

# Kitchen fit for a chef



He's worked in commercial kitchens all over the world and built a fair few here in Norfolk, but chef Chris Coubrough felt the heat when it came to designing his first home kitchen, writes **Nancy Wedge.**

**C**hris Coubrough and his wife Jo are tucking into home-baked apple cake in their open-plan kitchen, dining and living room. Sun is streaming in through the terrace doors which open onto the garden where their three-year-old son, Max, is skipping over the grass to look for freshly laid eggs in the hen coop.

"The children and I live in this part of the house," said Jo. The couple also have a daughter, Lily, aged six.

They are joined by Chris when he has some rare time off from overseeing his ever-growing empire of gastro-pubs and hotels, as well as his burgeoning TV career.

There's The Crown Hotel at Wells-next-the-Sea; The Crown Inn at East Rudham; The Kings Head at Letheringsett; The Ship Hotel at Brancaster, which opened in May; and the latest acquisition, the White Hart at Hingham.

Pictures:  
**Keiron Tovell**

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Used to living in staff housing, Chris and Jo have clearly enjoyed renovating their first home, near Fakenham, which they moved into last year.

"It's just like doing up a hotel, except that you aren't going to invite the general public into it. You don't have to worry about licensing and where to put the reception or the bar," said Chris.

"This was the first non-commercial kitchen we've bought. It was from Simply Kitchens in East Rudham, who were excellent.

"The owner, Rob, could see my nervousness – 'Do you really need two six-burners or that many sinks?' he would ask patiently. He was good at listening to what I wanted and interpreting it in a way that would work for a home kitchen."

The result is light and inviting with cream curved floor cupboards topped in a warm butterscotch quartz, walls painted in shades of sand and engineered-oak flooring.

Lined with windows overlooking the garden, the kitchen leads directly into the dining area, where a beautiful oak table – a wedding gift from Jo's parents – takes pride of place. It all flows through into the cosy living room, also decorated in calm, neutral colours.

Influenced by New Zealand open-plan living, Chris and Jo designed the kitchen themselves, incorporating a few commercial elements.

The Falcon range cooker, for instance, has a solid top in the middle of the gas burners. "You can fit lots of pans on it and it is handy to have a diminishing heat," said Chris. "You can also cook directly on it – it's good for scallops, eggs, flapjacks and drop scones – and it lifts up to reveal a wok burner."

Another chef-style feature is the

## A man with an open plan – that's TV chef Chris



**HOME COMFORTS:** Chris and Jo Coubrough in their new kitchen, which features two clocks – one set to UK time and the other New Zealand – and a stylish sink built into the central isle (left).

sink built into the central island, where produce from Chris' well-tended raised vegetable beds are washed. "To prevent cross contamination, we have this sink for food preparation and the other for washing up," he explained.

As well as providing additional cupboard space, the island is where the children sit for breakfast and guests enjoy a pre-supper drink, with

a ringside view of Chris in action.

"Chris is happy for people to watch him cooking, so when friends come over we have a drink here and it's all very relaxed and chatty. Then we go over to the table to eat and on to the sofas to relax after," said Jo. "We have always had a clear idea of what we wanted; it comes from a long time of not having our own place."

High on the list of priorities for the

couple were clutter-free surfaces, which they have achieved by storing items away in deep drawers and tall, spacious floor cupboards. "We don't like everything out on display and we wanted an alternative to high units, which can crowd you in and block the light," said Chris.

Lighting was also an important consideration. The kitchen ceiling is studded with 20 spotlights and there are five lighting circuits in the room, so that different light combinations can be selected depending on the occasion.

"I would say it's better to skimp on the rest and spend more on lighting," added Chris.

The kitchen was being built at the same time as the revamp of The King's Head at Letheringsett, which was crowned Norfolk dining pub of the year by the Good Pub Guide this month.

"Jo used to ring me to complain that the builders weren't there, and I would say: 'I shall endeavour to find out where they are, darling', when I knew very well they were working on the pub."

Jo said: "Chris cooks when he's here, so probably once a week, and it is my domain on the other six days. I enjoy cooking for my friends and obviously the children."

Tuna pasta, spaghetti Bolognese, lasagne, salmon dishes and roast dinner are all typical fare.

"My favourite food is chicken," said Chris, who explained that egg-laying chickens were the most prized animal on the family farm in Taranga on New Zealand's North Island where he grew up.

"When we have chicken it's still a treat. We had friends over for dinner last night and Jo reckons we gave them roast chicken for the third time!"

pubhaul



The Ship, Brancaster



The King's Head, Letheringsett



The White Hart, Hingham



The Crown, East Rudham



The Crown, Wells-next-the-sea

■ For more information about Chris, his pubs and cooking events, go to [www.flyingkiwinns.co.uk](http://www.flyingkiwinns.co.uk)