

Hi, I'm Kate, and I've just bought this – my very first home!



MY FIRST home

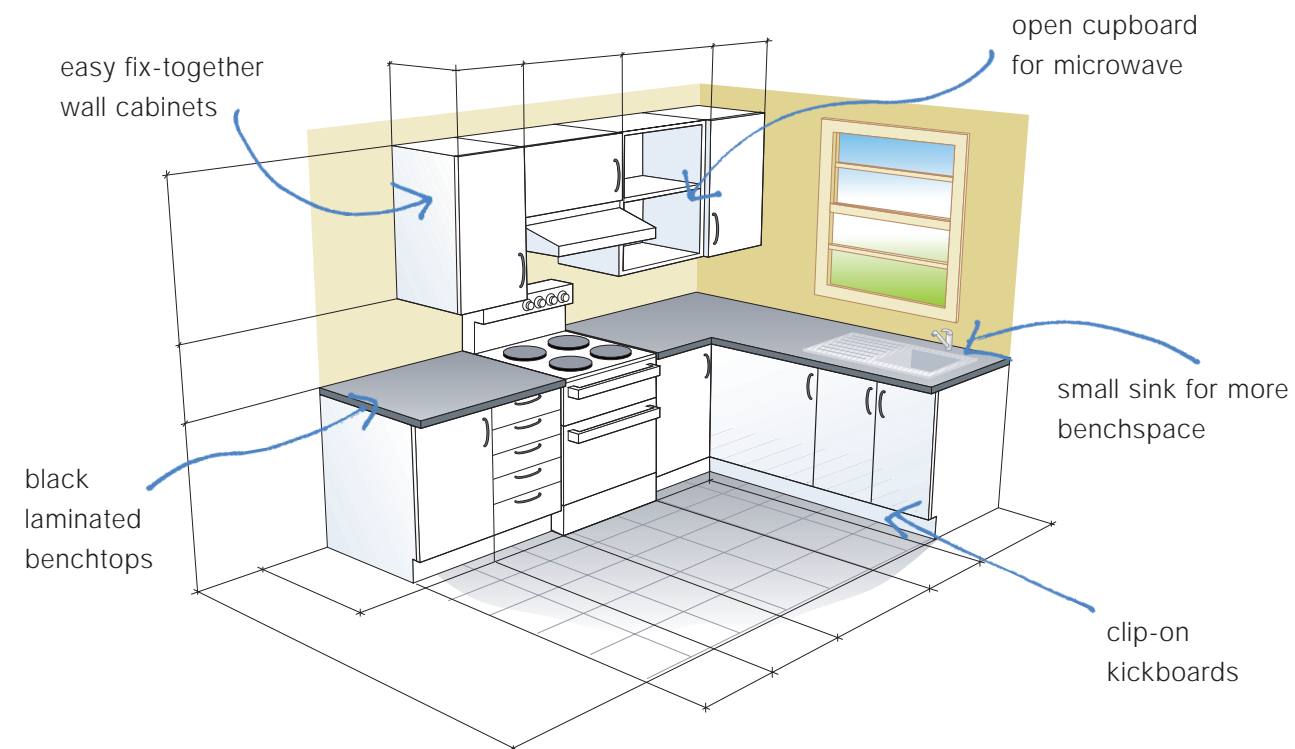
I know, I know... it needs lots of work. And I can't wait to get started. Every month in *Handyman*, you can follow the renovation progress with my step-by-step features. **I figured I'd start by tackling the totally feral kitchen and replacing it with what's called a "flat-pack" kitchen** – cheap and very DIY-friendly. I reckon lots of other home owners will love my solution. **Well, here we go!**

I DID IT FOR JUST \$3,000!



MY FIRST home

Words: Kate Griffith
Photographs: Joe Filshie
Diagram: Stephen Pollitt



GETTING STARTED ON MY easy-assemble kitchen

1. GO SHOPPING!

Lots of flat-pack kitchen suppliers have showrooms, so you can check out their ideas and find out what style is going to suit your needs. (I've made a list of the ones I looked at to give you a starting point – contact details are at the end of the story.) I went for basic white; I figured it would make my kitchen look bigger. But there are tons of colours and different finishes, so go nuts if you want to!

2. MEASURING UP

Heeding first my Dad's warnings of 'not once, not twice, but three times', I measured up my space. He kept stressing how important it was to get this first stage right – so I made sure I took my time. I checked out where the existing plumbing and electrical points were to work with because, as my friends who are tradies told me, the less you have to move around – the cheaper it will be!

