

Bespoke

WORKMANSHIP



Blackwell Projects come highly recommended by fellow professionals. It's no wonder then that they have just completed a stint as principal contractors for The Waterside Inn's kitchen refurbishment

Noise constraints, health and safety issues, parking permits – glamorous such considerations may not be, but they are all part of the working day for Blackwell Projects, one of the UK's leading bespoke commercial interior and shop-fitting companies. 'There is a lot of programming and planning that goes on behind the scenes,' says the company's founder and managing director Mark Blackwell, 'together with a lot of skill and creativity to meet a client's often very exacting requirements. You never get the perfect scenario – there are always obstacles that make for challenges to get an interior just right.'

Whether selecting and sourcing of exotic stones, granites and woods from abroad, getting the best from the material suppliers, manufacturers and craftsmen in the UK with which Blackwell Projects has built trusted relationships over the decade it has been in business;

or simply fulfilling the restaurant, club or bar-owner's vision of just how this refit should look and perform.

Indeed, more interesting to company and client alike might be the challenge of making a Michelin-starred kitchen work with greater efficiency in an atypical L-shaped space, as Blackwell Projects recently did on the refurbishment of Michel and Alain Roux's The Waterside Inn. Commencing works within the traditional Christmas holiday period enabled handover of the project some 14 weeks later, indeed one day ahead of schedule. The project involved total demolition and rebuild of the kitchen structure and new interior finishes and equipment throughout.

'The work can be complex and we make sure we have good communication with our clients,' explains Blackwell. 'Some clients have a very specific idea of what they want, which may not be feasible



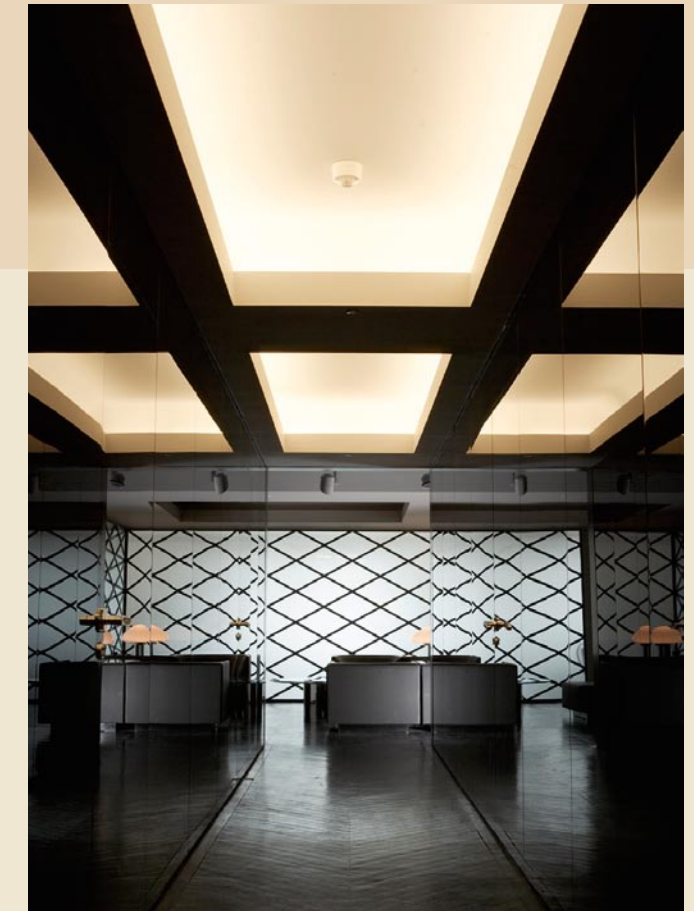
because of the budget – they have seen it in a magazine but overlooked that it was made to order for some sheik. But we make sure they get the very best alternative for their money.'

And for their time. Cliché it may be, but in the commercial world time is money – and every hour that a business is closed for a refurbishment, is money lost, even if the longer term objective is to create an interior that will produce greater profitability. This is one reason why Blackwell Projects usually completes a new fit or refurbishment within tight deadlines of just eight to 12 weeks, from first sketch to finished job. Perhaps it is no surprise then that some 90% of the company's work comes through the recommendation of fellow professionals, of the architects and interior designers, 'which is a nice situation to be in,' says Blackwell.

'We're aware that a commercial refurbishment may have aesthetic and functional requirements, but it is first and foremost a source of income and the space needs to be used again as soon as possible,' adds Blackwell. 'The business is about providing the best result for the money and within the brief without cutting corners.'

The briefs that Blackwell Projects takes on are varied: within the commercial arena (it also refurbishes top-end private residences) these may include high security cabinetry for a jewellery shop, giving a fashion store the latest look, creating special steel units to fit between standard cooking stations in a contemporary kitchen, or updating a traditional restaurant without losing the character its customers have come to love. Doing so means the company has to be as equally attuned to the client's brand image as to stylistic trends in shop-fitting, and provide the right materials according to whether the interior is expected to have the average five to seven year life cycle or, as is typically the case with restaurants, up to 12 years.

Either way, one of Blackwell Projects' signatures will be the quality of its bespoke workmanship. And perhaps this is no surprise as Blackwell himself was a cabinet maker and antique restorer before he launched his company, and many of his managers come from similar professional backgrounds. 'We fit some very good hand-made furniture for our clients, made by some of the best craftsmen, but I do miss doing the hands-on work myself sometimes,' he says. 'Those skills have at least given us at Blackwell Projects a fine eye for detail and good craftsmanship.'



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