



# Kitchen Art / Kitchen Architecture

PRESENTED AT THE KBB EXHIBITION IN BIRMINGHAM, THE ROCK IS A BOLD CONCEPT THAT CHALLENGES SOME OF THE ESTABLISHED NORMS OF KITCHEN DESIGN. WE SPOKE TO ITS CREATOR COLIN WONG ABOUT THE IDEA BEHIND IT AND HOW HE HOPES IT WILL INSPIRE OTHERS TO THINK DIFFERENTLY...

## INFINITY

**Colin Wong:** "There is something about Corian that draws me instinctively to design with gentle curves. The 'Infinity' Rock, inspired by hypnotic lapping waves, was designed to be layered, calm and tactile. Wharf Seamless Worktops skilfully fabricated Infinity and used the transparent properties of the Venaro white Corian to accentuate each layer with Led light panels whilst Corian Juniper adds subtle contrast with its sensual curves."



## COLIN WONG

Born in Scotland of Asian descent, curiosity took Colin Wong back to his roots in Asia where he entered the shop fitting industry working for top European fashion houses. On return to the UK, Wong established Edinburgh-based kitchen and bathroom studio, Development Direct.

His design ethos is deeply rooted in the principles of Feng Shui with a clear emphasis to create interiors that can lift the spirit. Wong said "I believe design has the power to alter your mood before your mind has had time to think. On a drab, dreary morning, as you enter the kitchen and before your foot hits the ground, does the space make you feel alive and ready to face the day?"

A prolific award winner, he has amassed 22 design awards across all sectors and is a regular columnist, judge and guest speaker on kitchen and spatial design.

## ARCTIC

**Wong:** "My journey started with the 'Arctic' Rock. I wanted to create a dramatic piece with the tactile feeling of a natural rock formation. I worked closely with the fabricator Neo-Granite as it was imperative that the broken edge detail wasn't too refined, so we chose to go back to old stone masonry techniques and hand-chisel the edge. I collaborated with Silestone and selected their polished Calacatta Gold which contrasted well against the matt chiselled edge. The feature of the raw edge was further enhanced by cladding the Rock in a back-lit bronzed mirror".



The Rock concept is the creation of a personalised kitchen sculpture designed to connect to its surroundings and its users. Like a commissioned piece of art, each Rock is unique, crafted to sit proudly within the space. Today's kitchen industry is often reliant on current trends which can often 'timestamp' a kitchen. The concept explores the potential of removing the primary focus away from the cabinetry and on to the form itself, creating timeless kitchen architecture.

The Rock concept allows clients to commission their personalised Rock, then cloak it in their selected material and finally 'slot' in their chosen furniture. Designed to last generations, furniture can simply be interchanged whilst the Rock sculpture remains timeless and truly individual.

The designer behind the concept, Colin Wong, explains: "The concept's goal is to hand the power back to designers to create more thought-provoking designs which have a real sense of permanence. I also like to see great design available to all and not just the elite, so personalisation is the key. Whether you choose to clad your Rock in a semi-precious stone, laminate, or recycled scrap, the emphasis is on the form. I would hope my concept encourages designers

from all walks of life, whether it be artisan blacksmiths or pop-artists to leave their mark on the design landscape."

### DESIGNER: What was the starting point idea behind The Rock concept?

**Colin Wong:** I was approached by the KBB event organisers UBM to develop a kitchen concept for this year's exhibition. I often have many concepts burrowing away in my mind so when they gave me free reign to bring my 'Rock' concept to life, it was an opportunity I couldn't turn down. I am an incessant scribbler and my desk is a mountain of my design ideas. However, I fondly remember as a kid that I drove my mum crazy drawing these crazy concept cars with gun turrets and flame throwers instead of studying for things that mattered (to her!). This subliminal scribbling continues to today with crazy cars now making way for conceptual kitchen sculptures.

### DESIGNER: What is meant by the 'permanence and impermanence' of kitchen furniture and materials?

**Wong:** All too often, I am told by a rep or social media what this season's 'must haves' are. It always makes me smile, as I don't believe designers strive to be common and unoriginal. No matter how amazing a new look is in someone's eyes, it is exactly

that – a trend. Anything in-vogue waits to be put out of its misery to make way for the new trend on the block.

If we continually follow certain looks set by manufacturers, there is undoubtedly a lack of permanence and the kitchen can be 'timestamped' to an era only to be replaced like yesterday's news.

