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# Livingetc

LEADING BY DESIGN



## BIG DESIGN ENERGY

2024'S MOST DYNAMIC TRENDS DECODED  
NEW COLOURS, NEW MOODS AND NEW NAMES TO KNOW  
PLUS THE ART OF CREATIVE SPACES



ARCHITECTURAL FEATURE OF THE MOMENT

# built-in benches

THEY ARE THE SMALL BUT MIGHTY BESPOKE DESIGN ELEMENT THAT ARCHITECTS ARE USING TO UPGRADE IGNORED CORNERS

FEATURE Keith Flanagan





Often as sleek as they are seamless, built-in bench seats have a foothold in the modern architect's tool kit. Popular as window seats or as dining banquettes in kitchens, they also come in handy throughout the home – especially in smaller spots that warrant an impromptu sit.

Built as extensions of wall cabinetry, positioned near the front door, or even tailor-fit for tight corners that might not accommodate floating furniture, they offer a small but mighty dose of charm in unexpected places.

Space is naturally the chief benefit. 'Built-in furniture works for different purposes in different projects,' say Sarah Zames and Colin Stief, founders of Brooklyn's General Assembly. 'We often do built-ins in small spaces, where maximising the space as much as possible is desirable.'

And as homeowners seek bespoke design, customisation is increasingly important; integrated bench seats have a tendency to fill any void, no matter how tricky the layout.

'We're deploying more and more custom designed elements in our projects to solve spatial issues when an off-the-shelf piece simply can't address the issue – for example a horseshoe-shaped room,' says Alexandra Donohoe Church, managing director and founder of Australia's Decus, which has a penchant for upholstered benches in its projects. 'We find we can infuse an awkwardly shaped room with a feeling of seamlessness through custom built-in upholstery.'

Here are a few built-in bench ideas that add functional character to any home. ➤

## 1 HANG TIGHT

**Freestanding benches need ground support, but built-in benches can float with the right hardware. For the design opposite – a plush semicircle seat inside the home's entrance – Dublin's Kingston Lafferty Design chose a cantilevered effect that hides the support structure. 'What you don't see in the finished piece here are the metal brackets, which have carefully positioned timber grounds (batons) to be fixed into,' says Becky Russell, the studio's CEO, describing the custom-made hardware. 'Once you have the correct strength of brackets and the correct wall build up, the rest is joinery and upholstery.'**

**PROJECT BY** Kingston Lafferty Design

## 2 GREAT HEIGHTS

**If you want your bench to rise to any occasion, you'll need to get your dimensions right. This entryway bench – a perfect perch designed for putting on or taking off shoes – offers a sensible blueprint for a comfortable seat. 'We**

**always base our seating options on a good seat height, which is usually around 42cm,' says Sina Gwosdzik, co-founder of Berlin's Jäll & Tofta. 'This in turn is a good height for a drawer to store boots and shoes. The depth is again oriented to the depth of the cabinet, and this is 40-60cm.'**

**PROJECT BY** Jäll & Tofta

## 3 DUAL PURPOSE

**Incorporating a built-in bench with cabinets or storage is multifunctional furnishing at its best. 'In the case of the Bergen Street Townhouse, we created this built-in as part storage, and part reading nook,' say the founders of General Assembly of this cushioned niche. 'The space is adjacent to the dining room, and so we wanted to incorporate some storage for serving ware, but we also wanted to take advantage of all of the beautiful natural light in the space, and so bringing in a cosy area to hang out felt like a good use for that corner.'**

**PROJECT BY** General Assembly





## BENCH MARK

Using architecture to demarcate the entryway in this colourful Athens apartment, designers installed distinct flooring and a monochromatic palette (matching the built-in bench seat) to zone the seating area within the open space. 'The seat is part of a wall, which is the background for a painting,' says Konstantinos Pantazis, co-founder of Point Supreme Architects. 'The floor has the same deep red colour that absorbs the differences in function and makes a stark contrast with the spaces adjacent, such as a ciel and green small interior garden.'

PROJECT BY Point Supreme Architects

PHOTOGRAPH DRAKOULIDIS YANNIS





PHOTOGRAPH ADRIAN GAUT STYLING COLIN KING

### BUILD OUT

In this case, the bench is just the beginning – it serves as an anchor for a smart partition wall just inside the home’s open entrance. ‘We wanted to create a restful place to sit that doubled as a threshold into the home from the outside, thus enhancing the transition,’ says Tommy Zung, principal of Studio Zung. ‘The slatted wood allows for light to percolate in gradually, making the entryway subtle and refined while also providing filtered sightlines.’

PROJECT BY Studio Zung ➤



COVER UP

Upholstering a bench with permanent, plump padding can soften the look and function of a space, as shown by this cushioned seat that rounds off a piece of joinery in a ‘rumpus room’ for teenagers. ‘The upholstered element made sense here because the space needed to shape-shift to meet a variety of uses,’ says Alexandra Donohoe Church, interior designer and founder of Decus. ‘We felt the room needed softening – it’s immediately off the pool outside – and it had to be durable so the upholstery is outdoor fabric.’

PROJECT BY Decus