

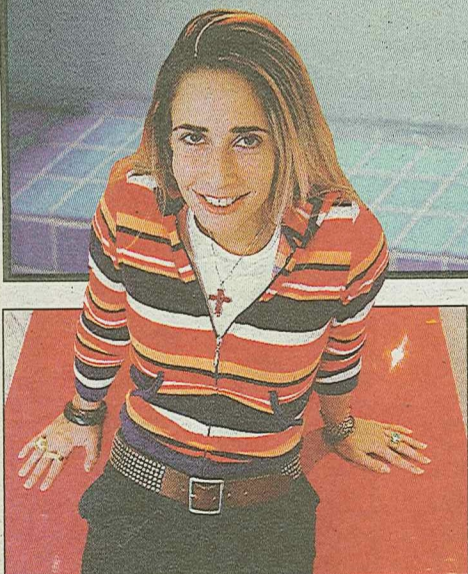
THE SUNDAY TIMES

Section 10

# Home



**Splashing out**  
Get a bathroom that adds  
value to your home



### It girl and the developers

New homes in north London are getting interior designer Tara Bernard's upmarket style  
page 44

### Chianti on the cheap?

The Tuscan government is selling off dozens of properties - but many need some serious renovation work  
pages 27-29





# How to clean up your act in the bathroom

Sumptuous bathrooms don't have to be the exclusive preserve of luxury hotels, and more and more homeowners are being tempted by fancy baths and basins. **Dominique Coughlin** divides the design classics from tomorrow's avocado suites

**H**ouse-hunters who stepped into a bathroom and found a plain white suite would once have considered themselves lucky. More usual was an outdated avocado bath, grimy grout and grotty carpet. Compensation was to be found in the kitchen, the real selling point of a house: the look was freestanding, the appliances stainless steel and the space large enough to entertain an extended family and run a home business round the table.

Kitchen design may have reached burnout (who dares to cook there these days?), but let's hope the same designer obsolescence doesn't await the enthusiasm transforming the British bathroom. Brits are not renowned as paragons when it comes to bathing habits, but recently we've been cleaning up our act.

In the past five years, the UK has increased its spending on installing and refurbishing bathrooms by 50%, to £2.4 billion, according to market research compiled by Ideal Standard and Armitage Shanks.

"Where once spending on bathroom sanitaryware was in the hundreds of pounds, spending is now in the thousands, with £5,000 an average amount to spend," says Yvonne Orgill of the Bathroom Manufacturers Association.

Designer bathroom outlets such as C P Hart, the first showroom to stock the Philippe Starck I designer range, and The Water Monopoly, specialising in opulent antique and contemporary baths, including those installed in London's Portobello Hotel (reputedly filled with champagne by former lovers Kate

Moss and Johnny Depp), have both seen an increased footfall of clients happy to spend £20,000.

"We have finally caught up with America and are putting in an increasing number of bathrooms. It's typical for us to see projects that have a bathroom for each bedroom," says Cathy Oakley of The Water Monopoly. "The budget has doubled, and for the master bathroom can be between £10,000 and £20,000."

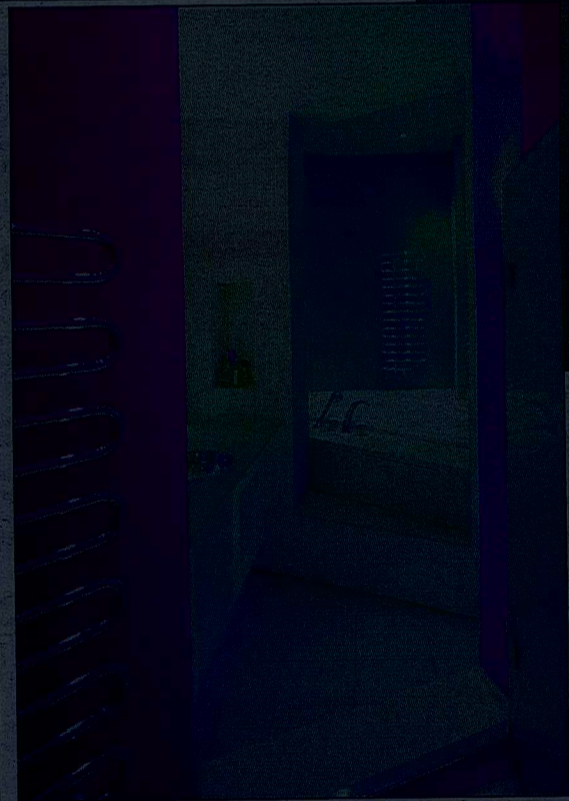
Lorian Coutts, the marketing manager of B&Q, agrees the bathroom is enjoying a new-found status as a "room which people are enjoying as a place to relax". Sales of B&Q's top-end products such as their double basins (for £278) and the Milano Modern freestanding bath suite (including bath, basin, WC, taps, wastes and fittings for £1,456) have shot up. "We are now seeing customers who will spend £1,500 on bathroom fittings," says Coutts.