The Rock concept looks at kitchen design in a more sculptural manner where the kitchen form is not governed by on-trend furniture or worksurfaces. Instead, I want individual rocks to be created by designers like a commissioned piece of art which have real presence and permanence within a space, akin to the architecture of the house itself.

### DESIGNER: How could the relationship between kitchen designers and manufacturers potentially change in the future? What are the main obstacles and how might both designers and manufacturers address them?

**Wong:** I respect that kitchen manufacturers move with the times to capture trends simply to increase their sales. Business is business and that won't change. I am not saying we cannot work with manufacturers and in the instance of the Rock, my concept simply reverses the stereotypical

## LOOKING GLASS

**Wong:** "I wanted to be a little playful with my 'Looking Glass' Rock and collaborating with Formica spurred me to design a sculpture that challenged the stigma that eye-catching design need not always use expensive materials. Inspired by Alice in Wonderland, I wanted to draw the eye in a theatrical way to a sensual velvet box. This was achieved by tapering Formica's Deco metal panels towards the box whilst the form is picture-framed in Formica's Nero Grafite thin laminate".



design and buying process which normally starts with the cabinetry followed by the worktop. The Rock concept starts with the design of the sculptural form itself and then, and only then, cabinets are selected to simply slot into place to play a more understated and functional role.

For this year's KBB exhibition, I collaborated with Rotpunkt and selected their range of more understated, architectural finishes which worked perfectly as they respected that the focal point was the Rock form itself.

As kitchen designers, we need manufacturers just as much as they need us. However, in an ideal world, I would love them to collaborate with the more lateral thinking designers whose ideas can elevate the manufacturer's offerings in a much more original manner. If they just listen to the mass market then the UK's design landscape simply won't have the diversity and originality evident in other countries.

**DESIGNER: We've seen a growing emphasis on a diverse range of materials being used in the kitchen – is The Rock concept a natural progression towards a different way of thinking about how we use materials?**

**Wong:** There is no doubt that the industry is bountiful with all manner of door and worktop finishes, so the look of homes is subsequently led by these manufacturers and their 'chosen' finishes. I personally feel that unadulterated design originality is lost in this maze of finishes which sadly dictates the look of so many kitchens. I am not here to reinvent the wheel but merely want to look at utilising these materials in a more lateral manner, where the designer and client chemistry behind a design is more meaningful than the material itself. I also like to mix in materials from outside of our industry to create a more diverse design landscape. Being able to design and mould a bespoke kitchen sculpture not governed by trends gives the power and kudos back to the designer.

## CORTEN

The 'Corten' Rock was inspired by an industrial metal-worker's bench to create the moody feeling of an industrial sweat shop. 12mm thick Iron Corten quartz by Neolith was used to replicate solid iron and the material was elevated and offset over the matt black base with a smoked mirror-clad shadow gap. Planet Granite fabricated this piece and water-jet cut the niche box and mitres to achieve an understated, honest look.



# GIVING SOMETHING BACK

SPECIAL THINGS CAN COME FROM GREAT DESIGN...

When the concept was being conceived, Colin Wong requested that all proceeds from the sale of the Rocks would be donated to charity. Three years ago, he extended his interests to include philanthropy, with a percentage of all his profits going towards a care facility for disabled and disadvantaged children in Asia.

So what made him get involved in charitable deeds in the first place? "Truthfully, I was becoming a little frustrated and bored," he explains. "I count myself lucky to have received so many awards over the years, but I started to lose that amazing feeling I experienced when I collected my first award. I started searching for things that would give me back that special feeling and kind of hit a brick wall. Then one day, one of my developer clients turned up after two years in exile and I quizzed him



where he had been. It transpired that he felt a little soul-less after so many years of developing so he took time out and built shelters and water-wells for homeless families in Asia. Listening to him, it was evident that this brought a new dimension to his life, so with this chance meeting, I decided to give a little back."

It has since become a real passion for Wong, and he would urge others

within the industry to consider finding the time to get involved in something similar themselves. "Our industry is a really prosperous and buoyant one and over my 19 years, I really haven't seen a poor kitchen or bathroom owner in relative terms.

"There is no doubt, we all lack time, but I take a month off to travel to my charities and I see no negative affect to my business. In fact, I come back fresher and motivated as I know how far the money can go. When I think how my designs can influence deprived people on the other side of the world then it is a special feeling that all should experience at least once in their lifetime. On your next holiday, go to more unknown destinations and simply wander off the beaten track and you'll be dumbfounded by the poverty you can stumble across."

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