLY.

The finishes schedule isn't something you complete at the end — it's a living document you build throughout the design process. Start it as soon as your first selections are confirmed and add to it as decisions are made.

BE SPECIFIC.

Vague entries create miscommunication. Instead of "white benchtop" write the brand, product name, colour code, thickness, and edge profile. The more specific your schedule, the less room for error.

INCLUDE IMAGES.

A visual reference alongside every entry eliminates ambiguity. Screenshot from supplier websites, save from your mood board, or photograph samples — and attach them to the relevant row.

VERSION CONTROL MATTERS.

Every time you update the schedule, increment the revision letter (A, B, C) and date the document. Share only the current version with your trades — having multiple versions in circulation is a common source of costly errors.

SHARE IT WITH EVERYONE.

Your cabinetmaker, stonemason, electrician, plumber, and builder should all have a copy of your current schedule. It keeps everyone working from the same information.

READY-MADE TEMPLATE

Building a finishes schedule from scratch takes time. I've created a fully formatted, customisable template that you can populate directly with your own selections — formatted professionally and ready to share with your trades and suppliers from day one.

Available at designsbydayna.com

Use code DAYNA10 at checkout as a thank you for purchasing this guide.

WHAT COMES NEXT

You've completed the design and planning phase. Here's what the next stage of your renovation journey looks like — and where this book hands over to your trades and professionals.

Get your plans drawn. Whether you hand-draw your floor plan, use a free tool like SketchUp, or engage a designer to draw them professionally — you need a scaled floor plan and elevations before you can get accurate quotes. Your plans are the document that everything else is priced from.

If hand-drawing your own plans or learning SketchUp is something you'd like help with, these are areas we're looking at offering dedicated resources for in the future — a step-by-step plans guide and a SketchUp course that takes you from blank screen to a complete 3D kitchen model. If either of those sounds useful to you, reach out and let us know — it helps us understand what to prioritise.

Contact on Instagram: @designsby.dayna

10

FINDING & BRIEFING YOUR TRADES

THE PEOPLE YOU CHOOSE MATTER AS MUCH AS THE DESIGN

You can have the most considered design, the clearest vision, and the most carefully allocated budget — and still end up with a renovation that disappoints if the wrong people are executing it. The trades and cabinetmaker you choose are not interchangeable. The quality of their work, the way they communicate, and how they manage your project will determine the experience you have and the result you end up with as much as any design decision you've made.

This chapter covers how to find the right cabinetmaker and trades for your project, how to brief them effectively so your vision is communicated clearly, what a complete quote should include, and the questions most people don't think to ask until something has already gone wrong.

FINDING A QUALITY CABINETMAKER

Your cabinetmaker is the most important person in your renovation — manufacturing and installing the single largest element of your kitchen. The quality of their work will be visible every day for the life of the renovation. Finding the right one is worth taking time over.

WHERE TO LOOK

Referrals from people you trust
Ask anyone who has recently renovated — and if the result looks good, ask specifically about the experience, the communication, and how issues were handled.

Instagram and Online Portfolios
Look for consistency across multiple projects rather than one standout kitchen. Note: some of the best cabinetmakers have no online presence, working exclusively through builders and architects.

Houzz, Google & Facebook reviews
Look for patterns rather than individual comments — consistent feedback about communication and problem resolution tells you more than a single glowing review.

Showrooms
Visiting in person reveals finish quality and materials — but more importantly, how they communicate. If they can't answer your questions clearly in a showroom, they won't once your project is underway.

Your designer, architect, builder, or trades
Anyone already involved in your project sees cabinetmakers' work firsthand. Their referral carries more weight than any online review — and the best cabinetmakers are often only found this way.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Beyond the quality of their finished work, there are a number of things worth assessing before engaging a cabinetmaker:

How long have they been operating or working in the trade?

Longevity matters in the trades. A business that has been operating or individual that has been in the trade for ten or more years has worked through the challenges that cause newer businesses to fail — supply chain issues, staff turnover, difficult projects. It's not a guarantee of quality, but it's a meaningful indicator of stability.

Do they have a physical workshop or showroom?

A cabinetmaker with a physical premises is more accountable than one operating entirely remotely. You can visit, see work in progress, and understand the scale and capability of their operation.

What does their communication look like from the first interaction?