3. DRAW IT UP

Next, I did some sketches for my new kitchen layout. A lot of the kitchen websites have online kitchen planners to help you out. Flat-packs use standard measurements for their cabinets, so it was like a mini jigsaw puzzle, working out what was going to fit – I got there eventually.

4. GET READY

Finally, in an attempt to look really organised (OK, I was really trying to impress my Dad – there are some things you never grow out of), I made a list of everything needed for my new layout – including all the little cash-consuming extras, like handles, kickboards and, of course, the benchtop. Parting with my hard-earned cash was tough, but when all the stuff arrived, I really felt I'd got my money's worth. We were ready to go!



TOP TIP BUY CABINETS WITH WHITE COVER PLATES TO HIDE SCREWS AND GALVANISED PLATES IN THE CORNERS. THEY HELP KEEP THINGS NICE AND NEAT INSIDE.

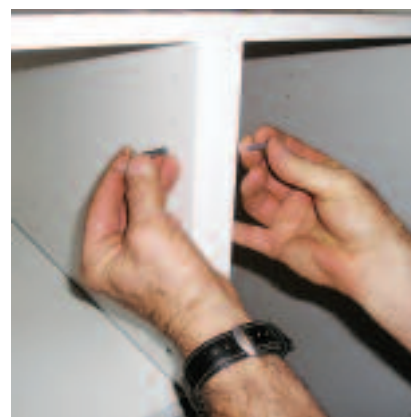
With my limited budget, I'm rolling up my shirt sleeves + tackling it DIY-style!



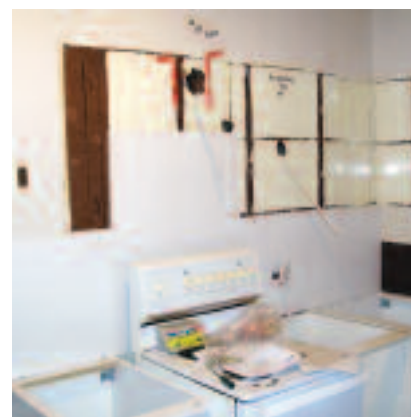
1 The fun part – destroying the old kitchen! I needed to curb my enthusiasm, so I didn't damage the existing walls. A professional plumber re-positioned the old sink drainage and water pipes into the corner and capped them, and an electrician moved a couple of power points for the new rangehood and microwave.



2 Pre-assembling the cabinets was like a real-life Lego project. To keep things easy, I left the doors off at this stage. I found the flat-pack instructions really easy to follow. Although it took the best part of a day to assemble all the units, it was all pretty straightforward.



5 Once the cabinets were in place, we screwed adjoining cabinets together, keeping front edges flush. They had clever little connectors that screwed into each other for a nice tight fit. Then, last of all, we fixed the cabinet backs to the wall through the brackets supplied. We needed to use wall anchors in a couple of places where there were no studs available.



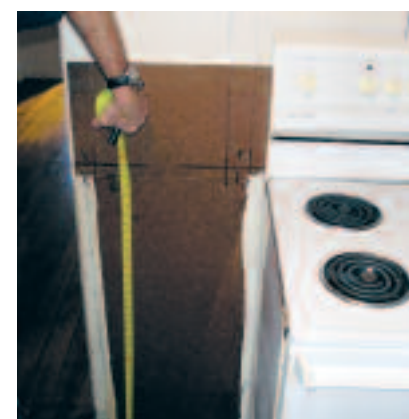
6 Whew! Time for a coffee break, and to sit back and admire the bottom half of my new kitchen in place. Then, with renewed energy, I was ready to tackle the installation of the top cupboards. This was going to be tricky: how are you supposed to support them while you're fixing them in place?

LESS STRESS

MAKE SURE YOU KEEP ALL THE SCREWS, INSTRUCTION SHEETS AND LITTLE BITS & PIECES TOGETHER AT ALL TIMES. DON'T LOSE OR DISREGARD THEM – EVEN IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE FOR YET.

GOOD SENSE

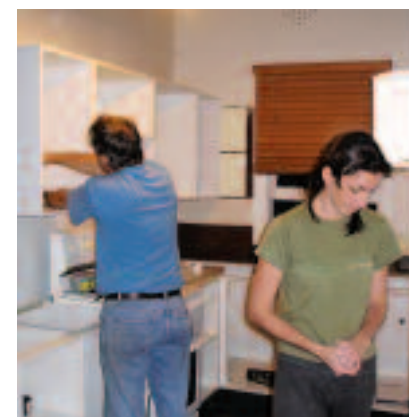
WORK OUT WHICH WAY YOUR DOORS ARE GOING TO OPEN – NOT ONLY FOR THE EASE OF ACCESS, BUT ALSO TO MAKE SURE THEY DON'T BANG INTO OTHER DOORS AND DAMAGE HANDLES OR MELAMINE.



