



Create a clean look

New, cheaper materials and clever furnishing can transform a washroom for less, writes **Isobel King**.

So, how about a comfy armchair or maybe a mirrored dresser to complement that striking stone basin? Eccentric as it might sound, furnishings are the latest in bathroom glamour, as designers take their cue from other living areas in the home.

“It’s a very prominent trend,” the director of Paco Jaanson, Ari Zorlu, says. “Designers are delineating between ceramic ware and furniture, making storage independent, so you can change the look at any time without gutting your whole bathroom.”

While not to everyone’s taste, nor perhaps even practical for your average space-challenged bathroom, it does demonstrate how far the humble washroom has come.

Vanities and basins

You only have to wander through a few bathroom showrooms to see floor-mounted vanities have been upstaged by sleek, wall-hung beauties. By freeing up valuable floor space, they make compact

bathrooms seem much larger. However, there are a couple of drawbacks to keep in mind.

If your existing plumbing is through the floor, you’ll have to move your pipes to the wall, which can be expensive, depending on how accessible the plumbing is. Wall-hung vanities also provide less storage than conventional floor varieties, so you’ll need to rethink where you house all that inevitable bathroom clutter.

The general manager of bathrooms for Harvey Norman and Domayne, Len Nucifora, says plain white polyurethane is still the most popular finish for cabinets, although timber-look finishes are making an appearance.

Vanity tops make the real style statement. Luxury finishes range from Carrara marble, CaesarStone and Corian to resin polymarble. Fully moulded designs – in which the sink and top are formed from one piece – are most coveted. Their streamlined, organic look is a breeze to clean – something the managing director of Candana, Marc Reed,

says is a big consideration now.

The consensus is that above-counter basins have seen their day. The novelty factor wore off when owners realised they were left with towering grime traps.

Space allowing, his-and-hers basins remain popular.

Toilets

Again, a wall-hung pan is the go and even better if you can splash out on a cistern concealed in the wall. That could mean inserting it into an existing wall if there is room, or building a false wall to house it.

If the budget doesn’t stretch that far, you can take your pick of modern wall-hugging toilets that take up a fraction of the space of your old dunny and probably use half the water. If you’re renovating, it’s a good idea to check with your plumber before you go shopping so you can find something compatible with your existing outlet.

Baths

The arrival of hard-wearing acrylic has made freestanding baths





Key trends ... wall-mounted fixtures; freestanding baths. Photos: Candana, Domayne

plummet in price and suddenly everybody wants one.

However, before you rush in, consider whether you really have the space for it. "I've seen them crammed right up against walls in small spaces and it's just impossible to clean around them," warns the owner of Just Bathroom Renovations, Mark Annesley, who's been in the industry for 15 years.

Nucifora says you can pick up an acrylic one-piece for about \$1000. A bath in cast stone, such as Corian, starts at about \$3000.

Showers

Bathrooms are becoming smaller, especially in newer apartments where every square millimetre counts, which means a bath is no longer mandatory. Open, walk-in showers are becoming the norm and have many advantages, not least of which is you don't have to clamber into a slippery bath and grapple with taps in a confined space.

The manager of Archicentre, David Hallett, says apart from looking smart, level-entry showers are particularly advisable as a safe option for the elderly and young children.

Tiles

The bigger the better is the trend with tiles and many cheaper imports from China now compete with traditional Italian and Spanish offerings, meaning you no longer have to spend a fortune to create a five-star look.

Opt for neutral-coloured wall tiles punctuated by a stone or glass mosaic border if you want something timeless.

Choose floor-to-ceiling coverage to create shiny surfaces that bounce the light around.

Tile companies are producing amazing granite and marble lookalikes, so you can spend as little as \$30 a square metre instead of about \$180 for an authentic look.



Style and efficiency combined

NEW technology has thankfully spared us the old water-saving shower heads that used to spray needles of water. Australia's WELS star rating scheme (see waterrating.gov.au) means you can easily identify the water-efficiency of any tapware. If you want to indulge in a large shower rose, it is now possible to find many eco-friendly options; a three-star shower head uses as little as six litres to seven litres a minute, compared with about 20 litres for the old ones.

Coloured tapware, electronic and hands-free options, plus novelties such as Kohler's water tile, which sprays water from fixed tiles on the shower wall or ceiling, are at the cutting edge. But the mainstream market still favours convention.

Mixer taps now outsell the old three-piece sets and we've taken Europe's lead and adopted flexible rail showers as our favourite. The managing director of Candana, Marc Reed, says women like them because the height can be adjusted "so you don't get your hair wet".

Isobel King



Mix master ... mixer taps, such as Paco Jaanson's Love Me, are all the rage.