

## **Plywood perfection** Precision-engineered kitchens and furniture by Uncommon Projects

If you followed RIBA's recent House of the Year competition and its attendant Grand Designs show on Channel 4, you'll have seen Pocket House in East Dulwich, an ingenious, part-subterranean home with a beautiful, modern and cunningly compact kitchen – designed by Uncommon Projects.



Uncommon Projects' team at their production facility in Leyton, London. Photography by Jocelyn Low.

Based in Leyton, East London, the growing company specialises in designing and making bespoke plywood furniture and kitchens. Since its launch in 2011, Uncommon Projects has been collecting awards and admiration for its inventive, highly functional designs, problem-solving approach, and contemporary, material-led architectural projects.

The in-depth design knowledge of Uncommon Projects' founders – architect Alan Drumm and product designer James Hoy – leads them to enshrine design thinking at the heart of the company. The kitchens they create perfectly reconcile the reality of

the space to the lifestyles and unmet needs of the customer, as well as being sensitive to existing architectural details. Where some kitchen designers would simply slap the cabinetry on the biggest wall available, Alan and James take a completely bespoke approach, interrogating each brief and working either solo or with the project architect to optimise the floorplan. This has ensured the company has become particularly well known for its work in partnership with architects who appreciate Alan and James's design experience, as with Tikari Works on Pocket House and with leading practice dRMM on the interior of Maggie's Oldham.

The studio's manufacturing process takes advantage of the latest available technology. Alan and James begin by modelling the kitchen using CAD, then refine it with the client, before the individual components are cut to spec using CNC machines. It's an approach that guarantees precision and minimises waste.

This attention to detail and highly engineered approach extends into Uncommon's material of choice – plywood. Ply used to be dismissed as unglamorous, mass-produced and the poor cousin of hardwood, but this engineered timber has a compelling advantage – thanks to being made from multiple layers of wood glued together, it is in fact much stronger and more durable than industry standard particle board. Ply also gives Uncommon Projects the opportunity to expose the cut edges, which gives their kitchens a distinct character and an appealing material honesty.

Even the most expensive designer kitchens are often made using a standard modular system that results in an unchallenging, generic look. However, because Uncommon Projects isn't wedded to standard units or restricted to specific finishes, its designers are free to provide a totally bespoke service, matching everything from shape, size, colours, features and finishes to the needs of a space. Although they may share a modernist look and an appealing functionality, no two Uncommon projects kitchens are the same.

*"As a bespoke furniture manufacturer, we're not tied to specific kitchen cabinet shapes and sizes so we can really make the most from tight spaces in a way that complements the room and lifestyle of our clients."*

– James Hoy, co-founder of Uncommon Projects

Now, as they approach their 10-year anniversary, Alan and James are preparing their own extension project. In 2020, Uncommon Projects will open a new central-London showroom in an iconic modernist location – watch this space for the details.

## Some Uncommon Projects...



As seen on Grand Designs, Pocket House by Tikari Works, kitchen by Uncommon Projects. Photography by Jocelyn Low.

### **Pocket House, East Dulwich**

Shortlisted for RIBA House of the Year and the Stephen Lawrence Prize for experimental architecture, Pocket House is the residence of architects husband and wife team, Tikari Works.

*"It is critical for our work that every element or detail enriches and relates to the whole project, so having someone understand the architectural language made the entire process smoother."*

–Nicola Tikari, co-founder of Tikari Works

Crafted solely from spruce-veneered birch plywood, the compact kitchen is cleverly designed to maximize space with deep-drawer base units and sliding-door countertop cupboards that conceal plug sockets and are perfect for storing condiments. The modern, raw-wood style of the kitchen furniture is matched by

desks and cupboards in the subterranean bedrooms, and a console and cabinet in the bathroom, also by Uncommon Projects.



Components are cut by CNC to guarantee precision and minimise waste. Whitstable by Uncommon Projects. Photography by Jocelyn Low.

## **Whitstable**

A warm and calming space in a delicate blush pink, this kitchen was created to resolve a problem of flow in an interwar bungalow, created by a past extension project. The previous kitchen was effectively a corridor between the hall and living room, with little status as a room in its own right. Uncommon Projects' design gives the space a distinct identity – and improved storage – while respecting the character of existing architectural characteristics such as the pitched ceiling.

Notable features include the L-shaped bank of base units in maple-veneered birch plywood, a bespoke wall-mounted bench concealing a column radiator, and an ingenious storage solution in the form of a wall length shelf fitted with concealed strip lighting and complemented by the plywood-framed window.



Beyond the kitchen, Uncommon Projects bespoke plywood furniture defines this open-plan living space in Leytonstone. Photography by Jocelyn Low.

## **Leytonstone**

The owners of this house found Uncommon Projects on Pinterest, and commissioned them out of an appreciation of the studio's penchant for exposed ply edging. Designed to cultivate a feeling of openness and flow, the kitchen has a midcentury-modern feel and an atmosphere of cosiness and calm thanks to the use of warm, woody tones and soft material textures such as cork.

In response to the owners' love of entertaining, the open-plan space is divided into distinct cooking and dining/living zones through features such as the open wine-rack, the ceiling-height cabinets in oak-veneered birch plywood with spray-lacquered doors, and two sets of shelves atop radiators concealed by plywood slats. These extend to form an L-shaped window seat on one side of the room.

Uncommon Projects' Leytonstone project was named 'Kitchen Design of the Year' at the Designer Kitchen & Bathroom Awards 2019 and at the KBB awards 2019.



Colour is used to express function and materials in Hampstead Heath. Photography by Jocelyn Low.

## **Hampstead Heath**

Extending their Victorian home, the creatively minded owners were keen to move away from the typical minimalist white kitchen look, and charged Uncommon Projects with creating a space for entertaining that was bright, bold, playful and graphic.

A tailor-made island is the sociable centrepiece, fitted with open shelves, draws of different depths and sliding doors that both provide a wide variety of versatile storage space and create a characterful 3D look.

*“The tallest base units connect with the system of horizontal wall shelves that rise up from the basement, through the double-height space to the study on the floor above. Fitted with bright sliding doors that deepen in colour as they ascend, the shelves create a common visual thread through the house – a sense of continuity and connection between the floors. Our bespoke approach means the cabinets can work across spaces and rooms like this and yet all the details still feel considered and harmonious.”*

– James Hoy, co-founder of Uncommon Projects

## Notes to editors

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### **About Uncommon Projects**

Founded in 2011 by an architect and a product designer, Uncommon Projects designs, makes and installs bespoke plywood furniture for residential and commercial clients across the UK. Based in London, the award-winning company has earned a reputation for inventive contemporary design, function-first personal approach and material-led aesthetic, consistently winning industry awards for its fitted and freestanding kitchen design. Everything is designed and made in Leyton, East London.

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