

BEAUTIFUL KITCHENS

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Sebastian Conran's KITCHEN STORY

As a **product designer**, he has created hundreds of utensils and accessories for the kitchen, but what does he use at home?

My kitchen has lots of shelves so everything is on display. I've got a mix of both wood and granite worksurfaces and an island that's on castors and can move around. The only thing I've hidden away is a microwave. I'm slightly embarrassed to have a microwave but it's useful for heating up milk and coffee.

I like to see the people I'm cooking for so there are walls but no doors. The dining table is huge – it seats 12 at a push. Some dishes I like to plate up in the kitchen, some I bring to the table for that sense of drama.

We cook every day, using raw ingredients. I go to the farmers' market on Saturday mornings, and I cook fairly simple food as I don't have a lot of time during the week. Tonight I think we're having roast salmon with green beans. My wife Gertrude does the puddings.

I remember when I was a child my stepmother [Caroline Conran] was writing an amazing cookbook called *The Poor Cook*. I was there on hand to help her test the recipes, and today that book is still the foundation of my cooking.

My father gave me this huge cookbook called *Modernist Cuisine* for my birthday a couple of years ago, filled with exotic recipes from the likes of Heston Blumenthal. It's fantastic that we have these chefs, but I like simplicity in everything – especially food.

We inherited a Britannia range cooker with the house. It's a big old thing with a griddle on the side; I don't believe in throwing away perfectly good kit. I keep a large stockpot steamer on the hob because I always feel cookers look a bit naked without anything on them.

My top tip is to try using a scalpel in the kitchen. I've discovered that it's the perfect thing for scoring duck skin. I had my

brother-in-law, who's a surgeon, round and as a joke I offered him a scalpel to cut the skin. I then tried it myself and realised... wow.

My dream dinner guests? George Orwell, physicist Richard Feynman, Albert Einstein, comedian Sandi Toksvig and the Queen. They're all independent thinkers. I love the Einstein saying 'Imagination is more important than knowledge'. I believe that applies to cooking, too.

My favourite restaurant is Hereford Road in London's Westbourne Grove. I can walk there. And I like Boulestin that's just opened in St James's Street, which is very elegant French food, but not fussy.

The appliance I use every day without fail is my kettle, which has a temperature counter. Its lid is clear, so you can see the level, and comes off for filling – not a horrible flap-up thing. It has a soft rubber spout so it pours without dripping.

I used to tune into Radio 4 all the time but since I met Gertrude, who's an actress and singer, I listen to a lot more music. I have a fantastic music system and particularly like Glenn Gould playing Bach.

When I was head of design for Mothercare we always assumed that people would have only one arm free to use our products – the other arm would be holding a baby. I use a similar principle in kitchen design. Simplify everything and no gimmicks.

When designing a kitchen, think about the washing-up and get a big sink. You can never be too rich, too thin or have too big a sink. Who does the washing-up? Oh, Gertrude. I'm not going to pretend!

See more of Sebastian's designs at sebastianconran.com. His Universal Expert collection is available from John Lewis and universalexpert.co.uk

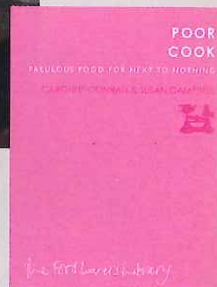


Sebastian uses his Universal Expert kettle, £60, John Lewis, for his daily brew



A large sink is a must, but Sebastian leaves the washing-up to his wife!

Poor Cook by Caroline Conran and Susan Campbell, £9.99, Waterstones.com



Universal Expert porcelain colander, £50, John Lewis



Britannia Delphi dual-fuel range cooker, £3,299, Ao.com, is similar to Sebastian's

Listen to Glenn Gould on vinyl. The album is £19.31 at Amazon

