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## Business awards



### Winner

#### Laurence Pigeon and Keith Atkins · Alternative Plans

**The Special Achievement Award is given to those individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the kitchen and bathroom industry and truly advanced the sector in a way that changes it for the better to the benefit of all.**

**Kitchen retail has** come a long way in 25 or so years.

Back in the early 1980s UK homes had yet to discover in any great numbers the value and practicality of the modern European design. Shaker was the order of the day and the height of glamour was a fancy pilaster.

Fast forward to 2009 and the kitchen world looks very different. Even the most provincial showroom is likely to include high gloss lacquers, granite, marble, handleless doors and minimalist aesthetics.

But it's not just about the design. There was a time when a kitchen retailer was simply a shop that sold kitchens - now they're kitchen studios, a true boutique experience selling the service as much as the products.

And, as with all cultural shifts in design and taste, there had to be pioneers. There had to be entrepreneurs brave enough to see into the future and, in particular, see the quality of the European product that was far from being widely available.

Laurence Pigeon (bottom right) started his kitchen life when he joined his family business Humphersons, a company that had been trading in bathrooms since the 1870s. "I'd always been interested in cooking, food preparation and, of course, eating the end results," he later explained. "I started to get interested in kitchens, planning them so they'd be efficient,

and my kitchen business interests really started from there."

In 1972 Keith Atkins (top right) joined Humphersons, having cut his kitchen teeth at Wrighton, and he and Laurence formed an effective partnership there until the company was taken over in 1981.

Keith went off to ABC Cuisines while Laurence slowly put his literally alternative plans together. The pair had kept in touch and in 1984 Laurence persuaded Keith to join forces again and Alternative Plans the showroom was created.

The pair knew instinctively the style of kitchens they wanted to create and they started with Cuisine Schmidt and Allmilmo but when the chance to work with Boffi came along they took the plunge and made it their prime brand - and it's been that way ever since.

For over 25 years, Alternative Plans has demonstrated the way a modern kitchen retail business should and could work. It took a basic retail model and turned it into a boutique of interior design and led a trend that has become standard today without ever compromising that original vision.

Laurence once said that the success of Alternative Plans has always been about knowing who you are and where you're going, a simple rule that many retailers could take heed of in today's environment: "Find, discover, have, or create an identity - and be consistent, especially with the identity."