With older housing competing with the sophisticated en-suite bathrooms now fitted as standard by developers, improving a bathroom is an investment worth making.

Ed Mead, director of the Chelsea estate agency Douglas & Gordon, says: "Between two identical houses a bathroom can make all the difference. If you get it right it can add up to 10% to the value of your property. In a difficult market, it can help the buyer choose your house above the rest."

Mead warns, however: "Never spend more on two bathrooms than on your kitchen. There is no point installing a label bathroom if the rest of your house is standard," he says. "Always go for white, unless you're using marble or granite, and make sure the bathroom is spotless before a viewing. One of the first things I do is tap the bath to see if it is pressed steel. Never go for plastic or fibreglass. If the owners have skimped on the bath then they will have skimped elsewhere."

It's not just in style-conscious town houses that bathrooms matter. "An en-suite used to be very grand," says Alex Lawson, associate director of FPDSavills's country house department, "but now it's pretty much par for the course. Everyone wants one and some expect a



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suite from Chipperfield's new White range costs £1,501.

Better known for its playful and practical kitchenware gizmos, the Italian company Alessi has turned its attention to the bathroom. The designer Stefano Giovannoni has created bathroomware with the company's signature globular shapes, available this autumn from Durante: baths start from £1,600, washbasins from £515, and loos from £580.

Much of the latest kit is made for tight spaces. "The average UK bathroom still tends to be 8ft by 6ft," says Yvonne Orgill. "We are seeing more second and third bathrooms converted from spare bedrooms."

Not satisfied with stealing soaps and bathrobes, we are stealing much of our inspiration from hotel spas and bathrooms. Taking our cue from luxury hoteliers, we now hide our

**4 In five years, spending on bathrooms has risen by 50%, to £2.4 billion 7**

pipework and cisterns. Sales of back-to-wall and wall-hung loos, long-standing staples of German and Italian bathrooms, are growing, where previously they were nonexistent in the UK.

"The look is clean, though not astringent," says Laurence Pidgeon of Alternative Plans. "It's a sort of Zen of bathing, and a Japanese look is very popular, as are natural stones such as limestone and marble, and woods such as cedar."

The roll-top bath has also left its legacy. A freestanding bath placed centre stage is a design favourite. The Paris (from £5,464) and Bateau (from £5,288) baths, from The Water Monopoly, have a more contemporary line than original Victorian roll-tops but are based on French antique baths. B&Q's roll-tops with chrome feet start at £349.

Tim Prager, a writer, and his wife, Berthe, recently spent more than £20,000 installing a master en-suite bathroom and second bathroom for their children Jean Andre, 8, and Gabrielle, 11, at the family's house in

southwest London. "We've stayed in hotels that had beautiful bathrooms and thought, 'Hang on, this is more comfortable than our home. That can't be right'," says Prager.

For their own bathroom, two rooms were knocked into one 15ft by 22ft room. The shower is tiled in rustic Italian marble and has Fantini and Hansgrohe fittings. Suspended from the wall are two Cesame ceramic

bowls set into a limestone, wall-hung counter top, from Alternative Plans.

"It may seem like a lot of money, but considering how much has been added to the value of the property in terms of comfort, and probably in terms of price too, we actually feel a bit cheap," says Prager.

For the children's bathroom, an exceptionally shallow shower tray, also by Cesame, means the walk-in

shower drains much like a continental wet room: Wet rooms (where the whole floor can become wet and water safely drains away without damaging the building) are few and far between, but that's likely to change. "I've only seen architect-designed, one-off projects to date," says Mark Emery, "but there is a lot of scope for the future."

Traditional wet rooms are better suited to the concrete structures of German and Italian buildings, where bathroom floors and walls are often copper- or lead-lined. However, the Tatami shower tray, designed by Roberto Palomba of Flaminia, helps to overcome the problems of installing wet rooms in British timber-framed houses. Winner of the Elle Decoration best bathroom product award at the 100% Design exhibition, the shower consists of an aluminium tray set into the floor, surrounded by deep tiles to bring it level with the floor's surface. Prices start from £614 for a complete unit, from Original Bathrooms.

Additional reporting: Helen Davies

## Where to splash out

Alternative Plans, 020 7228 6460, [www.alternative-plans.co.uk](http://www.alternative-plans.co.uk)

B&Q, 0845 222 1000, [www.diy.com](http://www.diy.com)

Bathstore, 020 8773 5022, [www.bathstore.com](http://www.bathstore.com)

C P Hart, 020 7902 1000

Designer Bathrooms, 0121 444 0101

Durante, 020 7589 9990

Ideal Standard, 0800 590 311, [www.thebathroom.info/idealstandard](http://www.thebathroom.info/idealstandard)

Leeds Loft, 0113 305 1515

M C Stone, 020 8968 9040

Ocean, 0870 242 6283

Original Bathrooms, 020 8940 7554

The Water Monopoly, 020 7624 2636, [www.water.monopoly.com](http://www.water.monopoly.com)

Wickes, 0500 300 328

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