3 Time to work out bench height. I wanted the bench to be level with the existing oven, so I drew a level line around the walls to use as a guide. This also allowed me to do a quick measure to the floor, to check whether it was level. Surprise, surprise! My floor was a good 20mm out at one end, making me realise why the units come with adjustable legs.



4 At last, it was time to place the assembled base cabinets into their position. I used a trusty old spirit level to ensure that all the prefab cabinets were level in both directions – front to back and side to side – and adjusted the legs up or down where necessary.



7 We fixed the wall cabinets together as one piece, pre-drilling the holes for power points in the back. We then lifted them up and sat them on top of the melamine splashback. (The splashback was cut to the shape of the wall cupboards and screw-fixed to the wall studs. Its top edge made a great resting place for the cupboards while being fixed in place.)



8 Now to fitting the benchtops. The professionals say that the fewer the joints, the better the finish. Sounds easy, but getting it right took careful planning. We worked out where the straight and mitre joints would be (they're the cuts on an angle) and managed to fit the main bench with just one mitred joint. See "The Bench", page 48 for details.

FIRST-HOMEOWNER DILEMMA!

I'd spent all my cash buying the house, so how could I afford a new kitchen? Given my budget, I wasn't too unrealistic and knew

MY FIRST home

I couldn't afford anything too schmick. I just wanted something clean and tidy that would make the most of the small space.

FIRST-HOMEOWNER SOLUTION!

Have you ever heard of DIY flat-pack kitchens? I always thought that the way to get a new kitchen was to go to a showroom, pick the one you like and then fork out vast quantities of cash for it to be built. **Not so!** Flat-packs are a great alternative for those of us with tightly-drawn purse strings.

HEY, LAZY SUSAN!

Storage is a big part of any kitchen design, and for those low corner cupboards (where things can go missing for years) try a Lazy Susan. They're perfect for tucking away big pots and pans or things you only need to pull out now and again.

AVOIDING MELAMINE SPLITS

Here's a tip that can save you oodles of frustration. Someone canny suggested that I place a piece of masking tape on the opposite side to where I was drilling, to help stop the melamine splitting – and guess what? It works!



Question: How could I support the top cabinets while I fixed them into position?

Solution: I screw-fitted a sheet of white melamine, cut to shape, as an alternative splashback.

Not only did it cover up the old ugly walls quickly, but it also sat neatly on top of

the base cabinets, providing support for

the wall cabinets above.

Without this, I would have had to fix a temporary timber cleat to the wall to hold the cabinets in place while I screwed them to the wall, which sounds scary.

I can always tile the splashback or glue stainless steel sheeting onto it later – when my budget permits!



9 Now to cut the hole for the sink. To avoid drawing on the benchtop, I marked the shape of the sink with masking tape. I marked a cutting line on more masking tape 12mm inside the edge of the sink. The tape also provided protection for the edge of the melamine as I cut out the sink shape with a jigsaw.



10 Next came cupboard doors and shelves. Mine had easy-to-use hinges that pressed into place on the back of the doors and then clicked into pre-drilled holes. Once these were in place, I just had to tap in the plugs and screw them into place.



13 For the doors and drawers, I chose cute little 96mm satin chrome handles. I also discovered my new favourite gadget – the Howard Silvers mounting template for handles. It's used to locate the hole position for your handles and means you can't muck it up. Love it! Match the holes to your handle and drill away.



14 I bought a small, self-recycling 600mm rangehood and screwed it into place under the fan cabinet, following the manufacturer's instructions. (Self-recycling rangehoods contain coals that filter exhaust without needing any ducting or venting. Prices start from around \$99.)



11 My cabinets came with removable shelves and shelving pins so they could be fitted at whatever height I wanted. I just had to make sure the finished edge of the shelf was facing outwards. That might sound obvious, but I had to re-do a couple when I realised the difference – oops!



12 The drawer units clicked together easily, but it's important to screw the rails in the advised numbered holes, so they fit correctly. I was getting cocky at this point and rushed in without reading the instructions properly, so I had to re-do it. Once assembled, I slid the drawers onto the runners and clicked on the faceplates.



15 The kickboards only needed to be cut to length, and they really finished off the kitchen. They came with a pre-slotted rail on the back for the plastic clips to slide into. I just had to match up where the legs were on the base cabinets, and then fasten the clips over the legs to lock the kickboards into place – easy!



