

Press

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ISH

The World's Leading Trade Fair for The Bathroom Experience,
Building Services, Energy, Air Conditioning Technology and
Renewable Energies

Frankfurt am Main, 12 to 16 March 2013

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ISH 2013: Bathroom Trend "Busy Bathroom" – Up Close and Personal

A new type of bathroom provides space for several users

The bathroom of tomorrow supports communicative functions and serves as a focal point for personal care and relationship maintenance

For some years now, the sanitary sector has been staging the bathroom as a "private spa" for individual relaxation. At the same time, the spectrum of products presented at the ISH, The World's Leading Trade Fair for The Bathroom Experience, Building Services, Energy, Air Conditioning Technology and Renewable Energies, includes a growing range of solutions for dual usage and integrated fitness facilities. "Pop up my Bathroom", the trend forum launched by Messe Frankfurt and the German Sanitary Industry Association (Vereinigung Deutsche Sanitärwirtschaft / VDS) four years ago, has analysed this development and projected it into the future. From 12 to 16 March 2013, the "Busy Bathroom" it describes will be on show at the ISH in Frankfurt am Main as a bathroom trend for 2013/14.

A growing number of products from the sanitary industry are responding to many people's need for a new type of bathroom: a spacious, multifunctional room that provides space for several users at the same time and thus becomes a "hot spot" within the home. Besides retreat, relaxation and comfortable, convenient personal care in a sophisticatedly designed ambience, the bathroom's many and varied functions are now set to include communication as well.

We're used to shutting the door behind ourselves when we go into the bathroom. Yet the notion of the bathroom as a place of retreat is a modern invention. Now that it has been upgraded to living space

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and a growing range of products for jointly used bathrooms is available, the space with the water connection is taking on a highly social dimension again. A role it once played in the tradition of European public baths and continues to embody in cultures such as the hammam: as a place of encounter.

It's not that long since we relinquished the idea of the "front room", sofa protectors and all, in favour of a living room filled with life where the entire family can enjoy its time together on an everyday basis. The emancipation of the kitchen unit and its opening up towards the living and dining area is even more recent. In many a recently published study on modern living, architects and designers are now even portraying the bathroom as a more or less open zone – open to the bedroom, open to the garden or even open to the living area.

The alternative to an open-plan bathroom: a bathroom that's open to everybody

In fact, there isn't actually any need for innovative bathroom planning to go that far. It's quite enough to contemplate the idea of opening up this very private space for usage by several people at the same time. The Pop up my Bathroom trend forum has now given this idea a name: the "Busy Bathroom" – a place full of activity that pulsates with life.

Similarly to the kitchen, the bathroom is a place of daily routines where, besides satisfying existential needs such as eating – in the case of the kitchen – and hygiene, we also satisfy our need for communication and socialising. For in the bathroom, we don't just take care of ourselves but of others too: we clean our children's teeth, scrub our partner's back while he's in the bath or hand him a towel when he's done, comment on the digital display on the scales and the calorie counter on the gym machine, comb our siblings' hair

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– or maybe pull it instead – help our best friend with her make-up or our boyfriend with his sunburn, get together after exercising for a session in the sauna or help our parents get out of the bathtub. It is a place where we are close to one another, where we show our affection and seek the approval of our family, partner and friends.

A ritual setting for the communicative functions of a modern lifestyle

During the morning ritual or evening chill-out, the bathroom plays the same role as the kitchen at a party or the make-up mirror in a nightclub restroom: it is the group's ultimate gathering place. With the difference that it calls for a high degree of familiarity or at least intimacy; the kind of familiarity that comes from years of living together – or from a fragile feeling of closeness that actually only arises at the moment of encounter. But no matter what, the bathroom itself, the place per se, always creates a special atmosphere, a sense of opening up to one another. Whether it serves as an island of calm in the turbulent sea of everyday life or a sheltered space for open encounters – the bathroom can become a magical place where special experiences occur, from an inspiring shower all the way to an initiation talk between father and son, mother and daughter or two close friends.

A far greater number of the communicative functions the bathroom performs are of course rather banal: it is where we discuss our plans for the day in the mornings, where we express criticism and voice motivation, whilst a double washbasin ensures that things keep running smoothly. This is where we laugh under the shower and strengthen our relationships by sharing the bathtime fun. This is where we pass on what we know about the right way to behave, personal grooming, first aid and beauty care. It is where we scrutinise our self-image by consulting not just the mirror but our partner too. And – again under the critical gaze of an interlocutor – it is where we primp the image we want to present to the outside world



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once we've done washing, putting on our make-up, doing our hair or adjusting our tie.

