

Bricks & Mortar



Make a splash

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COVER STORY

Splash out: the big bathroom makeover

Hammock tubs, concrete, brushed metal and plants. Carol Lewis lists the latest trends

turning design eyes towards the bathroom. Many big-name designers and architects have designed baths and bathroom sets, with British practices including Foster and Partners, Zaha Hadid Design and Rogers Stirk Harbour and Partners having recently designed bathroom suites for Porcelanosa, the ceramic manufacturer. Foster's Tono range even includes nifty magnetically attachable shower heads. So who made your bath?



The Watermark Collection's London floor-standing bath and taps including handshower and handles in vintage brass, £1,370

The smallest room in the home is fast becoming the focal point, somewhere to be uncharacteristically bold with interior design or create a mellow spa environment insulated from the rest of the house. If you want to make a splash in the bathroom, here are the key trends to follow this Easter.

Starchitect style
Last week Conran and Partners, the design and architecture studio, held a glitzy party at the founder Terence Conran's former apartment in Shad Thames, south London. There were cocktails with names such as Bubble Bath and Spring Soak, and a host of interior design bloggers and writers were present. The occasion was the launch of a bath that the studio had designed for Victoria and Albert Baths. The Eldon (£2,880) is a pretty special bath; its asymmetry allows it to be part free-standing and part moulded to the wall via a handy shelf. Conran and Partners is not alone in

Make a statement
Despite the desire to conserve water, baths remain the centrepiece of the room. Last year the round wooden baths — think enormous salad bowls — at Berkeley Group's One Tower Bridge development in London were the talking point. This year it is the Hammock bath by Splinter Works, in either black carbon fibre (£19,800) or bespoke gold leaf (from £33,200), that is catching everyone's attention. You might scoff at the thought of a gilded bath, but all things metallic are in vogue. Chadder & Co has launched the Pennies from Heaven Windsor bath, coated with round copper mosaics (from £6,000) while another version is decorated in gold mosaic tiles (from £6,500).



Polished precision
You may not be ready for a copper or gold bath, but surely you are ready for a change from polished chrome taps. This year every hue is available: rose gold, brass, gold, chrome — and preferably brushed to give a satin rather than polished finish. If this metallic craze is too much for you then opt for monochrome; white or black taps are very much "on trend", according to bathroom designers. Joel Fry, a bathroom designer with Ripples, the bathroom specialist, says "Everything is brushed — brushed nickel, brass, brushed everything at the moment. It is the talking point of the room."

April showers
On show at the recent annual design exhibition held by Porcelanosa Group were programmable showers, where you can set the water's temperature



Bathtub by Ripples, £2,878

and flow, and orchestrate coloured lights and music depending on your mood. The company's Lounge showers have different colour cycles and settings for rain, fog and waterfall sensations, as well as constant jet flows. Porcelanosa also showcased the Soleil whirlpool bath, which offers hydrotherapy, temperature maintenance, music and aromatherapy via remote control. Elsewhere, there were taps that can be switched on and off and the water flow controlled digitally, and baths with an automated disinfection programme to clean up after you. For showers, Mira's digital models can warm up ready for you at the touch of a smartphone.

Gadget heaven
Waterproof television screens have featured in bathrooms for a while, but many of us would rather simply listen to music — now there are a range of



Splinter Works' Hammock bath in carbon fibre, £19,800



Sinea 2.0 basin and undersink cupboard, £2,415. Left the Wandle Bath by Martin Brudnizki for Drummonds in a polished finish, £5,460. On the cover: Victoria and Albert Toulouse bath in anthracite, £4,450

mirrors that double up as speakers. Roper Rhodes has a DAB radio and multimedia mirror (£496) and Better Bathrooms has a stereophonic illuminated mirror (£499.99), both of which connect to your smartphone. Alternatively your bathtub can be your sound system. The Kaldewei Sound Wave turns your bath into a giant speaker; simply connect it to your smartphone or tablet via bluetooth (£477.62 at UK Bathrooms). The ultimate bathroom gadget, though, has to be a Toto loo. The Toto Washlet is a toilet with a built-in bidet spray, drier and deodoriser. It also has an automatically opening and closing lid, sensor-activated flush, night lights and, best of all, a heated seat that can be set to the desired temperature (from about £1,000). It is also worth adding that some luxury developments have soundproof bathrooms and toilets, so no more being disturbed in the middle of the night.

Crisp concrete
The industrial look is still with us, heightened by the Instagram #styleitdark trend; think concrete or black basins, and black or brushed metal taps against walls that are painted navy blue or black, with an industrial or



Ravak's asymmetric avocado tub is ideal for small bathrooms, from £334

sculptural radiator — such as the Bisque Olga radiator (from £403.20). You can lighten the look with mirrors and lights, although Jo Crane, a designer with Ripples, suggests perhaps restricting this look initially to a cloakroom where you don't need bright lights to apply make-up.

Colour and shape
The avocado bath is back — but not as you know it. Ravak's bath (from £334) is avocado-shaped and ideal for small bathrooms.

Avocado green is also back, in direct contrast to the industrial-look pastels that are also on trend this year, with blush pink, baby blue and pale green units. The pink looks surprisingly good when teamed with something bold, such as rose gold fittings. Although be aware that it is not the bath, toilet or basin that is avocado green (see page 4). It is the units and perhaps a feature wall.