The way a cabinetmaker communicates before they have your money is the best predictor of how they'll communicate during your project. Are they responsive? Do they answer your questions clearly and completely? Do they follow up when they say they will? These things matter enormously once a project is underway.

THE QUESTIONS MOST PEOPLE DON'T ASK

These are the questions that separate a well-informed client from one who discovers important information too late. Ask them of every cabinetmaker you're seriously considering before requesting a quote.

Is my kitchen manufactured in your own workshop or outsourced?

This is the single most important question to ask — and the one most people don't think to ask. When manufacturing, installation, stonework, and trades are all being handled by different businesses, the lines of responsibility become blurred. If something goes wrong, knowing who is actually accountable becomes complicated and difficult to resolve. The most reliable outcome comes from a company that manufactures in-house, installs with their own team, and works with the same stonemason and trades consistently.

Do you have your own installation team or do you subcontract?

The manufacturer and installer need to be working from the same understanding of the design. When installation is subcontracted, communication gaps between manufacture and install are a common source of errors and delays.

Who is your stonemason — and is it someone you work with exclusively?

A consistent stonemason relationship directly affects the quality of the benchtop-to-cabinetry interface — the joins, edge profiles, and coordination of templating and installation. A cabinetmaker who uses the same stonemason consistently will produce a more seamless result.

Are your trades in-house or referred to independent contractors?

If the kitchen company is coordinating trades, confirm they take responsibility for quality-checking their work — not simply making the introduction.

What is your warranty on cabinetry and hardware?

A quality cabinetmaker should offer a minimum of two years on workmanship and be able to confirm the warranty on hardware brands they specify. Get this in writing as part of your agreement.

What does your project management process look like?

How a cabinetmaker manages a project from sign-off to installation tells you how your renovation will actually run. Clear, confident answers to questions about contact points, variations, delays, and rectification indicate a business with systems in place. Vague answers indicate one without.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR TRADES

Beyond the cabinetmaker, your renovation will involve a number of other trades. Understanding who does what — and who is responsible for coordinating them — is important before any work begins.

Plumber

Responsible for disconnecting and reconnecting all existing plumbing, relocating services if your layout is changing, installing the sink and tapware, connecting the dishwasher, and any gas work required. As covered in Chapter 3, every kitchen renovation requires a plumber regardless of how straightforward the project appears — disconnection and reconnection alone require a licensed professional.

Electrician

Responsible for disconnecting and reconnecting all existing electrical, installing new circuits where required (particularly for induction cooktops), running power to island benches, installing lighting, and ensuring all electrical work complies with current Australian standards. As with plumbing, every renovation requires an electrician — there is no scope of kitchen renovation that doesn't involve electrical disconnection at minimum.

Builder

Not every kitchen renovation requires a builder — but if your project involves removing or modifying walls, structural changes, ceiling work, or significant patching and plastering, a licensed builder needs to be involved. If you're engaging a kitchen company that offers a full project management service including a builder, confirm that the builder holds a current licence and that all relevant permits are being obtained.

Tiler / Flooring Installer

Splashback tiling and flooring are almost never included in a kitchen company quote — these are trades you'll need to source independently. A good kitchen company will often have referrals for both. Confirm the sequence of works with your cabinetmaker before engaging your tiler or flooring installer — the order in which these trades are on site matters significantly for the quality of the finished result. Refer back to Chapter 3 for guidance on flooring sequence.

Painter / Plasterer

Painting and plastering are similarly almost never included in a kitchen quote. Plan for a painter to be on site after trades and before cabinetry installation for any new plasterwork or priming, and again after installation is complete to finish walls, touch up around cabinetry, and paint the ceiling if required. Your kitchen company may have referrals — ask.

HOW TO BRIEF YOUR TRADES EFFECTIVELY

A clear brief before your first meeting with a cabinetmaker or trade makes fewer assumptions, asks better questions, and produces a more accurate quote. Your brief should include everything you've compiled working through this book:

Your project summary
Your vision, three priority words, non-negotiables, confirmed appliances, and finishes direction — giving any trade an immediate understanding of what you're trying to achieve before they've seen a single drawing.

Your floor plan and elevations
A scaled floor plan showing kitchen dimensions, door and window positions, fixed structural elements, and your preferred layout. Elevations showing approximate cabinetry heights, appliance positions, and key design details. These don't need to be professionally drawn — a clear, dimensioned hand-drawn plan is sufficient at the quoting stage.