More space for the increasingly rare hours we spend together

A growing number of people are voicing the need to share these things with a partner and be in the bathroom with others from time to time. Not always, but now and again. The amount of space consumers are increasingly demanding for their bathrooms should not just be interpreted as the need for a "private spa" to be used alone. For part of the reason why demand for large showers, double-ended baths and double washbasins is growing is that the bathroom's popularity as a jointly used room is growing too – and not only amongst families. Today the bathroom serves not just as a place for personal maintenance but for health and relationship maintenance as well. Accordingly, people aren't only cuddling on the sofa, they're snuggling up in the bathroom too. What better response could there be than to cater to the desire for more cosiness and create space for seating, fitness equipment and more room to move in general. Room for playing children, yoga exercises, press-ups, bookworms and glorious relaxation.

Room for the sauna too, which is celebrating a comeback with a new, often surprisingly transparent look. Not necessarily in the basement, however, but increasingly in the bathroom. After all, a sauna doesn't just stand for solitary relaxation after a hard day's work, but for socialising with friends as well. In Scandinavian sauna culture, this role is often even uppermost. Wherever bathing culture provides compensation for coldness and solitariness, or where – as in many Asian or Arabian cultural environments – it takes on ritual forms, communication in the bathroom becomes an important aspect of both physical and emotional wellbeing.

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More cosiness makes a separate toilet a must

One area that will probably continue to be largely disregarded when it comes to communicative needs is the toilet. For some years now, the trend has been to separate or even remove it from the bathroom proper: the loo is migrating out of the bathroom and into a separate lavatory that is accessed via the bathroom or hallway. This is one respect in which our bathroom culture differs from that of our ancient Roman role models and pre-modern practices.

The "Busy Bathroom" reconciles different expectations

The modern bathroom is a combination of old and new bathing culture. In future, multimedia equipment and the digital networking of the bathroom will also cater to this communicative trend, when for instance radio, news and internet functions are available via the mirror or lighting programmes and music allow us to select the mood we want. It's not that the bathroom's communicative functions were simply switched off in the years when it was slowly but surely being turned into an individual wellness temple. But because people didn't really want to admit to the existence of those functions, modern role models and forward-looking space concepts are in short supply. And yet the "Busy Bathroom" isn't just attractive for big families and shared apartments. Even dyed-in-the-wool singles enjoy company and might want to share their whirlpool or bath with somebody every now and again – especially if they've got one of the increasingly widespread bathtub models with a central drain. Families, on the other hand, need space more than anything else – both in the sense of room to move and in the sense of storage space, with a double washbasin and plenty of shelves and cabinets. With this in mind, the central theme of universal design seems more topical than ever, for besides providing an excellent design principle for a multigenerational bathroom, it can also help turn the space into a genuine gathering point for various generations, family members and friends.



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In times when the everyday realities of the various members of any given community are diverging more than ever before and daily schedules – even within a family – are increasingly out of sync, the importance of the few remaining places and rituals that generate togetherness is growing. More than anything else, that means the table and the bathroom. Future bathroom design should express this and adapt living conditions to people's real needs accordingly. The "Busy Bathroom" provides some food for thought in this respect. At the same time, it is not so much about specific design principles as about creating possibilities – for joint, barrier-free usage, for communication, for multifunctionality, for wellbeing. Regardless of whether it's used by one person on their own or several people at the same time. After all, there's still nothing stopping you from turning the key in the lock if you want to.

Photos to accompany this text are available at:

www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/trend_report

Background information on Messe Frankfurt

Messe Frankfurt is Germany's leading trade fair organiser, with 467.5 million euros in sales and 1,725 active employees worldwide. The Messe Frankfurt Group has a global network of 28 subsidiaries and approx. 50 international Sales Partners, giving it a presence for its customers in more than 150 countries. Events "made by Messe Frankfurt" take place at more than 30 locations around the globe. In 2011, Messe Frankfurt organised 100 trade fairs, of which more than half took place outside Germany. Messe Frankfurt's exhibition grounds, featuring 578,000 square metres, are currently home to ten exhibition halls and an adjacent Congress Center. The company is publicly owned, with the City of Frankfurt holding 60 percent and the State of Hesse 40 percent. For more information, please visit our website at: www.messefrankfurt.com