

# Coffee Drinkware

## European market receptive to handmade and consistent concepts

The European market for coffee drinkware is growing. There is considerable competitive pressure from established brands with a long heritage and a sharp positioning. Focusing on designs, materials and techniques linked to your local origin gives you a good chance of success. Handmade coffee drinkware and consistent concepts also help you create an image. In addition, sustainable and fair trade values can give you a competitive edge.



Coffee drinkware covers coffee cups, cups and saucers, mugs, sugar bowls, milk jugs, coffee pots and spoons. These are all classified as tableware. Related implements such as water kettles and coffee grinders and makers usually come under kitchenware. This category includes tableware and kitchenware made of porcelain or china; ceramic tableware and other household articles like pottery, stoneware, earthenware, etc.; and drinking glasses made of lead crystal (excluding glass ceramics or of lead crystal and stemware).

## Design, Labelling & Packaging

Coffee cups, mugs and saucers are typically made of glazed ceramic, allowing them to hold hot coffee (the ideal serving temperature is 68 to 79 °C) and providing insulation from the beverage. Cleansing is easy, as glazed ceramics are dishwasher-safe. Handles are optional, but do provide additional insulation for the hands as well as portability. The preferred types of coffee among European consumers are:

- standard black or white coffee – served in a cup, with or without a saucer, which must hold a volume of between 20 to 26 cl, or a mug, with a volume ranging from 20 to 40 cl;
- cappuccino – served in a cup and saucer with a volume of 15 to 18 cl;
- espresso – served in a 'demitasse', a cup with a volume of 5 to 6 cl, usually on a saucer.

Saucers need to be proportional to the cups, but are usually around 15 cm in diameter.

Porcelain, another common material for coffee drinkware, allows for heat retention but cools down quickly due to air bubbles in the cup. Besides glazed ceramics (stoneware, earthenware) and porcelain, glass is also used a lot for coffee drinkware, as are synthetics such as melamine. Paper and plastics are used for disposable coffee drinkware. The cylindrical form is the most common for mugs and cups. Deviations from the 'perfect' cylinder add aesthetic value. Any decoration is possible, ranging from hand-painted decorations to transfers. Glazing techniques and colours add further design elements to the coffee sets.

For labelling, the following points have to be kept in mind:

The cylindrical form is the most common for mugs and cups. Deviations from the 'perfect' cylinder add aesthetic value. Any decoration is possible, ranging from hand-painted decorations to transfers. Glazing techniques and colours add further design elements to the coffee sets.



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Information on the outer packaging of coffee drinkware should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer; External packaging labels for coffee drinkware should include: producer, consignee, material, quantity, size, volume, country of origin, and caution signs; For pottery and porcelain or glass items, boxes should preferably be labelled with warning notices such as 'FRAGILE!' or 'Handle with care!'; EAN or barcodes on the product label are common in Europe. Your buyer will specify what information they need on the product labels or on the item itself. For instance logos or 'made in...' information. This is part of the order specifications. Use the English language for labelling, unless your buyer indicates otherwise.

Packaging has pre-requisites like:

### Importer specification

Pack coffee drinkware according to the importer's instructions. They have their own specific requirements for the use of packaging materials, filling boxes, palletisation and stowing containers. Always ask for the importer's order specifications. These are part of the purchase order.

### Damage prevention

Properly packaging coffee drinkware minimises the risk of damage by shocks. How an item is packaged for export depends on how easily it can be damaged. Ceramic or glass coffee drinkware is generally quite fragile. Packaging should make sure the items inside a cardboard box cannot damage each other. It should also prevent damage to the boxes when they are stacked inside the container.

## Dimensions and weight

Packaging must be of easy-to-handle dimensions and weight. Standards are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination, specified by the buyer. Cartons are usually palletised for air or sea transport. You have to maximise pallet space.

## Cost reduction

Nesting or stacking the items inside the container reduces costs. While packaging has to provide maximum protection, you must also avoid using excess materials or shipping 'air'. Waste removal is a cost to buyers.

## Material

Importers are increasingly banning wooden crating and packaging due to their unsustainability and high material and disposal costs. Economical and sustainable packaging materials are more popular. Using biodegradable packing materials can be a market opportunity. For some buyers, it can even be a demand.

