

The BIG idea

Make a splash with your bathroom – whatever its size – with the latest inspirational ideas and innovations

Words: Amelia Thorpe



Previous page (p55): This clever black and white room design plays tricks on the eye, creating the illusion of more space as the black sweeps up the wall – an effect enhanced by the fittings' clean forms. The Alape Scopio floorstanding conical washstand is priced £707 from CP Hart.

Right: Hotel bathrooms are usually small, which makes them a good source of inspiration. This ensuite in Stockholm's Hobo Hotel, designed by Studio Aisslinger, is cleverly separated from the bedroom by a space-saving sliding panel. A table-style washstand looks lighter than a solid floorstanding vanity unit, and a wetroom-style shower makes the most of the available space.

It may be the smallest room in the house, but there's no reason why a bathroom can't be big on style – no matter its size. After all, it's the room where we spend time every day, from an energising wake-up shower in the morning to a relaxing soak at night. So why not make it the best it can possibly be?

Size matters

We all know bathrooms in the UK tend to be small – they certainly are in comparison to many of their European counterparts. Much of our housing stock dates back to Victorian times, when built-in bathrooms were a rarity. Over the years, as houses have been updated, it's often a former nursery, box room, or a small bedroom being converted into a bathroom. Even more recently built houses and apartments – especially those in cities, where space is at a premium – have traditionally had small bathrooms, as Kirsten Wain, designer at West One Bathrooms, explains. "Typically, the size of the bathroom would be based on a 1700mm-long bath, plus basin and toilet," she says. Add to that the trend of trying to squeeze extra bathrooms into our homes, thanks to the growing preference for more ensembles, and it's no surprise a 2 x 1.7m space can be a typical 'small bathroom' size. "Extra ensembles can add value to a property," says Kirsten Wain. "So we quite often see developers including narrow bathrooms, perhaps 1 x 2.2m, with the door in the middle of the long side, shower at one end of the room, toilet at the other, and a shallow projection basin opposite the door."

Bath or shower?

So how to begin the design of your room? Start by making a wishlist of the fittings you want to include. Manufacturers are used to the size issues UK bathroom owners face, so there are plenty of compact designs available to help you make a stylish choice. A standard bath, for example, is 1700mm long, but there are smaller models available – down to about 1400mm. There are also corner baths, P-shaped baths (with a showering area at one end) and baths with tapered ends. The design of baths doubling as showering spaces has come on leaps and bounds, too, so you can find a good selection of models with a more generously sized and non-slip flat end for showering, as well as an integrated shower



screen. Or perhaps you prefer to forego a bath altogether, in favour of a larger shower? A simple panel can screen off a wetroom-style zone. Or you might choose an enclosure with a space-saving bi-fold, pivot, or inward-opening door. Can you fit a shower, screened by a simple door, into a recess in the wall? Or find room in a corner to tuck in a small quadrant or square enclosure?

Specialist solutions

When it comes to basins, there is plenty of choice in size and styles including corner models and shallow-depth designs. They can make all the difference to the layout's success and your ability to easily move around the room. WCs can be trickier, as the location of the soil pipe may restrict your options of moving it into a new position. However, shallower depth WCs are available – such as those in Ideal Standard's Concept Space range, which are 6cm shorter in projection than

the standard Concept models. You will also need to factor in clearance space around the fittings: generally allow a minimum of 600 to 700mm for the width of a WC – usually around 360mm wide itself – so you don't feel penned in by a wall on one side and a basin on the other, for example. If you have been thinking of installing a WC and a bidet, you might consider combining them into one: the latest shower toilets offer the functionality of both (and more), all in one design. Japanese company Toto created the original shower toilet (or Washlet), but now most manufacturers offer one.

And don't forget the furniture. Good storage will help keep clutter away and enhance the spacious feel, whatever your bathroom's size. The room's size constraints may mean there's little choice on the layout, so spend your time on lighting, finishes and features helping to make your bathroom eye-catching and attractive – and shift your focus from its size to its style. [\[KBB\]](#)

Top right: Mirrors and polished surfaces bounce light around the room, creating the illusion of more space – as do wall-hung fittings, which help with keeping an uncluttered look. A similar bathroom by Halo Design Interiors would cost around £17,500.

Right: A laundry basket is yet another obstacle to fall over in a small bathroom, but this Sento tall unit with built-in basket plus shelf storage, £723, is a neat solution to the problem. Shown here in a matt anthracite finish, it is available from Vitra.



Case study



Designer: Roselind Wilson, Roselind Wilson Design

The client: A young professional couple

Location: Belsize Park, north London

The brief: To create a luxurious guest ensuite

Cost: About £30,000, including marble

Photography: Richard Waites



“My clients, a professional couple in their 30s, wanted to update a tired bathroom to create an inviting ensuite for their guest bedroom as part of a project to renovate their entire late-Victorian apartment,” explains Roselind. “We were able to ‘steal’ a little extra space from the adjacent plant room, moving an internal wall to make the ensuite as big as possible. We decided not to include a bath, which would have made the room feel cramped, and concentrate on creating the most generously sized, luxurious shower instead.”

“It is tempting to think light colours and plain finishes will make a room feel larger, but often the opposite is true. Beautiful materials can add interest and texture, adding a sense of depth. Here we used striking Calacatta Gold marble, Made a Mano Komon wall tiles and Vintage Brass brassware from The Watermark Collection. The shower area is framed with a black line, which is discreet yet powerful: it provides a sense of balance to the mix of materials and helps draw the eye to the furthest points of the room, enhancing the sense of space.”