Your finishes and fixtures schedule
Every material and product selection in one organised document. Sharing this upfront means your cabinetmaker is pricing exactly what you've specified rather than making assumptions about finish quality or product tier.

Your appliance specifications
Downloaded spec sheets for every confirmed appliance — your cabinetmaker needs these to design cabinet openings, confirm clearances, and coordinate service locations with trades.

Your timeline
When you need the renovation to be complete. Be realistic — quality cabinetry takes time to manufacture and most reputable cabinetmakers have lead times of eight to fourteen weeks from sign-off to installation. Factor this into your planning, particularly if the renovation needs to be complete by a specific date.

GETTING & COMPARING QUOTES

With your brief prepared, you're ready to approach cabinetmakers for quotes. Here's what to understand about the quoting process before you begin.

What a Kitchen Company Quote Should Cover
Not everything needs to be in the one quote — understanding what a kitchen company is and isn't responsible for prevents confusion when comparing quotes from different businesses.

Typically included in a kitchen company quote:

- [ ] Removal and disposal of the existing kitchen
- [ ] Supply and delivery of the new cabinetry
- [ ] Installation of cabinetry
- [ ] Benchtop supply and installation — if they have their own stonemason
- [ ] Trades — plumbing and electrical, if they offer this service

Typically not included — source these separately:

- [ ] Flooring — source independently, ask the kitchen company for referrals
- [ ] Painting and plastering — source independently, ask the kitchen company for referrals
- [ ] Appliances — unless the kitchen company offers a supply service

HOW TO COMPARE QUOTES

Get a minimum of three quotes before making a decision. When comparing them, the most important principle is to compare like for like — a quote that is significantly cheaper than others is almost always missing something, quoting a lower specification, or based on assumptions that haven't been clearly communicated.

When comparing quotes, look at:

What's included and excluded

Read every quote in full and note what's explicitly included versus what's assumed or excluded. A quote that doesn't mention bench installation, for example, may be excluding it. Ask for clarification in writing on anything that isn't clear.

The specification being quoted

Confirm that every cabinetmaker is quoting the same door material, board specification, hardware brand, and finish. A quote using standard particleboard carcasses and generic hardware will come in lower than one using HMR board and Blum hardware — but they're not equivalent products.

Why price differences exist

Price variation between kitchen companies is driven by legitimate factors — location and overheads, whether work is done in-house or subcontracted, machinery quality, and team experience. A higher quote from a company manufacturing in-house with their own installers and a consistent stonemason is often better value than a cheaper quote from one coordinating multiple subcontractors. Understand what you’re comparing before deciding on price alone.

BEFORE YOU SIGN ANYTHING

Once you've selected your cabinetmaker, review the contract or agreement carefully before signing.
Confirm the following in writing:

- [ ] The full scope of works — exactly what is and isn't included
- [ ] The agreed timeline — manufacture lead time, installation date, and completion date
- [ ] Payment terms — deposit amount, progress payments, and final payment timing
- [ ] Variation process — how changes to the scope are agreed and priced
- [ ] Warranty terms — on cabinetry workmanship and hardware
- [ ] What happens if something is incorrect or damaged?

If anything in the agreement is unclear, ask for it to be explained and amended before you sign. A reputable cabinetmaker will have no issue with this. One who is reluctant to clarify terms in writing is telling you something important.

YOUR TRADE BRIEFING CHECKLIST

Use this to confirm you have everything ready before approaching cabinetmakers and trades for quotes.

Your brief is ready:

- [ ] Project summary completed (from Chapter 9)
- [ ] Floor plan drawn with dimensions
- [ ] Elevations sketched for key walls
- [ ] Finishes and fixtures schedule completed
- [ ] Appliance spec sheets downloaded and compiled
- [ ] Timeline confirmed

Questions prepared for cabinetmaker meetings:

- [ ] Is manufacturing done in-house or outsourced?
- [ ] Is installation done by your own team or subcontracted?
- [ ] Who is your stonemason — do you work with them exclusively?
- [ ] Are trades in-house or referred to independent contractors?
- [ ] What is your warranty on cabinetry and hardware?
- [ ] What does your project management process look like?
- [ ] Can you provide references from recent clients?

