

KITCHENS



Real style on a shoestring

A designer achieves a model makeover with just \$15,000 in his pocket, writes **Barbara Sweeney**.

THE idea of starting his own kitchen company only occurred to Michael Kitchener when he and his wife, Samara, were putting a new kitchen into their first home, a two-bedroom flat in an art deco block at Bondi.

With a name like Kitchener, it may have been predestined. But Michael came about the business via a circuitous career path in industrial design. He worked in graphic design and then furniture making and production before joining a kitchen company's computer design section.

"I wanted to pursue my own happiness and had been asking myself how I could do something different. This kitchen was the inception," Kitchener says.

As first-home buyers, the

Kitcheners knew they would eventually move into a larger home, so the one thing that determined this kitchen design was budget.

"I wanted something that looked nice, but would stand up to wear and tear," he says.

The rear of the apartment comprised a separate kitchen, dining and living room. Most of the renovation budget was spent removing two walls to open up the space, although the kitchen's floorplan remained the same.

Kitchener went on to make the most of the remaining \$15,000 he had in his pocket.

His approach was to lift basic laminated cabinets – "some of the more durable products are the most cost-effective" – with more expensive details and finishes.

The soft-closing Blum drawers, CaesarStone benchtop and glass mosaic tiles convey a sense of quality not usually associated with a budget kitchen.

His attention to detail continued with under-cabinet



task lighting, ambient lighting, extra-tall wall units to maximise storage space under the high ceiling and accessories such as a rail to hang kitchen utensils.

He was especially pleased to have found the space to include a 45cm-wide dishwasher, an appliance not often found in small kitchens. His only regret is not etching drainage channels into the stone benchtop, a decision that was taken when trying to whittle down the cost of the overall makeover by a fraction.

"We decided to put in an undermounted sink, but then we didn't integrate draining

(channels) into the benchtop, so water now pools on the benchtop itself rather than draining away," he says of that budget cut.

"The advantages of doing that (having the channels) would have far outweighed the saving."

It proved to be a useful, if not hard, lesson for the couple.

Kitchener's hindsight advice to other renovators is this: "When you want to save \$1000, look for five ways to reduce costs by \$200 each rather than eliminate one big thing."

The trick is working out which things are worth spending the extra money on.

Budget makeover: Michael Kitchener (above) lived up to his name when creating this chic but functional space

COST \$15,350

THE PAIN Demolishing two walls from existing plan

THE GAIN Ceating the breakfast bar. It's a bonus in a small space

LOVE MOST Being able to fit in a dishwasher

LOVE LEAST Not integrating sink drainage channels into the benchtop

CABINETS Laminex Wenge natural finish with matching edges

BENCHTOP 20mm-thick CaesarStone Osprey with pencil-round edge

FLOOR Existing timber floorboards

WALL TILES Blue glass mosaic

WALL PAINT Dulux Antique White USA

SINK Undermounted sink by Abby

TAP Abby mixer

APPLIANCES Delonghi gas cooktop DGHSII; multi-function electric oven DMFPSII; and rangehood TF60. Heller 45cm-wide dishwasher

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