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EXETER LIFE

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Fascinating features

- City under siege: back to the Civil War
- Music group's 50th birthday
- Out of Africa for homewares business
- Special sculpture unveiled for charity
- Exeter Chiefs go marching on
- Catch up with our columnists

SPRING IS HERE!

A CITY READY FOR THE NEW SEASON

FIND YOURSELF A FAB NEW HOME
HOT PROPERTIES FOR SALE + INVESTMENT ADVICE

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FESTIVALS & HOT SPOTS TO DINE

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Right Ashton House Design shows how traditional can blend seamlessly with the modern ashtonhousedesign.co.uk **Left** EasyDock M technology with a powerful integrated magnet to ensure seamless docking of the spray head. Stockists: grohe.com

WHAT'S COOKING *good looking?*

Once the unattractive engine room to the house where white goods languished along with the cook; an unattractive but necessary offspring to modern living – but our baby has grown to be the good looking one, writes CAROL BURNS

Our kitchens tend to be at the very heart of our homes - and there is no room that we ask more of. It has to be functional for much of the grunt work that keeps the household ticking over; we want it to be a social space where we can gather to cook and eat - and we want it all wrapped up in a good looking package to show off our taste in design as well as food.

"With many of us enjoying open plan living, kitchens need to fit with the overall interior design of our homes,' say Caroline Palk from Ashton House Design (ashtonhousedesign.co.uk). Never before have the finishes and lighting needed such careful consideration.

"The island continues to be pivotal to most kitchen layouts – with surfaces incorporating heating elements, extractors that appear out of nowhere, fabulous finishes – and presents an opportunity to include must-have stool seating. What is a kitchen if not an area for family and friends to congregate where they can engage, carry out a useful chore or two, or simply entertain the chef at work! An interesting mix of materials that sees a contrast of textures – timber with zinc, glass with copper, marble with steel – will elevate it beyond a workplace."

My new favourite thing is bespoke fused glass splashbacks. Many artists working in glass will create something totally unique for your kitchen, turning a mundane practical necessity into a thing of beauty and turn your cooking space in to the room's focuspoint (so make sure you keep your range spotless!). Alternatives are tiles, mirrored spashbacks or off-the-peg toughened glass panels.

Technology has transformed how we use our kitchens – and no where is this more illustrated than with the once humble tap. Today's tap can supply ice cold filtered water to drink, boiling water for your teapot and everything in between and they have spray hoses and swivel as standard. Turn it on with the touch of your hand (or even foot, if your hands are full). "Some manufacturers are now offering clever technology that prevents the tap body, including the spout, from ever getting hot, thereby ensuring no scalding," says Kelly Everest from GROHE UK.

'Always include soft seating where space permits – they're bound to be among the most popular seats in the house.'

Imperial kitchen furniture starts from £10,000 crown-imperial.co.uk

Right Freestanding kitchens have much to recommend them. Classic and portable - they allow you to treat the kitchen like other rooms in your house - you can refresh them without ripping everything out. We love Barnes of Ashburton's latest range which are bespoke and handmade. barnesofashburton.co.uk

Technology really has revolutionised our kitchens. Karen Chugg is from Exeter's Intelligent Abodes (intelligentabodes.co.uk) who will not only install the latest technology – but teach you how to use it. In her smart kitchen, technology helps ensure the temperature and lighting is always right – long before you enter. Whether it's warming the room or the automatic blinds which rise with the sun (and the children) or cooking dinner. "I can switch the oven on from my smart phone knowing it will be beautifully cooked when we all get home starving," says Karen. "We select 'all on' lighting mode as we clear the kitchen and stack the dishwasher, then we adjust to 'TV' mode and settle down to watch a family programme on our Aquavision TV which is neatly flushed into the wall.

"In the evening, the kitchen becomes a peaceful haven for me and the other half to enjoy a glass of wine, listening to our favourite music from the discreet speakers, dimming the lights and shutting the blinds from the comfort of our cosy chairs with my smart phone."

My favourite kitchen design tip comes from Ashton House Design. "Always include soft seating where space permits," Caroline Palk adds. "At the very least upholstered bar stools offer a comfortable perch or two. Add sofas and swivel armchairs – they're bound to be among the most popular seats in the house. Soft furnishings that include fabrics, hides, throws and scatter cushions add texture and acoustic benefit to an otherwise hard surfaced and potentially noisy interior." ■