

# Home improvements

Many homeowners have taken the opportunity in recent years to carry out major and minor improvements to their properties, preferring to increase the value of their existing homes rather than entering into the volatile property market. In 2011 it looks like the trend will continue.

Home refurbishment is also an opportunity to upgrade appliances, materials and fittings to the latest environmentally friendly and cost effective innovations and models. Each month, the Town Crier will be offering advice and ideas on how best to improve a home and increase the value of St Helier homes.

## Buying a New Kitchen

Choosing a new kitchen is a big decision, as it is both costly and requires a large investment of time. It is important to consider carefully what you want in terms of style and functionality from your kitchen, as well as keeping in mind your budget and whether you want installation or supply only. Firstly, you should look for a reputable kitchen retailer with permanent display showrooms and who can provide a full design and installation service. When looking around for your new kitchen, always ensure that you check the background and credentials of any company before you buy. Ask for examples of previous work and don't be afraid to follow up any available references. Don't just go for the cheapest price with the flashiest advert - make sure that the company can do everything it claims.

## Choosing your kitchen

A quality design kitchen is identified by the quality of its cupboards, worktops, and appliances. You will stand a better chance of purchasing a well-made kitchen if these three elements are of an individual high standard. Ask what specifications are on offer. Showrooms are the traditional way to get inspiration and information regarding kitchen installations. You can see kitchen displays up close and get an idea as to how the fittings might work in your home. Showrooms also give the opportunity of a good daylight viewing of the different finishes, materials and colour selections. Expect to be served by knowledgeable and experienced staff who will listen to your requirements and advise accordingly.

## What to ask

Buying a new kitchen is not just about getting a good price. For peace of mind, you need a company that offers great service as well. When you are considering making this significant purchase, find out important details such as:

- When will payment be required?
- When will it be delivered, and what access will they need?
- How will your kitchen delivery and installation be project managed?
- Ask about the credentials of the fitting team? Have they been vetted and insured?
- When will the installation begin and end?



Ensure that any quote you receive is fully itemised, and check that both you and the installer know what works are to be included in the contract. Re-decorating, plastering, tiling, plumbing and electrics may not be included in a standard 'dry fit' - double check this so that you can plan accordingly.

## A dry fit usually comprises:

- Full delivery
- Removal of old kitchen
- Assembly and attachment of cupboards, doors, and drawers
- Fitting worktops
- Fitting the sink on or near current location

After-sales customer service is just as important as the process prior to purchase. A good company offers project management throughout and an inspection service when the fitting has been carried out so any questions or issues can be quickly sorted. Find out whether this is offered before you sign a contract. Always check the terms and conditions, making sure that the payment terms are understood.

You may be asked to pay a percentage of the total value as a deposit at the point of acceptance or ordering. Ensure that you understand the payment schedule.

- Do I have to pay a deposit at the time of ordering?
- Do I have to pay the balance on delivery?
- Will I have the chance to retain any of the balance until completion?

## The installation

Working closely with the kitchen designer

will help your plans to be fully integrated with their design flair and experience.

The designer and the project manager should work with the fitters to ensure smooth running.

Be prepared for unforeseen situations to arise. Due to the scale of work that a new kitchen fitting involves you will be very lucky if everything goes exactly according to plan. To ease the situation however, keep clear lines of communication. An experienced kitchen retailer will be able to identify and address the problems as they occur; either sorting them immediately or detailing future arrangements if that is not possible.

If you have any concerns that are not raised by the supplier, make sure that you draw attention to them yourself as and when they appear, not at the end of the job. It is general practice that suppliers will request you to sign a completion certificate once the kitchen is fitted, confirming that the job has been carried out in full to satisfaction. If there is anything unfinished or that you are dissatisfied with make a note of it on the certificate for further attention.

**Finally**, take your time, don't rush and choose carefully. You are going to live with your kitchen for a long time. It is the hub of most homes and a gathering place for all the family. It is also a substantial investment in your property.