## Consumer packaging

Consumer packaging for coffee drinkware adds value to the product in the form of branding. Usually, gift-wrapping is provided at point of sale. The inner box can often be used for this.

## Opportunities

After a shift away from Chinese imports caused a dip in 2013, European imports of glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware are increasing. Developing countries supply more than 40% of these imports. Europe's main importers of glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware are Germany and the United Kingdom. Their large market for developing countries makes them especially interesting. European demand for glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware increased between 2012 and 2016. With an average annual growth rate of 4.1%, it reached Euro 3.3 billion in 2016. Demand is highest in Italy (Euro 1.1 billion), followed by Germany (Euro 444 million), France (Euro 383 million) and the United Kingdom (Euro 362 million).

Europe's demand for glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware is higher than its production. This drives the need for imports, making Europe an interesting market. European production of glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware also increased between 2012 and 2016. With an average annual growth rate of 6.4%, it reached Euro 3.1 billion in 2016. Italy is responsible for 35% of European glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware production.



## The European Coffee Nations

### The Consumers

Coffee consumption in Europe is relatively stable at around 3.1 billion kg p/a. In terms of total coffee consumption, Germany is leading with more than 400 million kg p/a, followed by France and Italy. Per capita, Scandinavian consumers drink the most coffee, up to 12 kg p/a in Finland! Due to the success of coffee pod and capsule concepts like Senseo, Nespresso and Tassimo, singleserve coffee is becoming increasingly popular in Europe. Retailers in Northern and Western Europe are expanding their assortments of single-serve methods.

*Tips: As Europe's main coffee consumers, Germany, France and Italy are interesting target markets for coffee mugs, cups and saucers. With the largest coffee consumption per capita in Europe, Scandinavia is also interesting. Offer coffee mugs, cups and saucers suitable for serving single-serve and specialty coffee.*

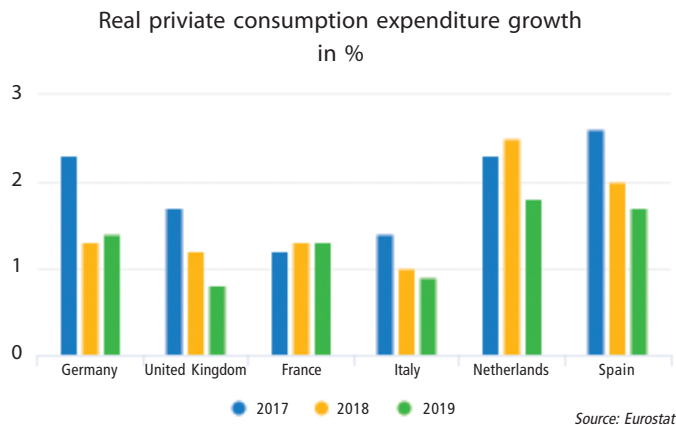


### The Importers

European imports of glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware dipped in 2013, mainly due to a dip in imports from China. Since then, however, they have recovered strongly. This corresponds to an average annual growth rate of 1.7% over the entire period, with imports reaching .2.7 billion in 2016. In the coming years, European imports are expected to keep growing moderately. With .1.1 billion, developing countries account for 41% of European glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware imports.

This share is predicted to stay fairly stable in the coming years. In reality, many of the exports of glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware from Western European countries are re-exports of products manufactured in developing countries. Germany is Europe's leading importer of glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware, with Euro 496 million in 2016. The United Kingdom follows with Euro 350 million. When it comes to imports from developing countries, Germany and the





United Kingdom are also leading with Euro 207 million and Euro 232 million respectively. For the United Kingdom, this is of its total glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware imports! China dominates European glass drinkware and ceramic tableware and kitchenware, with 30% in 2016. This used to be 37% in 2012, illustrating a shift away from Chinese imports. Other leading suppliers from developing countries are Turkey (4.2%) and Thailand (3.4%).

**Tips:** Study your options in Germany and the United Kingdom. Their strong imports of products from developing countries make them especially interesting markets. Compare your products and company to the strong competition from China, as well as Turkey and Thailand. You can use ITC Trademap to find exporters per country. You can compare on market segment, price, quality and target countries.

