

Luxury bathrooms: a liquid asset

More than ever before, the 21st-century bathroom offers a luxurious retreat from our frenetic lives. But for the savvy seller it is a lucrative investment, too



Room with a view: the new owner of this stunning bathroom will have to pay for the privilege. A Hollywood A-lister, perhaps? Park Avenue, New York. £56m, CIM Group and Macklowe Properties (001 212 432 5657; info@432parkavenue.com)

By Christopher Middleton

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World's 20 sexiest bathrooms

Not so long ago, your bathroom was the sort of place you dipped in and out of pretty quickly. There was no such thing as dwell time, just bath time. And it didn't last very long.

Today, all that has changed. Talk to the people who shape our 21st-century homes, and they describe the modern-day bathroom as a “cocoon”, a “retreat” and a place in which to linger and luxuriate. And while other, more public parts of the home have become showpieces designed to impress your dinner guests, the bathroom remains your own private sanctuary-cum-fortress.

The biggest transformation has been in what the modern bathroom is made of. Gone are the chipboard cupboards and the plastic shower trays. In their place are carefully matched wall panels made of Calacatta marble, fog-free make-up mirrors and £4,500 copper baths. Not jammed up against the wall, either, but standing proudly in the middle of the room.

Such is the demand for bathroom luxury, at the top end of the market, that experienced Mayfair estate agent Peter Wetherell (three decades in London W1) has made a bold prediction. He envisages the cost of a typically sized bathroom, in his part of town, doubling over the next five to 10 years, with the price per square foot rising from £5,000 to £10,000. This will bring the value of a 32 sq ft Mayfair bathroom to £320,000, some £70,000 more than the £250,000 that the Office for National Statistics says is the current average price of an entire UK home.

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What's more, the seriously upwardly mobile homeowner doesn't have just one of these ultra-modern bathrooms, but two, or even three.



A luxurious bathroom developed by Candy & Candy

“As far as the prime central London market is concerned, less than one bathroom for each bedroom is fundamentally too few,” declares Bella Tellwright, of Notting Hill estate agents Crayson. “In an ideal world, a five-bedroom house should have a minimum of two en-suite bath or shower rooms, plus one family bathroom.”

No doubt about it, says Robin Chatwin, head of Savills in south-west London. Buyers can't get enough

bathing opportunities.

“The appetite for multiple bathrooms continues to grow,” he explains. “It’s not uncommon to see an extra bathroom added by sacrificing a small bedroom. We estimate the addition of a good en-suite bathroom adds from £45,000 to £75,000 on to the value of a £1.5 million London home.”

Outside the capital, too, a luxury bathroom can pay dividends. Insiders agree that the prospect of upgrading this room puts off some buyers — which is why a newly fitted one, which requires no work, can be such a valuable asset. So where do you start?

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Take a leaf out of the book of those developers who no longer provide his and hers washbasins (the secret, say many, of a happy marriage). They are creating separate his and hers bathrooms.

No problem, either, telling the difference between the two. It’s not just that the male version has lots of earthy colours and wood panelling (maybe wedge, from Africa), but the female bathroom comes with its own fridge, to store face creams that go off if not kept chilled.

As for keeping us warm, radiators are now just so last century. Because if there’s one feature that modern buyers demand in the bathroom ahead of any other, it’s underfloor heating.

Yes, it seems today’s homeowner can no longer withstand the chill of icy lino on their toes. They want their route to the washbasin first thing in the morning pre-warmed.

“I think it’s fair to say that underfloor heating in the bathroom is an absolute must in all of our developments,” says Laura Pratt, of Candy & Candy. “As are towel ovens, or heated walls on which to hang your towels. And of course, the other thing we are increasingly being asked for is a Toto.”

This, it emerges, is a Japanese-made lavatory, combining such features as a foot-warmer and a music system. There is also a seat that not only warms itself, but is programmed to sense movement, and raise or lower itself accordingly.

Not that the fashionable bathgoer will want this contraption anywhere near their ablution area. More and more, the WC is exiled to its own closet.

Another idea that originates from hotels is the joining together of master bedroom and bathroom, to create the “bethroom” — or even, when a spa or hydrotherapy pool is involved, the “spathroom”.