Wet wallpaper
More water-resistant wallpapers that are suitable for use in the bathroom are being launched. The latest is by the bathroom brand Devon&Devon. Its range of 32 themes includes some striking on-trend plant and geometric designs.

Bold bathroom wallpaper is best used to create a statement wall, although you can also get wallpaper that simulates the look of metro tiles, exposed brickwork or wood (from £10.39 a metre at Victoria Plum), if you would prefer to stick to a more traditional or industrial look.

Plant life
In the same way that our kitchens have transformed into living spaces, our bathrooms are set to do the same. Expect to see more armchairs and living room-style furniture appearing in larger bathrooms. According to Crane, bigger bathrooms are becoming more common, with more and more people converting a spare bedroom into a walk-in wardrobe and large bathroom when the children move out of the family home.

The first step towards embracing this trend is adding more plant life to the bathroom — think a greenhouse with a bath, rather than a bathroom with a pot plant. "Green and greenery is huge at the moment," says Crane.

She suggests teaming green Perspex splashbacks with wooden units for a Scandinavian look — and, of course, dotting plenty of plants around.

Buy-to-let what you need to know. See Money tomorrow

PROJECT MANAGER

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are moving and improving, hoping to add 16,000 sq ft of space to the Orangery at Kensington Palace, with a two-storey basement and a single floor above. The extra space will be used for their staff and storage. The Orangery, which was built in 1704 for Queen Anne, will be "unobtrusively extended to its rear", according to plans submitted by Historic Royal Palaces. The finished extension will be a "tremendous improvement both visually and functionally" and is "deliberately understated" so as not to detract from the "splendour of the surroundings". London architects typically quote £409 a square foot as the cost of adding subterranean space, so the Kensington Palace extension is likely to cost about £6.5 million. However, a basic conversion can be done for between £277 and £318 a square foot, in an area where planning requirements are less stringent and the property is easy to excavate. Basement extensions in Kensington and Chelsea are so popular that the local authority has had to introduce restrictions on such projects. Nevertheless, more families are likely to follow the example of the duke and duchess. For example, one reader found that relocating would cost him £200,000 in stamp duty, so he put in a basement, spending the same amount of money and adding more value to his home.



A basement extension, which included a kitchen, at Queensberry Mews in Kensington, west London. Below: at Wilton Place in Knightsbridge, west London, this basement conversion included a spa. Both are by the architect De Rosee Sa

Why it still pays to dig a basement

Are people still digging basements?
Yes. The unwillingness to pay large stamp-duty bills means that families are looking for ways to add space to their homes. "Basements are coveted," says Edward Lipton, an architect at Lipton Plant Architects. "The cost of moving home is substantial, so it makes sense to add a basement." Savills says a well-excavated basement beneath a terraced house priced between £750,000 and £1.5 million in the centre of London or the smarter suburbs will add up to 15 per cent to the value, despite the slowdown in house prices.

What's the cost?
Wakefield says excavations can be carried out for as little as £30,000, but this would be for the dig and the most basic of fittings, with no water or incoming services, and with brickwork left exposed. Converting a cellar or lowering the floor of that cellar is the cheapest option, with the expense mounting if you are digging and underpinning a new space, or creating a lightwell with external access. Digging out a new extension of 220 sq ft would cost £90,000, while adding 350 sq ft would cost £225,000. This price covers only the shell and core — plastering, decorating, installing a kitchen, bathroom or swimming pool will cost more.



My neighbours will hate me. What else do I need to know?
Do nothing until you are certain the makeover will add value. A basement dig is unlikely to be a cost-effective exercise on a house worth less than £500,000. This means that a project will not be viable in many suburbs of London, but will pay off in Surrey and similar locations where prices are well above average. Rebecca Wakefield, the creative director at Banda Property, says a house needs to be worth at least £1,200 a square foot for a basement excavation to be worthwhile.

What other expenditure can I expect?
Robin Chatwin, the head of Savills in southwest London, advises adding 10 per cent to your renovation budget for things that might go wrong. You must also budget for planning costs, which most people overlook and can add up to £20,000. To achieve planning permission, which will almost certainly be required, several reports assessing the

project's impact on its surroundings will be needed. A hydrological study is generally always necessary to assess how underground water will flow, and a study is required of any trees that are growing near by. However, you will not know what is under your property until you start digging. Jonathan Woodcock, the director of Qualitas Construction, a basement company, found large lumps of concrete under one property, and a hand grenade under another.

How safe is a basement?
Digging a basement is much riskier than a loft conversion, but when it is done well a house will be better off structurally. "We tend to find the integrity of the house is much better, because the typical Victorian home didn't have the structural support that can be put in today," Woodcock says. Typically a house will be underpinned with concrete columns. Before digging begins, structural engineers come up with a "temporary works plan", which explains how the house will be held up during the excavation, and a "final works plan", which details what will hold the structure together once the work is complete.

There have been instances where homes have collapsed during basement excavations. An architect says this can happen when contractors fail to follow the exact sequence of a plan; each underpin needs to be placed in the right order for the property to be adequately supported.



The duke and duchess are digging a basement at the Orangery, above

What should I ask the architect?
The first question is whether there are planning restrictions in your area. Ask to see images of the architect's previous work and make sure that the design creates a space with ample natural light and ventilation. Bedrooms and a living space should be close to the perimeter or lightwells so that they are adequately ventilated, while utility spaces and bathrooms can be internal. Annabelle Williams