## Effect of real private consumption expenditure on European demand

Private consumption expenditure is an important indicator for the European home decoration market. The sector is closely linked to economic conditions. When money is tight, consumers postpone buying non-essential items until they have enough disposable income. Between 2017 and 2019, European private consumption expenditure is expected to increase. This means that consumption of decorative products is likely to rise. Especially in emerging markets, consumers will have more money available to spend on decorating the home. Consumers in mature markets already spend a fair amount of money on decoration, so growth in their consumption will be moderate.

### Trends that offer opportunities

#### 'Slow' or 'to go' coffee drinking moments

Busy urban lifestyles often reduce breakfast to hurried food intakes. Coffee drinking during the early-morning rush needs to be quick and convenient. Therefore, breakfast tableware consists of everyday basics, often with a mug instead of a cup and saucer.

Inexpensive, unassuming crockery is used for this 'to go' user moment. Coffee at work also falls into this category, because the coffee drinkware in the workplace is often equally basic, sometimes disposable. European consumers also appreciate more intense coffee drinking moments, such as at the end of a meal, weekend breakfasts, or private get-togethers. 'Let's have a coffee' is an invitation to some quality time. Here, the enjoyment of coffee drinking takes a central place. These are precious 'me-time' moments of 'slow coffee' drinking, which is accentuated by some nice drinkware. The idea is to drink your favourite coffee, from your favourite cup or mug, with your near and dear ones. A number of consumers are developing into real coffee connoisseurs. They take pride in preparing and sharing specialty coffees with friends, and derive status (admiration) from it. These 'home baristas' grind (and sometimes even roast) the coffee themselves and serve it in the most appropriate, extra-special cups. Generally, 'me-time' moment consumers will be less price-sensitive than rush-time users. Home baristas form a small top segment in coffee drinkware.

**Tip:** Study the developments in coffee consumption in Europe. Coffee drinking and gifting trends directly influence consumer needs in drinkware. Check our studies about coffee, also to investigate different coffee drinking cultures across Europe. Cater for the various coffee drinking moments and offer the right drinkware for the right occasion. Be aware that the same consumer may prefer different drinkware for different occasions. Have a different price-value mix in mind for each. Communicate the main values of your offer to the consumer's various coffee drinking moments, rather than to the type of person (demographically). Extend the number of moments for which your coffee drinkware offers solutions by developing both 'slow' and 'everyday' coffee sets. Extend your consumer market



segment to include coffee at work or in catering places. Such project market marketing requires its own mix in terms of product features, price strategy, distribution and communication. Usually, price and durability are key factors here.

## Freedom of choice

When it comes to drinkware, European consumers are quite mature and prefer to make their own, individual choice in coffee cups and mugs. They require freedom of choice, rather than buying what everyone buys or the industry prescribes. Complete matching sets of dinnerware, or coffee sets specifically, that are bought in one go seem a thing of the past. Modern-day consumers match different coffee drinkware to different emotions, and compose and arrange their own coffee sets. This can even go as far as combining new purchases with flea market finds and freely mixing and matching cups and saucers. Another trend is doubled-edged. Some consumers are becoming more formal in their coffee rituals, strictly using the right drinkware for their specific coffees. For them, a cappuccino comes in the right cup, with a saucer, in the exact dimension, as the Italians would do it. On the other hand, other consumers are rapidly dropping conventions in drinking coffee and just doing whatever is convenient or feels right. This is causing the disappearance of the ceramic coffee pot and the saucer.

**Tips:** Cater to the diversified coffee drinking preferences of the European consumers, for example by offering mugs in a variety of sizes. Don't invest in coffee pots, as they have limited commercial appeal. Offer flexible collections of cups and saucers than can be mixed and matched, with saucers optional. Offer choice or options, such as patterns in different colourways or shapes.

## Identity and personality

In an overcrowded tableware market, authenticity becomes key. This translates in two ways. Firstly, consumers want to express themselves and stand out from the crowd. They are able to do so by making individual choices in coffee drinkware, as they do in tableware generally. Equally, brands want to differentiate from others in their segment and need to show a personality or signature of their own. Heritage is one way for brands to do so: showing your own history (the first Wedgwood dinner service was made in 1763) or your production story builds trust. Origin is

another: patterns or shapes that are derived from local culture. Handmade is also extremely valued in a category (tableware) that is quite industrialised.