16 Done! All I needed now was plumber Pete, to reconnect my water and install the new mixer tap, and the electrician to connect all my power points. It was nice to stand back and watch someone else work for a change. I finished off the kitchen with a small tiling job around the sink, using several 200 x 200mm tiles to protect the walls.

LAMINATE ME

There are thousands of colours and styles to choose from, when it comes to laminate benchtops. They make a very cost-effective DIY option when compared to professionally installed granite or engineered stone.

I CAN HANDLE THAT!

For a quick and easy way to refresh or modernise your kitchen, just update your kitchen handles. There are heaps of great funky styles around, and it's amazing how much they can completely change the look of a kitchen.



I called in a bit of muscle for the tricky bits but the rest I did myself.

TOP TIP ANY EXPOSED RAW PARTICLEBOARD EDGES SHOULD BE SEALED, AS MOISTURE WILL MAKE THEM SWELL. I GAVE THE EDGES OF OUR SINK CUT-OUT A QUICK BRUSH WITH PVA GLUE BEFORE PLACING THE SINK INTO POSITION.

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ALL YOU NEED IS A SCREWDRIVER

the bench

Getting the mitre joint to meet neatly was very fiddly. To get a decent finish, I was told we needed less than 1mm variation in the join.

WARNING: This can be painfully time-consuming. We had to take the bench out and plane the edges of the joins back a number of times before we got it right.

It took all of my patience, but finally we had the bench fitting snugly and were ready to screw it into place. First, we added a little PVA to both edges and, as I had a black benchtop, I used black mastic along the top of the mitre joint to match. I cleaned up the excess that squeezed out of the join, using mineral turpentine.

HINT: For extra strength on the join, we screwed a timber cleat underneath to keep it square and prevent it from getting wobbly.

To give a neat finish, my benchtop came with extra edging strips for fixing to any cut ends. I just trimmed to the curve of the laminate with a utility knife.

Finally, it was time to screw the benchtop into position from underneath. I allowed myself a moment of congratulation as I watched my new kitchen really starting to take shape.



OK, HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

NO.	ITEM	SIZE	COST (\$)
1	High cabinet with shelves	400 x 600 x 2330mm	266.00
2	Base cabinet with shelves	400 x 600 x 860mm	218.00
1	Base cabinet with 5 drawers	400 x 600 x 860mm	290.00
1	Corner base cabinet	1200 x 600 x 860mm	303.00
1	Base cabinet for sink + 2 doors	600 x 600 x 860mm	125.00
2	Wall cabinets	400 x 370 x 700mm	192.00
1	Fan cabinet	600 x 370 x 350mm	73.00
1	Wall cabinet for microwave	600 x 370 x 700mm	103.00
1	Single lever kitchen mixer tap		59.00
1	1 bowl inset sink with drainer		139.00
8	Satin chrome handles	96mm	47.60
2	Benchtop	1860 x 606mm	260.00
2	Plinth	2200 x 160mm	60.00
5	Legs	90.00	

FLAT PACK TOTAL COST \$2225.60

Plumber	300.00
Electrician	150.00
Dump fees (old kitchen)	50.00
10 tiles + grout	50.00
Rangehood	99.00
Melamine splashback	48.00
PVA glue	8.95
Masking tape	2.00
Black mastic	4.95

TOTAL COST \$2938.50

Amazing! In just under a week I had transformed my decrepit old kitchen into a functional, clean and cute little cooking area. I could confidently put some hard-earned chocolate into my shiny new cupboards and pop some well-deserved bubbly in the fridge. **All in all, a job well done and definitely worth climbing the steep DIY learning curve.** I'm now ready to cook up a storm in my new kitchen, then roll up my sleeves and start on the next job from my very long 'to do' list. **Watch this space!**



So that's the kitchen done!
Next month I'm tackling the laundry. Good grief, how am I going to do that?

tools

- Flathead and Phillips head screwdriver set ■ Hammer
- Spirit level ■ Textra ■ Electric drill and drill bits
- Holesaw ■ Electric jigsaw ■ Utility knife ■ Power saw
- Electric planer ■ Mounting template ■ Stud finder

flat-pack suppliers

- www.flatpax.com.au ■ www.ikea.com.au ■ www.smartpackkit.com.au
- www.flatpackkitchens.com ■ www.kitcheninbox.com.au ■ www.kitkitchens.com.au

NEED HELP?

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO TACKLE THE KITCHEN INSTALLATION YOURSELF, THERE ARE TRADESMEN WHO SPECIALISE IN INSTALLING FLAT-PACK KITCHENS FOR VERY REASONABLE PRICES. DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR A LITTLE PROFESSIONAL ADVICE IF YOU'RE NOT 100% SURE ABOUT THINGS.

MY FIRST
home

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