

Case Study: bulthaup
The kitchen as a lifestyle

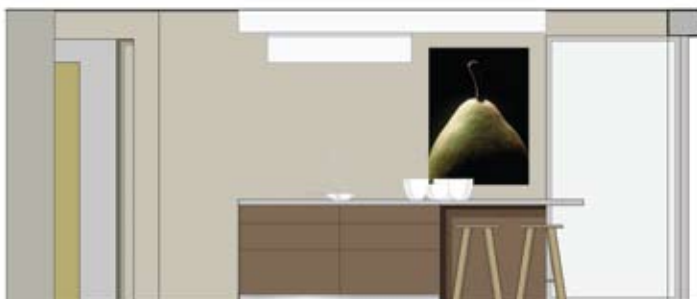




bulthaup adds local touches, such as installing art by local artists. For example, the work of the Ghent photographer Bart Van Leuven is prominently present in the showroom and in the realized kitchens of b.metropool and Ligna Recta.

“We fill the space with more than just a kitchen. If changes are needed in the interior, we suggest them in a subtle way,”

Bart Dirinck, bulthaup distributor b.metropool



Vectorworks 2D presentation by b.metropool.

With a sophisticated line of products made of durable materials in a sleek design, combined with constant innovation and a carefully built image, the German kitchen manufacturer bulthaup has established itself as a global trendsetter.

bulthaup’s modular kitchens are synonymous with timeless perfection. In addition to the manufacturer, the local distributors play an important role, because a bulthaup project often results in a custom kitchen.

“We fill the space with more than just a kitchen. If changes are needed in the interior, we suggest them in a subtle way,” says Bart Dirinck of bulthaup distributor b.metropool.

Karl Doise, of bulthaup distributor Ligna Recta agrees. “Once we have furnished the kitchen, clients often ask me to tackle the bathroom or another room with bulthaup furniture.”



Sophisticated simplicity: bulthaup's storage system is derived from the carpenter's box.

In our showrooms, bulthaup means an à la carte kitchen

Sixty years after its establishment, bulthaup is now present in over 50 countries across five continents.

In Belgium, there are ten distributors, and there are bulthaup showrooms in 37 cities in The Netherlands. In theory, the same kitchens are sold in each country: standard b1, and the custom-made b2 and b3. Yet there are quite a number of local variations.

“In France, for example, you will see many knobs, whereas in Belgium cabinets without handles are in high demand. You can customize our kitchens according to your wishes,” says Karl Doise of Ligna Recta. “There are almost no limits.”

“Our Dutch colleagues call the atmosphere in our showrooms ‘typically Belgian,’” add Bart Dirinck and Martine Verzwijvelen of b.metropool.

“However, we sell the same product. In our showrooms, bulthaup means an à la carte kitchen. Consequently, we provide a great deal of customization. We do not follow the bulthaup book so much. The range is also extremely wide, while only approximately one third is suitable for the Belgian market,” says Bart Dirinck.