Consistency, too, helps create a fan base and allows consumers to collect within a style group: Alessi represents inventiveness, Seletti humour, Bunzlau Castle cobalt blue.



**Tips:** Check the following identity elements and see where you could create an image on the market:

- History of your organisation, process or industry – what story can you tell to help the consumer add a dimension to your product features?
- Production stories: what materials, techniques, cultural meanings - do your products have that are a source of learning and inspiration to a consumer eager to hear and tell new stories?
- Origin is good, but don't be too ethnic. At the level of your product lines, make sure the binding factor is clear; this can be a shape, colour, or literally a story. Handmade – hand-thrown, hand-painted, hand-stencilled, hand-formed, an individual manufacturer's name or even impression of a thumb: it all adds to the personal touch of the product, and as such adds value.
- Emphasise the handmade element in your design and marketing. Trigger the consumer's senses (texture, colour, combinations of materials).
- Be consistent in your concept – focus on and become known for one special feature, look and feel, or story, instead of being 'everything for everybody'. This does not mean you can't change or innovate. For example, Le Creuset are extending into tea and coffee in the same signature style as their famous cooking pots.

## Made in Europe

An ongoing trend is that a chunk of the production of coffee drinkware (and tableware in general) takes place in Europe. For mass-market ceramics, this is driven by the need for lower quantities, smaller runs, lower logistical costs and greater control over quality and the frequency of buying. High-volume production is often located in Eastern Europe, where labour is relatively cheap. Another driver for this trend is the existence of a great European tradition in the production of tableware – especially in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy and Portugal, where experience can date back to the 18th and 19th centuries. Some of these manufacturers may manufacture the specials at home, whilst outsourcing their volume needs. Particularly in the higher segments, small studios throughout Western Europe serve their small niches with handmade pottery.

**Tips:** Be lean in your production, study and (re-)negotiate logistical costs constantly, offer flexibility in production runs, reduce packing costs and offer margin differentials for longer-term customers. Differentiate on design, story and identity. Study your importer to anticipate their cycle of product development and take the initiative in offering new design ideas or directions based on an intimate knowledge of their positioning and best sellers. Offer one-stop shop benefits: concepts for different categories (such as dinner- and kitchenware), consumer packaging, or even food and non-food. You can do this by offering a broad collection based on a particular raw material (such as porcelain or stoneware), teaming up with colleagues in your area, or horizontal integration.

## Collecting

Many European consumers collect items like coffee drinkware. This may seem contradictory to the desire for freedom of choice, but it is a very valid driver of consumption in home decoration (compare with statuettes, wall plates, tea spoons). Collecting is a gradual process and part of the satisfaction is to work towards a full collection of something over a period of time. Rather than buying a complete set in one go, consumers want to add new items to their collection gradually. A complete collection can consist of cups in one theme (such as butterfly decorations), by one designer (for example everything by Clarice Cliff), a time period or a brand (such as Wedgwood 1920s), or whatever drives the collector. Needless to say, 'complete' also means collecting both the cup and matching saucer if that was the original pair. Collectors may freely combine vintage finds (bought at flea markets or auctions) with newly bought items, depending on their theme.

**Tips:** Be collectible. Offer a variety of decors around one theme; add new items to your existing lines every new buying season based on the same design element (a shape, decor, etc.). Mugs are especially suitable for this, as they are also seen as stand-alone items in dinnerware and gift categories.



## Going green

In ceramic tableware, certifications related to socially and environmentally cleaner production are increasingly embraced. However, this forms a Business-to-Business rather than Business-to-Consumer value in this category. This is also because the consumer does not automatically associate ceramics with a possible depletion of raw materials (as in wood) or environmental pollution (as in plastics). Professional buyers demand certification as evidence of proper working conditions, to meet their own codes of conduct. So far, however, they have only communicated this passively, rather than using it as an active element in their positioning ('we are green!'). It is mostly done through their website, rather than on the product label. Green materials are increasingly valued. In drinkware, for example, pressed bamboo is marketed as a green alternative to established materials. In an increasingly competitive market with increasingly aware consumers, it is only a matter of time before sustainability becomes a selling point for consumers. The first signs of this can already be seen, for instance through Messe Frankfurt's Ethical Style Guide, a buyer catalogue highlighting green concepts at its fairs. The fair trade value set forms an exception, as this is actually a consumer value. Fair trade distributors prominently communicate their social and environmental principles to their customers. In ceramic tableware, including coffee sets, fair trade distributors offer their wares in the original niche segment of fair trade resellers, but increasingly also in mainstream segments (both in consumer and project segments).