Above: Fitted furniture makes the most of every inch of space, offering plenty of storage and keeping surfaces free to display only the prettiest items. A built-in wall-hung vanity and WC complete the space-saving design. Similar furniture by Barbara Genda Bespoke Furniture starts from £1200 per linear m. (020 7978 2349 or barbara-genda.com)

Below: A shower bath is always a good space-saving solution, as is a wall-hung vanity unit. As shown here, make the design look warm and inviting by using natural timber, contrasted with slate-effect porcelain tiles. A similar bathroom by interior designer Nicky Dobree would cost around £10,000. (020 7828 5989 or nickydobree.com)



Above: Measuring only 43cm wide, this Burlington freestanding corner vanity unit, £849, features an internal glass shelf for storage. It slots neatly into tight spots, making it ideal for a compact space. (01322 473222 or burlingtonbathrooms.com)

Small-space success

Carefully plan your bathroom to ensure it is a success and take advantage of any professional help when it comes to drawing up those plans.

“Planning is everything,” says Barbara Sallick of Waterworks. “The bathroom is, without question, the most challenging room to design.” Not only does it need to look good, it also needs to function perfectly to allow you the most luxurious and relaxing experience.

Before visiting any showroom, sketch up a quick plan of your bathroom with key measurements, position of doors and windows, and notes of any features – such as sloping ceilings. There’s the old-fashioned method of sketching out the plan on graph paper to play with different layouts. But some manufacturers – including Villeroy & Boch, Duravit, and Ideal Standard – now also have useful online tools to help you plan your bathroom.

Take some snaps on your phone, if you can. They will help show details, such as the position of pipework, and serve as a good starting point for discussions with a designer. Most bathroom retailers will offer help with your design, but this can vary from simple advice on product choices all the way through to a ‘white glove’ offering. West One Bathrooms, for example, offers a personal design service complete with presentation of drawings and CAD renderings, mood board, full quote, site consultation, and technical drawings from around £500 (deductible from the final order value). At its central London store it offers a ‘4D Theatre’, where you can don a headset and enjoy a virtual reality experience as you walk around your prospective new bathroom, to gauge whether you are happy with the layout. “It is very helpful if you struggle to visualise a design from plan, as you can even ‘open’ the drawers, and get a real sense of the space,” says West One’s Kirsten Wain.



Above: This computer-generated drawing, showing a bird’s eye view of a small shower room designed by Kirsten Wain of West One Bathrooms, accurately depicts how all the fittings slot neatly into place.



Below: The Ideal Standard Concept Air shower bath, from £300, features a wider end for comfortable showering and tapers down to the narrower end so the bath can fit more comfortably into compact rooms.

Above: To make the most of available space, recess a shower into an alcove and, as shown here, pair it with a pivot door which doesn’t need as much clearance to open. The Radiance Pivot door from Matki is priced from £509 in a range of widths.

Right: More and more bathroom manufacturers introduce furniture ranges – no wonder, as good storage that hides clutter from view is the best way to make even a tiny bathroom feel more spacious. Catalano New Light 2 drawer unit in Metz finish, £466, with New Light 80 basin, £235.



Above: Not only does the Grohe Sensia Arena shower toilet, from £3370, obviate the need for a separate WC and bidet with its built-in personal washing and hygiene functions – but the concealed installation frame for the wall-hung design also enhances the room’s spacious feel.



Design tricks

Some big ideas to help you make the most of a small space...

- ✓ **Increase it:** Can you move internal walls to increase the size of the room? Or move the position of the entrance door to make better use of the existing space?
- ✓ **Open it:** Choose an entrance door that won’t take up valuable space by protruding into the room. Sliding doors, pocket doors, and outward-opening doors are all possible solutions.
- ✓ **Hang it:** Opt for wall-mounted basins, furniture, and WCs to free up floor areas and make cleaning easier. Their ‘floating’ appearance will also help boost the sense of space.
- ✓ **Reflect it:** Create the illusion of more space with mirrors – a well-loved visual trick that never fails.

- ✓ **Light it:** Use clever lighting to increase the feeling of volume. Uplighting, for example, can create a sense of airiness by reflecting light off the ceiling. Plinth-level LED lighting around a bath can make the tub seem less block-like, and illuminated wall niches can introduce a third dimension to the space.
- ✓ **Level it:** A wetroom-style shower on one level can feel much more spacious than having to step up into a tight enclosure.
- ✓ **View it:** Use a transparent shower screen to allow maximum light to flow through the space.
- ✓ **Tile it:** Opt for large-format tiles with matching grout to reduce the busy grid-effect of grout lines.
- ✓ **Stash it:** Good storage, including slimline tall units making the most of the room’s height, ensures surfaces can be kept clutter-free for the most streamlined finish.

Below: Shower enclosure doors opening inwards, rather than projecting out into the room, are ideal when space is tight. This silver-framed reversible bi-fold door, from £399, is from Lakes Bathrooms's Classic Collection.



Below: The River bath from Waters Baths of Ashbourne offer the luxurious look of a freestanding bath, but its back-to-wall design takes up a bit less space. Measuring 1600 x 750mm it is priced £1795.



Below: Proof that small bathrooms needn't be boring comes in the shape of this Grid glass and aluminium shower panel from Aston Matthews. Its Crittall-inspired design and compact size make it ideal for the most stylish room. The 2100mm-high x 800mm-wide size costs from £1233.



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