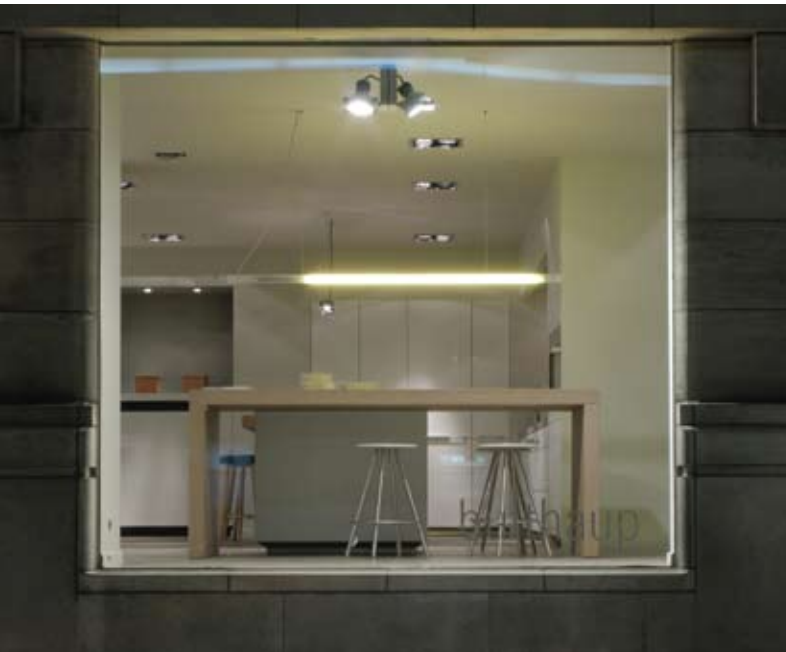


From sawmill to design kitchen

In 1949, Martin Bulthaup bought a sawmill and turned it into a furniture factory. He delivered his first kitchen buffets by horse and cart.

A few years later, the sales started throughout Germany. In the 80s, with his son Gerd at the helm, a new era began. Designer Otl Aicher - co-founder of the Ulmer Schule and designer of fonts and icon systems - defined the new philosophy in "Die Küche zum Kochen" (the kitchen for cooking).

Designers of kitchen elements should focus on the essentials of a kitchen: cooking, communicating, and enjoyment of eating. The kitchen becomes a space to live. Aicher's ideas caught on. bulthaup grew into a company with 500 employees, and with an exclusive global network of a similar number of partners, it became the leader of the designer kitchen. Seventy percent of production was exported and bulthaup reconciled old and new. The designs also reflected its past: the famous storage system of the kitchens is directly derived from the carpenter's box.



Ligna Recta's showroom.

The showrooms of b.metropool and Ligna Recta are located along busy roads in the center of Antwerp and serve as an important business card to promote their work.

"You have two options," explains Bart Dirinck. "Either you're at an inferior location and spend a lot on advertising, or you are in a prime location and spend little on traditional advertising, like us.



Showroom as a business card.

On our website we do not show much, although more than many of our colleagues abroad. It serves primarily to make the site visitor long for more," explains Bart Dirinck.

The bottom line for distributors is to make the right selection. There are 2,000 different fronts, and showrooms on average have only four or five kitchens on display.

Once the potential clients have made the move to visit the store, there is much discussion and the first drawings are made. Then, the original drawing is elaborated upon.

In addition to the technical drawings, they also make presentations in 2D. For the latter, the interior architects work primarily with floor plans and elevations.

“When the customer and their family look at the 2D drawing at home, we want them to feel the same atmosphere as in the showroom,” explains Bart Dirinck. “Accessories in the drawing, such as the chair on which they sat in our store can contribute to that. Or, on the drawing, we include pictures by Bart van Leuven, a photographer we often work with, and whose work is on display in the showroom. That’s how we create something personal.” b.metropool sells more than 100 kitchens per year, and makes 150 proposals.

“A hand-sketched impression, 2D plans, and talking about the kitchen, that’s very important to us.”

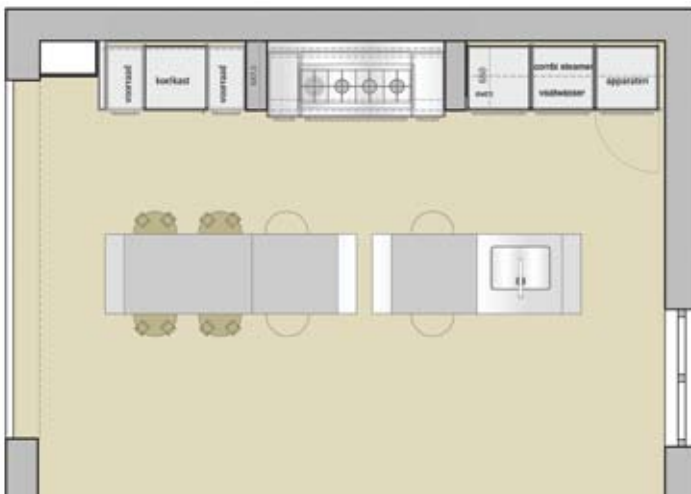
The plan should have the same atmosphere as the showroom

On average, it takes three months from order to installation. “We have hardly any inventory. bulthaup and the manufacturers of the appliances and countertops send the material to our warehouse. From there we take it in its entirety to the customer. The actual installation takes about one week to ten days,” says Karl Doise.