Fair trade distributors prominently communicate their social and environmental principles to their customers.

**Tips:** Be 'green'. Be specific about the green features of your concept. Add visual content and certify if and when it adds clear benefits. Consider fair trade certification. This is the most comprehensive certification around, but once your system is ready to support it, other certifications are relatively easy to acquire. Assist your fair trade distributor's marketing efforts by offering an attractive product, price and story.

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## Legal and non-legal requirements

The European Union's General Product Safety Directive applies to all consumer products, including coffee drinkware. It states that all products marketed in Europe must be safe to use.



**Tips:** Read more about the General Product Safety Directive. Also use your common sense to ensure normal use of your product does not cause any danger. The RAPEX database lists products that the European Union has rejected at the border, or withdrawn from the market. Check the database for similar products for an idea of what issues may arise.

Europe has specific packaging and packaging waste legislation. Among other things, it restricts the use of certain heavy metals. Europe also has requirements for wood packaging materials (WPM) used for transport, such as packing cases, boxes, crates, drums, (box) pallets and dunnage.

The REACH regulation lists restricted chemicals in products that are marketed in Europe. For example, REACH restricts the use of lead in the paints and glazing of ceramics. The European Chemical Agency provides useful information and tips on REACH. See for instance REACH Annex XVII for a list of all restricted chemicals. Also check out the information on REACH for companies established outside Europe and the Questions & Answers on REACH. The Food Contact Materials regulation states that home decoration products like coffee drinkware shouldn't negatively affect consumer health or food quality. It also contains rules on labelling food contact materials.

### Additional requirements

Social and environmental sustainability make your products stand out on the European market. Think of sustainable raw materials and production processes. European buyers increasingly demand the following certification schemes:

**Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI):** European retailers developed this initiative to improve social conditions in sourcing countries. They expect their suppliers to comply with the BSCI Code of Conduct. To prove compliance, the importer can request an audit of your production process. Once a company has been audited, it is included in a database for all BSCI participants.

**Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI):** This initiative is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. It aims to improve the working lives of people across the globe that make or grow consumer goods. You can use standards such as ISO 14001 and SA 8000 to read up on sustainable options. However, only niche market buyers demand compliance with such standards.

**Tips:** Optimise your sustainability performance. Reading up on the issues included in the initiatives will give you an idea of what to focus on. Buyers appreciate a good story. If you can show that you value your company's environmental and/or social performance, this may be a competitive advantage. You can do this, for instance, with a self-

assessment like the BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers, or a code of conduct such as the BSCI Code of Conduct and the ETI base code.

### Requirements for niche markets

**Fair trade -** The concept of fair trade supports fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities. Especially when the production of your coffee drinkware is labour-intensive, fair trade certification can give you a competitive advantage. Common certifications are from: World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO); Fairtrade International; and Fair For Life.

**Tips:** Ask buyers what they are looking for. Especially in the fair trade sector, you can use the story behind your product for marketing purposes. Check the ITC Standards Map database for more information on voluntary standards and their requirements, including fair production.

**Crystalline Silica in ceramics -** Respirable Crystalline Silica (RCS) can cause lung cancer through inhalation. The ceramics industry mostly uses crystalline silica in the form of quartz and cristobalite. Although European legislation cannot regulate working conditions in non-European countries, European buyers care about worker safety. They may demand good handling of crystalline silica during production.

**Tip:** See the European Network on Silica for more information in various languages, such as the Agreement on Workers Health Protection through the Good Handling and Use of Crystalline Silica and Products containing it, a Good Practice Guide and the European national Occupational Exposure Limits.



