

Deborah Ross
Men don't care about our curves

My 12-year battle with OCD
By Norman Lamb's son Archie

Eating billy goat gruff
Yes, you really will this year

TIMES 2

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Kitchen politics: a brief history

By Hilary Rose

Peter
Mandelson,
Hertfordshire,
1992

An election being fought in the

Are you interested in politics or Ed's and Dave's sinks, asks Hilary Rose

With a general election only weeks away, the big issues are coming to the fore: the strength

of the economic recovery; the constitutional implications of an informal SNP/Labour pact. Yet the real issue is closer to home. Literally. Because with both David Cameron and Ed Miliband posing in their kitchens in the past week — or, in Miliband's case, one of his kitchens — this has become the kitchen-sink election.

Don't believe me? I refer you to yesterday's prime minister's questions, hot on the heels of the chancellor's budget speech. What was the main topic? Kitchens. Whatever the question, it was met by one side or the other with a feeble reference to kitchens.

"At least I paid for mine, unlike the chief whip," said Miliband, in a reference to Michael Gove.

"If he can't stand the heat, he should get out of one of his kitchens," quipped Cameron. Boys, boys.

This is not the first time that otherwise blameless kitchens have been wheeled out to political effect.

In 1964 Harold Wilson thought it wise in the run-up to a general election to be seen drying the dishes with his wife. Margaret Thatcher was photographed doing the washing-up during the 1975 Tory leadership election, as was Willie Whitelaw, although Geoffrey Howe refused point blank to have anything to do with a pair of Marigolds.

Tony Blair used his kitchen to prove what a man of the people he was because he could make a cup of tea.

“What was the main topic at PMQs? It was kitchens

Gordon Brown proved slightly the opposite during an interview in his Fife kitchen when he failed to close the fridge door.

In 1992 Peter Mandelson dried the dishes in a cramped little kitchen, but by 1999 — two years after Labour's general election landslide — had upgraded to a gloriously light-filled and flowery wallpapered one, complete with a pine dresser filled with mugs.

The 2015 election could be won or lost on the quality of your kitchen and your winning way with a tea towel. Maybe.



Tony Blair's Islington kitchen, 1997



Edwina Currie, Derbyshire, 1989



Gordon Brown, Downing Street, 2008



Harold Wilson's kitchen, 1964



Ed and Justine's second north London kitchen, 2015



Barbara Castle's London kitchen, 1964

kitchen? No change there, then

COVER AND BELOW: TIMES NEWSPIRETS; REA FEATURES; A&L ACTION



Mrs Thatcher's Chelsea kitchen, 1975



David Cameron, Downing Street, 2015

Inside Dave's kitchen

Last week was all about Ed Miliband's second kitchen. This week is all about David Cameron's first. "Nobody wants a kitchen that screams 'designer' any more," says Clare Betteridge, director of RFR, a property search and interior design firm. "It's about stealth wealth and being discreet. The Camerons' is by Roundhouse, which specialises in mid to high-end contemporary kitchens, and I would bet it's Samantha's choice because she's cooler than he is. It probably cost about £30,000 because it's quite small, but it's not trying to be flashy. This is a kitchen for people who are very family-oriented, cook a lot and spend time in their kitchen. You can tell by the open shelves and how everything's really accessible.

"But there's some really serious kit in there too: they have a range cooker, which is the urban Aga, and a serious fridge, probably Smeg. Nothing is there just to look pretty."

Everything, however, tells a story.

The middle-class mess

Bottles and bottles of Boots vitamins? Check. Carte Noire coffee beans?

Check. Chardonnay in the fridge? Check. Glass vase filled with tea lights? Check. Then there are the toothbrushes and toothpaste. The uninitiated might query their presence in a kitchen. Parents, however, know it's a solid way to speed up getting the children off to school after breakfast.

The food

Sardines on toast, made by daddy — although presumably for his children's tea, not his own. The role of Hellman's mayonnaise in such a dish strikes some of us as a little controversial, but the tins of John West sardines are unexceptionable. Weetabix is zero-sugar boring right-on, and we could reasonably have expected the white sandwich loaf to be brown — but the huge tubs of mini-cakes from M&S? Who would have guessed the Camerons countenanced such a thing? Does that mean it's OK for the rest of us to get through an entire tub of chocolate-coated flapjack bites at one sitting? Or maybe theirs are millionaire's shortbread. We will never know, but we do know there are two tubs. And a bottle of chilli sauce.

What's on his fridge

Family photos, obv. Magnetic letters, equally obv. But their placing is suspicious: why are they herded up to the very top of the door, where the children can't reach them? After all, it's the children who use them, not the PM. There are two possibilities:

1. This was SamCam's idea of a last-minute clear-up. She looked at the

work surfaces and decided all was lost because, while you can trust a man to open a tin of sardines, you can't trust him to clear up afterwards. By giving the letters a tidy shove, at least the fridge door could look presentable. 2. One of the children had hilariously spelt out BUM and some bright spark noticed before it was too late.

The extras

"A walk-in pantry is the ultimate middle-class luxury," says Betteridge. "Everyone wants one, but they take up a lot of space. It's a slight hark back to the country upbringing they both had but it is, again, a sign of someone interested in food; look at all those Nigella Lawson TV programmes where she's popping in and out of her walk-in pantry. The stainless steel splashbacks are urban and cool and the dining table looks like a classic £6,000 marble Saarinen from The Conran Shop. It could be a cheaper imitation but I bet it's not. The only thing that, to me, strikes a slightly jarring note is the arc lamp, because they're easily knocked over and not very practical."

And while Ed Miliband had a naff lime-green recycling bin in his (second) kitchen, the Camerons will have opted for a discreet built-in option, custom made by Roundhouse. When it comes to pans, however, everyone goes to John Lewis, be ye ever so high. If not own-brand, then Jamie Oliver. Le Creuset is the smarter, showier option, but can be incredibly heavy.

The condiments

No 10 is no place for a bottle of bog-standard Filippo Berio olive oil.

The Camerons fall squarely not just into the upper classes — Eton, daughter of a baronet, etc — but also into the Ottolenghi classes (see cookery books, below). Their olive oil, therefore, is from Ottolenghi. It will be called Planeta, it retails for £13 and is made from olives grown at Capparrina in Sicily, massaged daily by nubile young women dressed in Dolce & Gabbana cocktail dresses, rendering it an enviably green colour with a thick consistency and fresh-cut grass flavours*.

If you have a walk-in pantry, you're not going to sully it with bog-standard white wine vinegar; you're going to get chardonnay vinegar from the specialist Spanish importer Brindisa at £17.95 a pop. The same applies to spices: you're not going to countenance ten-year-old cardamom and brittle bay leaves turning to dust. You'll have tins of Bart's baharat spice, because it's what your Ottolenghi cookbook would want.

*Some of this is true.

The cookery books

The first Ottolenghi book, naturally, because otherwise how would one know what to do with the pomegranate seeds, za'atar and sumac in the walk-in pantry?

A Mary Berry book is a given, because everyone needs one Mary Berry cookery book. Ditto something by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, because if one can't support one's fellow old Etonians, what can one do? And naturally a book by Skye Gyngell, the former chef at Petersham Nurseries, aka the middle class's favourite rus in urbe, where the Camerons were lunchtime regulars.



Like many parents, Cameron knows the value of keeping toothbrushes by the kitchen sink