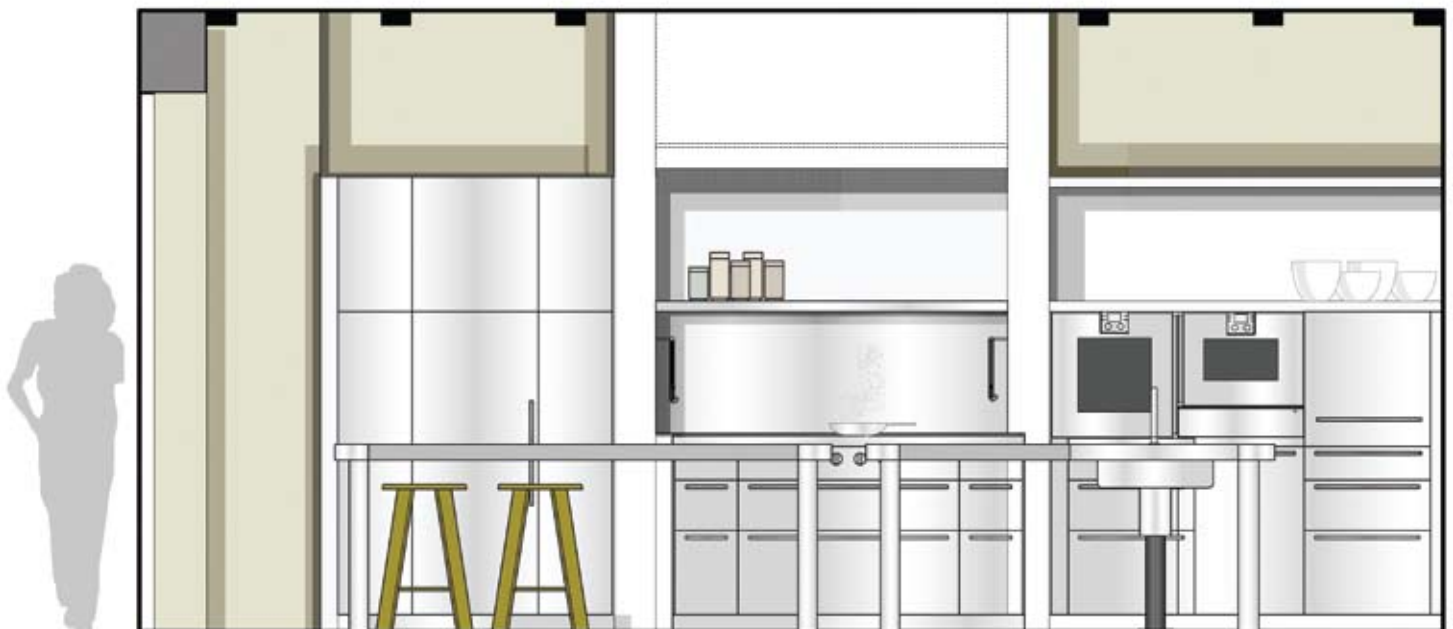
“For the delivery, we always work with the same installers, because the assembly is precision work. For example, the joints between the cabinets have a tolerance of only four millimeters. If necessary, we can make adjustments on site.

But in principle that’s not necessary, because that’s why we have made all those plans.”

bulthaup kitchens end up in both new and existing homes. In the latter case, the kitchen sometimes leads to the renovation of the house. “Customers often want more than a kitchen. They often ask us to also take on the bathroom or other areas of the home with bulthaup furniture. As we have time, we do that. This way, one creates a kind of harmony with the rest of the house,” explains Karl Doise.