## Market channels & segments

Coffee drinkware is widely available at offline and online retail places, ranging from hypermarkets, garden centres and general home stores to department stores and kitchen specialists. E-commerce in home decoration is increasing and can help you reach a broader range of customers. Retailers often combine online and offline channels. Consumers research and purchase products online, shopping around and comparing prices on home decoration items. Small (gift) items like coffee mugs or cups and saucers are especially suitable for this. To supply e-commerce you must be able to work with individual packing and labelling, as well as limited minimum orders.

The market for coffee drinkware can be broadly segmented into 'rush-time' and 'metime' users. 'Rush-time' consumers are found in the low and mid-low markets, consisting of everyday basics where price and design are accessible. Distribution is intensive, through one-stop shops such as supermarkets and garden centres, department and large home stores and online. Communication mainly focuses on value for money. Particular European manufacturer brands and retailers' own brands occupy this segment. Moment consumers with 'me-time' values are found in the mid to mid-high markets, as well as the luxury end of the market. In the mid segment, the mid-market department store offers diversity in brands with trendy and affordable coffee sets. Communication focuses on the user moment ('breakfast', 'moment to yourself', socialising) and on gifting.

At the mid-high to higher end, specialist coffee and tea shops, kitchenware specialists and premium department and design stores offer handmade items, sometimes limited edition. Communication focuses on the craftsmanship and the idea of the gift to yourself and to your nearest and dearest. At the upper end of the market, items become really special. This can be through their design (especially shape and material), scarcity or brand name. As coffee drinking has become mainstream, and coffee drinkware part of the overall look and feel of the home, distributors of general home decoration collections now also offer coffee sets. Such 'lifestyle' brands have broadened the landscape for coffee drinkware, moving it away from tableware specialists. This offers more opportunities for entering the (mid) market, but possibly lower volumes per order, as such lifestyle brands don't stock dinnerware in large quantities. The lower-end segments are only promising if you are able to offer large volumes at sharp prices, and as such have a fairly industrialised process. Mid- and mid-high segments are suitable if you can offer differentiation and are aiming at smaller segments, but with the possibility for small price premiums. Higher-end segments are suitable if you can offer exclusive designs based on exciting, (semi-)handmade techniques.



## 10 Tips for doing business with European buyers

1. Comply with the requirements of buyers
2. Prepare your own terms and conditions
3. Package your product well
4. Be flexible
5. Show interest in the business of your buyers
6. Communicate in a clear and honest way
7. Always try to engage in personal contact with prospects
8. Show buyers you want to understand their business needs and wishes
9. Accept longer payment terms
10. Specialise.

## Pricing

Consumer prices depend on the value perception by the consumer in a particular segment. This is influenced by your marketing mix: product benefits, promotion (brand or not, communication of product benefits), points of sale (reseller positioning), and a matching price. Shipping, import and handling add 25% to the price of your coffee drinkware. Wholesalers account for a further 100% mark-up. Finally, retailers may add another 100-150% to the price.

**Tips:** *The value perception of your product in the chosen segment determines its price. The quality and price of your coffee drinkware must match what is expected in your chosen target segment. To determine your price, study consumer prices in your target segment and adjust your price accordingly. Understand your segment. Offer a correct marketing mix to meet consumer expectations. Adapt your business model to your position on the market. ■*

Source: CBI, EU



# Kitchens take shape as spaces for “living in”

Manufacturers are responding with exciting innovations and an entirely new design language to make eating together an unforgettable experience



Kitchens offer a mirror on societal change at a time when cooking is no longer a necessity so much as a lifestyle choice. Once the kitchen had taken territory from the dining room, the next step was to expand into the living room. Kitchen manufacturers are responding with exciting innovations and an entirely new design language to make eating together an unforgettable experience.

It's a real paradox: although city dwellers cook increasingly rarely, they actually invite friends over to eat more often and spend more on their kitchens. No longer must a kitchen be pared-down and functional: now customers are insisting on top-quality kitchens to match their high design aspirations. Since kitchens are becoming living spaces, our desire to personalise them goes far beyond choosing the doors for the units. New apartments are now often planned around the kitchen. Because cooking is seen as sociable, it is no longer performed behind closed doors, but is celebrated publicly and in style. For instance, a manufacturer makes a combined dining table and island unit. The sinks incorporated in the table can be controlled separately, so you can keep wine cool and food warm. The herbs, spices and seasonings

you need are kept on the table, while cutlery and accessories are kept in drawers. This approach involves guests in shared evenings of cooking, rather than excluding them from meal preparation. As kitchen manufacturers get bolder with their incursions into living space, furniture producers are also making inroads into the kitchen. There are tables that combine dining table along with an induction hob. Three main design trends that are emerging: modular, new rustico and modern classic.