However, while champions of such an arrangement trumpet the convenience of being able to leap straight from sheets into shower room, others don't see this as a step forward.

A prominent anti-bethroomer is Simon Rawlings, creative director of the top design and architecture firm David Collins Studio. "We would actually discourage designs of this nature," he says. "Sleeping and bathing are two very different activities; combining these environments compromises both."

Tell me about it, says Joe Burns, whose firm Oliver Burns designed the super-prime Walpole Apartments in Mayfair (where the penthouse was on the market for £18 million). He's all for joining up master bedrooms and bathrooms, to take advantage of natural light, but with a tasteful element of division.

"We have designed areas with electromagnetic glass, so both areas can be viewed as one," he explains. "However, they have a clear or frosted glass dividing them. So depending on what mood the client is in, they can keep the glass clear or frosted at the touch of a button."

Which sounds like a sensible compromise. One thing you can't alter at the flick of a switch, though, is the location of your bath. And if you follow the hotel-room fashion for positioning it in the middle of the room, you might regret it.

"To my mind, it is fun for about a week, in a residential set-up", says Jiin Kim-Inoue, who is head of design at top-of-the-range outfit Finchatton. "But the moment comes very quickly when you get tired of having a big bath in the middle of the room."

There again, some people like the idea of having a dramatic, bath-shaped centrepiece. Especially if it's made of something spectacular.

Of course, the other big asset for a bath, is a view. Traditionally, baths haven't been placed near windows, because a chill draught down your neck is not the ideal accompaniment come loofah-time.

Now, though, with the advent of heavy-duty double-glazing, homeowners can enjoy a good view at the same time as a good soak. The only drawback is if your ablution area looks straight into another property (and, more to the point, theirs looks into yours).

One way to get around this, is to buy a property that overlooks open fields or parkland, as does the penthouse at 116 Knightsbridge (offering uninterrupted vistas of Hyde Park). If, however, you can't quite afford the £32.5 million asking price, a cheaper option is to install one-way viewing glass, so that you can see out, but your neighbours can't see in.

Safe behind your double-glazed modesty screen, you can gaze out not just from your bath, but through the man-made downpour of your shower. These days, too, you can specify the precise kind of deluge you want, and the angle you want it from. Everything is available from light mist to dense steam, from a gentle sprinkling to a high-pressure, targeted jet of water, directed at whichever bit of you needs invigorating.

Another option, if your fellow residents aren't easily shocked (or rarely look upwards), is to install a glass floor. This is a feature of the spectacular creation at Broughton Poggs Mill House, in Oxfordshire, on the market with John D Wood for £1.75 million (01865 311522, johndwood.co.uk). Here, while brushing your teeth, you can look down between your feet and see the ancient mill stream rushing by.



Broughton Poggs Mill House, with its glass floor over the stream

Just like a dream kitchen, a spectacular bathroom has the capacity to make the difference between someone buying and not buying a property.

Caroline Takla, managing partner of The Collection LLP, agrees. Her company seeks out and buys houses for foreign clients, in the £2million-£25million price bracket. “The bathroom provides an opportunity to show off, to demonstrate the degree of quality to which the property has been finished,” she explains. “It is, if you like, a metaphor for the rest of the house.”

At the same time, though, while all the other rooms in your home are where you cook, eat or entertain, your bathroom is a behind-closed doors domain. A place which, in an increasingly busy and

frantic world, is designed not so much for “we” time – as “me” time.

Make a splash: top furnishings for a luxury bathroom

Television screen (Aquavision)

A gas fire and fireplace

Fridge for face creams

Chromatherapy lighting of water

Dimmer switches (candles now old hat)

Music systems built into the ceiling

Heated walls

Underfloor heating

Far infrared sun lamp

Steam room

Towel-warming ovens and drawers (from houzz.com)

Non-fogging mirrors (from aqua.com and mirror-heaters.co.uk)

Horizontal shower (made by Dornbracht, Dornbracht.com)

Go-to suppliers

CP Hart (cphart.co.uk); Drummonds Bathrooms (drummonds-uk.com); THG Style (thgstyle.com); Ripples (ripples.ltd.uk); Catchpole and Rye (catchpoleandrye.com); Bathrooms International (bathroomsint.com)

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