The interior architects at b.metropool and Ligna Recta both work with Vectorworks for creating the designs, management plans, and detailed drawings for the carpenter and presentation drawings for the client. Design by b.metropool.



“By placing figures you properly reflect the proportions,” says Bart Dirinck.



The design is very sleek, even a little robust

Seamless perfection

At the Research & Development department of the German headquarters, product developers, scientists, and physiotherapists search for a balance between minimalist design, ergonomics, and functionality. After all, a kitchen should not only be practical and made to last, it should be a delight to the eye as well.

The seamless chamfering of laminate fronts is one of the visual innovations in which bulthaup has found success. bulthaup developed a new laser technique that allows perfect edges, completely seamless, as if the front is cast in one piece.



Status symbol

In recent years, the role of the kitchen has changed from an isolated spot into a central living space. As early as in 1983, designer Otl Aicher postulated that pleasure in eating, cooking, and communicating come first. The kitchen itself—the sinks and the cooking unit—must adjust. The designer kitchen was born.

“Cooking has become a family event and the kitchen is now a place to come together,” says Karl Doise.



Our kitchens are, foremost, workstations.

“I think we are part of the basis of that evolution. The kitchen has become a new status symbol. People go to restaurants less. They cook for their friends. With their kitchen they want to show their abilities and be lavish,” adds Bart Dirinck.

“The threshold of bulthaup is quite high, also because we never talk about prices in our advertising. Consequently, we miss out on potential clients: people who think we are too expensive for them, whereas perhaps we are not.”

To lower that threshold, bulthaup launched the standard b1 kitchen in 2008. That line is mainly targeted at young people and real estate developers.

“In addition, we place many b1 kitchens in country houses of customers who have a b2 or b3 in their home and want to have one during their holidays as well.”

Not show kitchens

That, of course, comes with a price tag. Prices for a full bulthaup kitchen vary from slightly above average, to triple the average, to even more.

“We don’t sell show kitchens,” says Martine Verzwijvelen “Our kitchens are, foremost, workstations.”

“Our customers are people for whom cooking is important and who appreciate beautiful things. We also often have young people who cannot yet afford a complete kitchen and buy one piece by piece, or, slightly older people, who have been saving. And the first thing they say is ‘I have always wanted a bulthaup,’ ” says Karl Doise.

Architect Case Study: Case Study bulthaup: The kitchen as a lifestyle

In recent years, the distributors have noticed that not only the role of the kitchen has changed, but more and more men cook as well.

"I used to work for another manufacturer. Its customers were mostly women," relates Karl Doise. "The husband only came up at the end, when the money had to be discussed.

Now I notice the opposite—the man comes along right from the start and he has his own ideas, not only about the budget, but also about the kitchen itself: what systems should be used, the color, and so on.

Perhaps this also reflects the design of bulthaup: it is very sleek, I think it is even a bit robust."

bulthaup at sea

Karl Doise of Ligna Recta installed a custom kitchen in a 43-meter luxury yacht. The designers of the yacht used Vectorworks® software for the kitchen's design, which was then imported seamlessly into the DWG file.



bulthaup is a lifestyle, we even have a fan club

Word-of-mouth advertising

Just like the products, bulthaup's marketing is exclusive. There is a Dutch language lifestyle magazine and every two years distributors organize a luxurious trip for their customers, because the bulthaupers have proven to provide quite a lot of word-of-mouth advertising.

"To many, bulthaup is more than a kitchen, it's a lifestyle. We even have a fan club," Bart Dirinck smiles. "And yes, we do cultivate that a bit." In mid-September, 850 bulthaupers were invited for an exclusive artistic and culinary excursion to St. Martens Latem and Deurle.

"One could also invest in advertising in newspapers. However, how do you know that you reach the right target audience? People find these trips fantastic. In the morning, at the reception desk, they are still a bit uncomfortable, but when the sun goes down, they have become best friends and talk about their children. Such things are very good for customer loyalty, because they tell their friends and family about this day."



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