## Modular: the kitchen as workspace

The kitchen is now the heart of the home and is no longer confined to a fixed space, nor even to static walls. A compact kitchen works better than an extravagant kitchen-scape, especially in a small apartment. Some of these kitchens look like sideboards and can be combined flexibly, a real benefit for people who move house frequently. They offer as much storage space as you need and prioritise tidiness and ease of use by keeping everything within easy reach. Some manufacturers split the kitchen into



three elements: a workbench (with water point, cooking zone and eating area), a cabinet for appliances (with oven and fridge) and an equipment cupboard (with

the contents clearly visible). This makes kitchen items into statement pieces: from sculpture-like glasses, to leather-clad Nespresso machines, rattan-coated thermos flasks and chopping boards that look like works of art. Another sort of modular kitchen stands on fine metal feet and almost completely hides its true nature. It works as a set of distinctive stand-alone items, offering not only space for a quick coffee but also room to cook an evening meal with friends. This new trend is also helping supposedly passé pieces such as the kitchen cupboard make a comeback - but in a modern guise. Tailor-made solutions can often be configured according to user requirements and combined with other furniture. Multifunctional kitchen appliances and pots and pans with removable handles can help save space.

### New rustico: reinterpreting a classic design

Rough-hewn, rustic alpine kitchens are on the way out. Instead, manufacturers are reinterpreting the farmhouse kitchen - with generous proportions and decidedly straighter edges. There is an emphasis on the interplay of natural materials such as wood, stone and ceramics which radiate warmth. In addition, they offer a pleasant tactile experience and are easy to keep clean: this is



nostalgia with a modern twist. Whether you choose work surfaces and doors that are really chunky or cut fine, these new country kitchens will

win you over with their sophisticated technology and smart storage solutions. They're even moving out of the countryside and into urban apartments. The sensory experience continues with the latest kitchen utensils - knives with fragrant wooden handles and plates made of handcrafted porcelain round out the 'new rustico' kitchen nicely.

### Modern classic: Kitchens for purists

It's not long since open-plan kitchens were the latest thing. Now kitchens in urban lofts and large houses sport clean lines and sleek fronts without handles, becoming pure works of art which fit seamlessly into the building's architecture. The kitchen has become a status symbol and, space permitting, is the showpiece in any apartment. Although stainless steel has long been an integral part of large-scale industrial kitchens, it also has a powerful effect when combined with matt epoxy resin surfaces.



Modern kitchens become cubist creations, behind whose façades a sophisticated inner life often hides. The most

frequently used utensils and foodstuffs remain within reach but are concealed in niches so they don't disrupt the kitchen's overall appearance. In open-plan living spaces, the traditional division into full-height walls of cabinets and an island unit has become a popular solution. A recent innovation is the disappearance of visible plinths and pedestals, which gives a greater impression of space. The free-standing island looks like a monolithic monument which forms a harmonious whole with the tall cabinets and wall units. These ensembles are impressive in themselves, and further details bring them to perfection: perhaps a neat joint or a soft-close mechanism to further refine the edges, and decorative accessories to fine-tune the style.

### The kitchen as digital showcase

The move towards digitalisation also drives developments in kitchens. Besides manufacturers' own apps, personal assistants like Alexa, or Mykie - who was specifically designed for cooking - can transform your kitchen into a 'smart kitchen'. Your assistants



know what's in the fridge, what the weather will be like later and how long the lasagne still needs to cook. Smart fridges not only sort foods

according to freshness, but also communicate with hubs that can compile shopping lists and share messages with your family. Some ovens that are already on the market can dramatically reduce cooking times by regulating their own temperatures. The key priority, though, for all manufacturers is that these new creations must retain the fun. ■ Source: Ambiente