Before signing:

- [ ] Minimum three quotes received and compared like for like
- [ ] Full scope of works confirmed in writing
- [ ] Timeline agreed and documented
- [ ] Payment terms understood and agreed
- [ ] Variation process confirmed
- [ ] Warranty terms confirmed in writing
- [ ] Rectification process understood

11

WORKING WITH A DESIGNER — IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

THIS BOOK WAS DESIGNED TO TAKE YOU AS FAR AS YOU CAN GO INDEPENDENTLY

If you've worked through every chapter, completed the activities, and arrived here with a clear vision, a considered layout, a confirmed appliance list, and a finishes direction — you may not need a designer at all. That was always the intention of this book. To give you the tools, the knowledge, and the confidence to take your project from idea to brief without professional help.

But not every renovation is the same — and not every point in the process feels equally manageable on your own. There are situations where professional design involvement adds genuine value, and being honest about when that is will save you time, money, and stress.

WHEN IT MAKES SENSE TO WORK WITH A DESIGNER

Your project is complex.

Structural changes, a significant layout reconfiguration, multiple adjoining spaces, or a brief that's difficult to translate into a cohesive design — a designer holds the vision together across all of those moving parts in a way that's genuinely difficult to do alone.

You can't visualise how it's all going to come together.

Having a clear vision on paper and being able to see it as a finished space are two very different things — and that gap is where a lot of renovators lose confidence in their own decisions. Working from your brief, your finishes, and your layout, I can translate everything into a 3D model showing exactly how your kitchen will look before anything is built. For many clients this is the moment the whole project clicks into place — it removes the guesswork and often surfaces small adjustments that make a significant difference before it's too late to change them.

You're feeling stuck or overwhelmed.

A designer doesn't just make decisions for you — they help you make better decisions faster by giving you a clear framework, eliminating options that don't serve your brief, and keeping the project moving with confidence.

You want someone to be accountable with you.

A designer across your project from concept to installation is an advocate in rooms you're not in — catching things before they become problems and managing the detail so you don't have to.

You want the result to be genuinely considered.

There is a difference between a kitchen that looks good and one that has been designed well. The difference lives in the details — the proportions, the material relationships, the way the space flows. A good designer brings that level of consideration to every decision.

You've done the work in this book and realised the scope is bigger than you thought.

That's not a failure — it's exactly what this book is for. Knowing when to bring in support is a sign of good judgment, not a lack of capability.

WHEN YOU PROBABLY DON'T NEED ONE

Your layout is largely staying in place and your renovation is primarily a finishes and appliance refresh — new doors, benchtop, splashback, updated hardware. This book has given you the tools to manage that confidently.

You have a clear vision, a manageable scope, and a good cabinetmaker who communicates well and has a strong track record. A great cabinetmaker with a well-prepared brief can deliver an excellent result without a designer in the middle.

Your budget doesn't allow for full design. Design fees are a real cost — if the budget is tight, that money may be better directed toward the renovation itself. This book exists precisely for that situation. And if you just need a second set of eyes on one or two big decisions, a single consult can give you that without committing to a full design service.

WORKING WITH DESIGNS BY DAYNA

If you've worked through this book and feel some professional support would help, I'd love to hear from you.

How I can help depends on where you're at. For most people, a one-off session is all it takes — whether that's getting clear before you start, or a second opinion on plans you already have that don't feel quite right. You bring the work you've done in this book, and we spend our time making decisions, not starting from scratch.

For larger or more complex projects, I also offer deeper design support. The best place to start is a conversation about your project, so we can work out together what level of help you genuinely need.

I work with clients across Sydney, remotely throughout Australia, and internationally.

You'll find my current sessions at designsbydayna.com/book-a-session or email me at dayna@designsbydayna.com — tell me a little about your project and where you're at, and I'll come back to you personally.

A FINAL NOTE

Designing a kitchen is one of the most personal and considered decisions you'll make in your home. It requires patience, clarity, and a willingness to sit with decisions until they feel genuinely right — not just good enough.

The work you've done in this book is the foundation of a renovation that will serve you well — not just when it's new and you're posting photos of it, but five years from now when it still works exactly the way you designed it to, and it still feels like yours.

That's what intentional design does. It lasts.

Thank you for letting this guide be part of your project. If your renovation takes shape from the work you've done in these pages, I'd genuinely love to see it — tag @designsby.dayna on Instagram or send me a message directly. Seeing this work come to life in real kitchens is the whole point.

Go build something beautiful.

Dayna x