

The living kitchen

Victoria Meale has created a kitchen that provides the perfect setting for family life

WHEN is a kitchen not a 'kitchen'? When it's also a room for family dining, effortless socialising with friends and general homely joy, somewhere to gather the clans, mull over plans for the garden, indulge in some idle chat or even write a novel. Such is the variety of functions it serves, the kitchen is playing an increasingly important role in everyday life.

In tandem with the move towards multi-functionality comes a growing sense that a kitchen isn't just about cabinetry. After all, sharp corners and hard surfaces do not a friendly space make, something that interior designer Victoria Meale feels strongly. 'Kitchens today require a different and more thoughtful approach,' she says. 'They need to feel comfortable and inviting, with a softer feel than the purely functional rooms of the past.'

A balance of practicality and warmth was key to the success of Victoria's design for this family home in Barnes, south-west London. True to its Victorian origins, the kitchen was small and part of a series of little, awkwardly arranged rooms ('far too many doors,' states Victoria) at the rear of the house. 'We removed internal walls to open up the space and create one much larger room, occupying the same footprint,' she explains.

Skylights and Crittall-style glass doors allow maximum light into the room, with the doors offering direct access to the garden.

But how to create a hardwearing design, suitable for a couple with five children who love to cook and entertain, without opting for serried ranks of cupboards and appliances? A practical layout was the starting point, recalls Victoria, who admits to 'templating and relocating the Aga many times' before she was satisfied. 'People always gravitate towards the warmth of the Aga, so it becomes the focal point of a room,' she explains. 'Just as I would position a table in relation to the fireplace in a dining room, so it was important to place the table here near to the Aga and in a space which also links to the island.'

