

International Bathroom Exhibition 2018 – Overview

Asked to come up with a title for this edition of the International Bathroom Exhibition, the most likely contender would undoubtedly be *The Shape of Water*. Not just because referencing Guillermo del Toro's film that won 4 Oscars in 2018 and the Golden Lion in 2017 is more topical than ever, but also because **visualising water as a shape** seems to be the hidden aim behind many of the most on-trend designs for the bathroom. While stereotypical phrases such as "the bathroom is no longer a service area but a room, just like all the others in the home" still abound, the trend for weighing up values is undoubtedly a new one: specifically **the value of water and the value of the relationship between water and the body**. The ergonomic principles that bathroom designers have always considered fundamental still apply, but meld with considerations of a more intimate nature. Many products really seem to visualise the flow of water, carving out shapes. In this regard, at a highly experimental level, **Ghigos** have brought 3D printing into the industrial ceramic world with their science fiction-themed but absolutely concrete washbasins for **Olympia Ceramiche**. Along with this "emotional" approach, another fairly common one sees the shapes, of washbasins in particular, breaking with sanitaryware tradition to reference the **decorative arts**, drawing – as **Roberto and Ludovica Palomba** have done for **Kartell by Laufen** - on the typical outlines of ornamental vases (**Marcel Wanders** has also taken this approach for **Laufen**). There are, however, some counterpoints to this interesting world built on poetic references: the most significant one is the showcasing of **objects that are also suitable for people with disabilities**. The manufacturers have taken this issue on board with verve, looking to resolve specific problems while blurring the distinctions. Bathrooms are beginning to be endowed with small expedients (see the waterproof Roll seats designed by **Diego Cesi/Archiplan** for **Ever**), which are more comfortable for all their users. **Ponte Giulio** has been working on the safety issue, in partnership with **Daniele Trebbi**, spawning the Hug Life Caring collection. Another counterpoint to the prevailing organic style is a prevalently **geometric** design starting point that, while still conforming to the "modern" tradition of bathroom design, has seen a renewed focus on size. One of the most standout in this regard is **Falper** with its Pure and Quattro.Zero collections designed by **Métrica**, featuring significantly expanded linear elements.

Certainly, an analysis of the variegated product landscape at the International Bathroom Exhibition clearly shows that our initial comments apply in particular to **sanitaryware design** which, as we know, is a highly specialised field and, therefore, in a different league when it comes to the trend markers in furniture design. There is no shortage, however, of **signs of bathroom-living space integration**, such as the slotting of washbasins into large mirrors, overturning the traditional, dominant, service relationship between washbasin and mirror (for the young designers at **MUT – EX.T**) and the placing of actual pieces of tall furniture inside the bathroom, like open/closed containers (Lay by **Marco Zito** for **Arlex**). This approach means that even the front of a sauna can become a shelved bookcase (**Marco William Fagioli's** Yoku for **Effegi**). Fabric has also been unexpectedly harnessed to wrap around the body of baths and washbasins (the Oval Couture collection, designed by **Dominik Tesseraux** for **Bette**).



Having taken stock of these considerations, it is nonetheless important to recognise that there are other products at the International Bathroom Exhibition with real things in common with our findings in regard to the prevailing furnishing trends. Coverings, in particular, are strongly symbiotic with the home finishes as a whole, with **nostalgia** the winning theme. The **tiles** that reprise designs from between the two world wars thus subscribe to a nostalgic mood, as does the revival of **Palladian-like** techniques (see the Casamood by **Florim** collection) rather than the ceramics inspired by *azulejos* or other traditional iconographies, specific to very precise geographical areas. The porcelain stoneware coverings, increasingly common and high performing, are also nostalgic, simulating other materials: from **wood** (**Fiadre** is proposing the materiality of **petrified wood**) to **marble** and **onyx** (in the 300x150cm format and an extremely thin 6mm), from **Arioste** and **FMG** respectively). **Mosaic** has also broken with the traditional squared tiles: with **Friul Mosaic** producing them in long strips (Element by **Nespoli e Novara**), while wallpaper, the leading lady of the 2018 domestic scene, has made a foray into the bathroom world with **Wall&decò's wet system**, overthrowing the absolute dominance of the tile.

In the realm of **tapware**, there is an increasing preponderance of metal finishes that have moved on from classic chrome, hinting at the preciousness of old gold, the warm tones of copper, and the silky effects of burnishing. The partnership of two leading companies, **Boffi** and **Fantini**, has brought one of the masters of contemporary design, **Michael Anastassiades**, in for the first time, adding his "hanging" AA/27 tap to their Aboutwater collection. **Graff's** Luna taps, on the other hand, eschew traditional shapes to become crescents, arching up the wall. Alongside these formal changes, the development of technologies that make for the increasingly improved functionality and maintenance of all the parts continues unabated: the Azimut showerhead, designed by **GI-RA** for **Antonio Lupi**, features improved water-air regulation, for instance.

In 2018, colour has made another breakthrough, into a world in which white, teamed with chrome, reigned supreme. While products featuring coloured ceramics have surfaced over the last few years, especially for washbasins, in earthy tones ranging from powder pink to terracotta (see **Flaminia's** brand-new NudaFlat collection by **Roberto and Ludovica Palomba**), the on-trend colours this year are mud, graphite, milky grey and cloud). Coloured taps have recently enjoyed a revival, particularly in black and white, but also in the loud primary colours that haven't been seen since the mid-70s. Colour has even made an incursion into the shower space, not just on the metal parts of the frames, but also on the – normally transparent – glass, which **Vismaravetro** has decorated in black, using hard-wearing ceramic paint.

Radiators, another important category at the International Bathroom Exhibition, are rapidly continuing to shrug off tradition. No longer components required to be hidden, they are turned into sculptures, minimalist and industrial-style, such as T Tower by **Matteo Thun&Antonio Rodriguez** per **Antrax IT**) or become concrete references to works of art.

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