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DESIGN

# MADE TO MEASURE: SMALLBONE'S BEAUTIFUL CABINET CREATIONS

PRESENTED BY SMALLBONE

*Words: Charlotte McManus*

SYNONYMOUS WITH LUXURIOUS PRODUCTS AND SUMPTUOUS  
CRAFTSMANSHIP, THE BRITISH CABINET MAKER IS A TRUE LEADER  
IN THE FIELD OF DESIGN



Masters of cabinetry and proud upholders of British craftsmanship, Smallbone of Devezes has been making exquisite bespoke furniture for 40 years. Since its inception in 1978, the company's reputation for quality and innovation has grown across the globe, with its one-of-a-kind designs in demand at luxurious addresses all over the world.

From its humble beginnings with a young graduate restoring a single pine chest, Smallbone quickly grew into a unique company that had people clamouring for its reclaimed timber creations. Unlike the glut of fitted melamine kitchens dominating the market, Smallbone's forward-thinking ethos was rooted in salvaged pieces and novel "unfitted" designs. With this fresh approach, Smallbone emerged as the key player in the development of the kitchen from being a purely functional cooking area to the central hub of the home.



Its first London showroom opened its doors in 1981 and the British company has since gone from strength to strength. Its parent company Canburg was recently ranked 18th in the Sunday Times HSBC International Track 200 for the fastest-growing international sales. To date, Smallbone designs have made their way to destinations as far-flung as Europe, Russia, Hong Kong and Australia. In particular, the brand has enjoyed huge success in the States – not least Manhattan, where Smallbone products have been commissioned in some of New York's top-



flight residential developments, from One57, Central Park Tower and the Steinway Building-  
three 'supertalls' on Billionaires Row- to Walker Tower.

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Despite its global success, the true heart of the company still beats in the traditional market town of Devizes, Wiltshire, where its workshop is located. Approximately 1,000 commissions are taken on each year, with the 120-strong team of master artisans and apprentices using traditional methods to meticulously craft each piece by hand. Many of the time-honoured skills practised have been passed down from craftsman to craftsman – among the staff are three generations of the same family – and each piece comes complete with an inscription from the joiner who created it. In addition, alongside the traditional tools of the cabinetry trade, the workshop is becoming increasingly populated with cutting-edge technology.



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The clean lines of the Mulberry range are inspired by a bespoke commission for a boutique development in New York's Soho

At the workshop, sawn timber starts its journey in the dedicated timber mill, before being prepared ready for its journey through the assembly lines that conclude with their rigorous Quality Control department. Only the finest materials are sourced from around the world, from FSC-certified hardwoods from some of the oldest forests of Europe, Russia and the Americas, to semi-precious marbles and granites from Italy, India, China and Brazil. Smallbone also uses exotic veneers like Macassar and Lacewood, which are sourced and held specifically for the brand.



For 40 years, Smallbone's talented team of craftspeople have produced elegant, sought-after pieces.

There is a Smallbone design collection to suit every style. Standout kitchen ranges include post-industrial-themed "Brasserie", which brings the chef's table experience to life with linear dimensions and brushed stainless steel, while glazed oak cabinetry, elegant marble worktops and rose gold detailing create a cool yet welcoming urban setting in "Mulberry". One of Smallbone's earliest concepts, "Original Hand Painted", has stood the test of time with its tailor-made appeal, allowing clients to create a personalised painted kitchen space from a hugely diverse palette of solid colours, glazes and special finishes. Additionally, the company's newest design, "Naples", creates a future-facing twist on contemporary aesthetics, from delicate slatted

oak doors with a hand-applied grey satin finish to almond gold detailing. LED lighting can also be used, expertly programmed for multiple moods – ideal for say, those who want to create the feel of a bar in their kitchen come evening.

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Although kitchens remain an integral part of the business, Smallbone has expanded its repertoire with designs for other spaces, from bedrooms and bathrooms to dedicated environments for work, media and even collectibles. Combining tactile, hands-on craftsmanship with the latest technology, the brand is leading traditional cabinetry into the 21st century.



The Smallbone desk inspired by the quined detail of Georgian architecture

“We tend to be invited initially to work on one room, the kitchen, but because of the breadth of our range it is not unusual for us to be asked to provide the furniture solution for an entire house,” says Smallbone director of R&D and Special Projects, Iain O’Mahony.

