

**THE BRIEF**

A spacious kitchen with an island that blends old and new.

MATERIALS AND FINISHES

A thick, solid walnut worktop on the large island.

DESIGN TIP

"Wood needs to be maintained, but you don't have to worry about damage, as major stains or scratches can be sanded out," says kitchen designer Neil Lerner.

SOURCEBOOK

Design and fitting. Neil Lerner Kitchen Design, (020) 7034 4920; nellerner.com. Gina Marks Interiors, (020) 7435 2615. **Sink,** Blanco, (020) 8450 9100; blanco.co.uk. **Taps,** KWC, (01992) 708335; kwc.co.uk. **Dishwasher and hob,** Fisher & Paykel, 0845 600 1934; fisherpaykel.co.uk. **Extractor,** Elica, (01253) 351111; elica.co.uk. **Wall tiles,** Habibi Interiors, (020) 8960 9203; habibi-interiors.com. **Flooring,** Via Arkadia, (020) 7351 7057; via-arkadia.com.



easily and blunts knives. I just find the material a bit harsh," she explains.

Aware that wood has its downside in terms of care, Gina initially specified a composite surface with wooden chopping boards integrated into the most frequently used areas. However, as she worked out how much of the space this would consume, the dimensions of the chopping boards grew until she opted for the entire surface in solid wood. Maximising on its design potential, Gina chose extra-thick walnut, which provides a beautiful dark contrast to the pale-oak units and boosts the proportions of the large central island.

In the two years since the surface was installed, Gina's maintenance fears have proved unfounded. Except for oiling the wood regularly, she has found it a joy to use. This is partly due to the precaution of having metal trivets set in next to the hob, so that hot pans can be quickly removed from the gas without fear of damaging the wood. "I wouldn't recommend solid wood to everyone but, as long as you don't do silly things like scrub it with a wire brush or soak it with cleaning fluids, it is a warm and friendly material to live with," Gina says. ■

WORDS LINDA GRABHAM

Suitable worktop materials

WOOD Naturally warm and beautiful, wood is a pleasure to use and improves with age. Always opt for a hardwood, such as oak, beech or maple. Regular oiling is essential.

STONE Granite is hard to beat in terms of durability and is available in gloss or matt finishes. Scratches tend to show on darker, glossy tones. Marble and limestone look great but need careful upkeep. A modern alternative is concrete, which can be cast to integrate sinks and curves. Slate is less popular but dramatic – look for a high level of silica.

COMPOSITES These are made from a combination of minerals, pigments and resin. They're not a cheap option, as worktops are made to measure, but they're robust and easy to clean and minor scratches can be sanded out.

GLASS AND STEEL Glass looks modern and dramatic. Make sure it is toughened and at least 12 mm thick – and take care with hot pans. Stainless steel withstands heat better and is very versatile. It can be noisy to work on and scratches eventually create a patina, which isn't to everyone's taste.

LAMINATES These are durable, cheaper than most other materials and available in realistic wood- and stone-look finishes. Choose a high-pressure laminate for stability and heat-resistance, but avoid contact with hot surfaces.

Wood works

OWNERS Gina and Lee Marks

LOCATION North London

BUDGET £25,000

DESIGNERS Neil Lerner Kitchen Design and Gina Marks

"Mellow-modern" is the term interior designer Gina Marks uses to describe the kitchen in the stylish Victorian home she shares with her husband Lee and their youngest son. While the plain-fronted oak units and stainless-steel appliances are clearly modern, it is the walnut worktop on her large island unit that Gina considers the mellow half of the look.

The decision to use solid timber was made early in the design process because Gina, a keen cook, loves the feel of working on wood. "Our old kitchen had white marble and I really don't enjoy working on such a hard surface. It bangs when you put saucepans down on it, scratches