Clients are encouraged to explore their passions. For instance, an elegant Crown Walnut desk with soft-touch lacquer and full-grain leather inlays can bring a real statement to a writer’s study, while a fashion fan might plump for a generous glass-panelled wardrobe to showcase shoes, clothing and accessories. Oenophiles, meanwhile, will delight in a sophisticated wine storage solution, where nifty features like UV filtering and a bespoke conditioning unit show off a well-stocked collection to the full.



Smallbone's new wine system includes almond-gold plated racks, a lighting control system and UV-stable tinted frameless glass

Whatever the space, every Smallbone commission is the result of close collaboration between client and design team. The process starts with extensive discussions, choosing material samples and referencing Smallbone cabinetry displays to pinpoint an agreed “design intent” of what the space should convey. The next stage involves Smallbone designers examining architectural drawings or visiting the room, if already built, in order to construct an initial proposal and get a sense of how it correlates with client expectations – this informs what senior designer Jai Godwin terms the “bones” of the design. The project’s colour palette is then populated with the shades of chosen timbers and accent materials.





The dressing rooms are hand-painted by one of its team of decorative artists

Once the designs have been developed, state of the art CGI's are then prepared before Smallbone's workshop and project management teams take over and prepare detailed drawings for the cabinet makers to begin their craft. At the workshop, artisanal skills such as timber selection, veneer work and finishing skills are put into play, in addition to applying expert knowledge of how the material parts will work together and cope with today's climate-controlled environments. Smallbone also works alongside the client's builders to provide the details needed to prepare the space for the finished furniture.



Organised cooking spaces allow both host and guest to indulge in the theatre of the kitchen

“The entire process can take 10-12 weeks, followed by installation. It’s a multi-faceted operation with many moving parts – the key is in the planning,” says Godwin. “Smallbone’s DNA is enmeshed with timber and skilled cabinetry, but we do have to work to stay current in a constantly changing design environment. Rare metals and finishes now define the luxury palette, and exotic veneers, hand-slumped curved glass doors and liquid metal hammered finishes are all some of the artisan techniques that have allowed us to stand alone in our ability to deliver unique products to discerning clients.”

Although the beautiful designs speak for themselves, Smallbone’s real USP lies in its completely bespoke service that goes far beyond that of its competitors – a quality shared by another quintessentially British platform, Q by Aston Martin. Clients can put an individual stamp on their commission, meaning that no two Smallbone spaces are ever the same.



Detail of Smallbone's accessory boxes in dovetailed oak from the Wallpaper\* Handmade collaboration

“For us, bespoke really does mean bespoke,” says Godwin. “As long as it is fundamentally safe and we can stand behind it as a Smallbone project, we do not adhere to rules – we work to achieve very specific design briefs, with clients who want something unique. For instance, one commission saw us make a super-luxe statement kitchen for a country estate, with client-chosen veneers and internally lit jewel onyx worktops. Another project was in a Cornish seaside peninsula property with a beautiful curved tower, which called for a completely circular set of rooms. A kitchen, an island and a bar were finished in high-gloss smoked eucalyptus veneer with curved glass cabinets and mirrors, reflecting the truly spectacular vista.”

Outside its loyal list of private clients, Smallbone’s beautiful hand-made creations are sought after by some of the globe’s most influential architects and designers. Amongst their collaborations, Smallbone has worked with visionaries Bill Sofield and Jean Nouvel on projects in the US. In 2017, the company collaborated with design bible *Wallpaper\** and fashion designer Paul Helbers on an exclusive creation for the magazine’s annual Handmade exhibition at Salone del Mobile in Milan, featuring a bespoke wardrobe made of oxidised English Oak that took over 500 hours to make.



Smallbone wardrobe collaboration with Wallpaper\* Handmade and fashion designer Paul Helbers

Smallbone celebrates a landmark 40 years of craftsmanship and design this year, with the team keen to look to the future. Some plans are still under wraps, but the company has disclosed that

it will be incorporating new products into showrooms, alongside initiatives to target emerging luxury markets, including a show apartment in Hong Kong. Smallbone designs are also underway at a super-exclusive luxury development in Dubai. Most excitingly, tantalising hints have been dropped regarding Smallbone furniture being a key USP for several major launches of some of the most valuable real estate on the planet.

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*For more details on Smallbone, visit [www.smallbone.co.uk](http://www.smallbone.co.uk) or email [enquiries@smallbone.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@smallbone.co.uk). You can also telephone: UK +44 (0) 207589 5998, US +1 212 288 3454*

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