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BANISH THE BLAND

Add colour, texture and freestanding furniture to freshen up the bathroom, says *Katrina Burroughs*

There's often a decorative disconnect between a bathroom and the rest of a home. Your sitting room, kitchen and bedroom may be full of character, incorporating a joyful miscellany of furniture and accessories, some handed down the generations, others from the high street, mixing textures and colours in your own personal edit. In the bathroom, you've got a matching suite of fitted furniture, in shiny operating-theatre white, bought from a single supplier. It is the one room where even the most

style-savvy homeowner tends to play it safe, purchasing an entire interior box-fresh from a specialist showroom.

However, while there's a need for expert help with the layout of this tricky room, there's no need to settle for suboptimal style. It's time to join the backlash against the boring bathroom.

Emma Sims Hilditch, the interior designer and creative director of Neptune, says: "The bathroom is one of the most difficult spaces to design. It's small, you need a lot of good storage and it's a wet space. The easiest option is to buy one off the shelf." Her bathroom bugbear is the

clinical look: fully tiled white spaces with glossy white fitted units. She is a fan of the unfitted bathroom, with a freestanding tub, washstand and storage.

"We encourage our clients to think of the bathroom as a space that can feel more integrated into the rest of the home, where each piece of furniture going into the room brings character and interest. Above all, it's about choosing your palette of finishes."

Neptune's Edinburgh washstand, in a warm combination of natural oak and marble (from £1,060), has been a hit since it launched last year – clients are buying it to

install in kitchens, mud rooms and utility rooms, too. As well as Neptune's range, there are great washstands at Balineum, Catchpole & Rye and The Water Monopoly.

The brand to look at, however, is Porter, founded by Lisa and Roy Perse five years ago. Interior designers are already more than familiar with Porter, an independent label whose handmade washstands, in joinery and natural stone, are simple, considered and opulent.

"We maintain that good design needn't stop at the bathroom door, so we strive to create spaces of calm quietude that live up to the rest of your home," Lisa says. The brand is about to expand its range to include lighting, brassware, baths and mirrors, and will launch a new website, porterbathroom.com, later this month.

Perse credits hotels such as Soho House and the Pig for inspiring the trend for mix-and-match unfitted bathrooms that combine vintage tubs and antique armoires with spectacular contemporary brassware and luxury linens.

The founder and creative director of Godrich Interiors, Ed Godrich, would add to the list the Lakes by Yoo, a collection of luxury holiday homes in Gloucestershire, where one of his projects features a pink-tiled room (pictured opposite) that is a textbook example of an individual bathroom.

"People often don't put as much effort into the bathroom as they do the other principal rooms in the house. They see it as a unit on its own, and that's how bathrooms end up looking a bit sterile. We aim for character. We don't want any one house to be the same as another, so we try to be a bit more original."

For the pink bathroom, Godrich found a midcentury cabinet on eBay and customised it to create a washstand. "It's not a cheap way of doing things," he says. "It can be a bit complicated. If something has drawers, you need to be able to accommodate the sink, so you have to fix the top drawers."

While Godrich uses vintage furniture to splendid effect, a characterful bathroom does not have to feature retro roll-tops and Victorian-inspired brassware. Contemporary Italian brands such as Ex.t and Cielo stand out for their imaginative freestanding bathroom furniture designs, inspired by modern industrial style. Whether you are going classic or contemporary, just remember: bland is banned.



Duravit's new Luv range, by the Danish designer Cecilie Mainz, brings the informal character of freestanding furniture to a contemporary bathroom collection. The bathtub (£3,790) mirrors the curved shape of the washbasin (£542). The Taupe vanity unit, with pull-out drawer (also available in white, Nordic white, stone grey, light blue and night blue, £2,041), has an American walnut top (£1,088). The mirror, with LED lighting, touch panel and demister, costs £1,703. duravit.co.uk

For a colourful finishing touch, try a mismatched trio of these hand-blown glass lampshades from Curious & Curious. The IP44 bathroom lighting range comes in 21 colours, four metal-fitting



finishes and six shapes. From left: round, strial, bowl, teardrop, traditional, pear drop. Small (12cm-14cm diameter, £445); medium (15cm-18cm, £485). curious.co.uk

Fancy freestanding bathroom furniture, but not a fan of roll-top chic? Then look no further than Italian brand Ex.t, which is the bee's knees at making freestanding bathroom fixtures with a contemporary feel. The Gus washstand, designed by Michael Hilgers, features a handmade ceramic basin on a chrome-plated metal base. [£1,247; cphart.co.uk](http://cphart.co.uk)



Proof that smart bathroom furniture need not be white, this Stone Grey washstand is the Lario 100 vanity unit from Victoria + Albert. Made in the UK in cherry and beechwood, it features an integrated basin and skirt in V+A's own Quarrycast material, made from limestone and resin. It also comes in a dark grey called Anthracite. £3,360; vandabaths.com



Victoria + Albert, a British brand whose tubs and basins are made in South Africa, designs its products with the modular bathroom in mind. Customers pick and mix pieces from the wide range of freestanding baths, basins, vanity units and brassware. Picture shows a Trivento freestanding bath (from £2,400) with a Lavello T14 vanity unit, in gloss white (£2,460). vandabaths.com

Balineum's overscale medicine cabinet, which can be ordered with a left- or right-hand-opening door, features three adjustable glass shelves. It comes in eight metal finishes, including matt gold, as shown, and measures W61cm x H84cm x D13cm. £5,900-£6,800; balineum.co.uk



The American architect David Rockwell's new Inciso collection for the Italian brassware brand Gessi is inspired by US plumbing. The solid brass taps, available from January, come in finishes including black, nickel and bronze. From £970; gessi.com



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Elements is a new, modular range of mix-and-match brassware from the Watermark Collection. Pictured is the wall-mounted, two-hole basin mixer, with handle in lumber teak, and spout and base in aged brass. £1,312; thewatermarkcollection.eu



What a white bathroom needs, to avoid a stark, clinical look, is an injection of natural texture. Try this Calidris woven magazine rack (W30cm x H44cm), with oak accessories shelf (W40cm). £166; ripplesbathrooms.com



This bath and basin are handcrafted by William Holland. The copper Bateau bath (£4,600) and copper Gyruz basin with artisan tin interior (£430) are shown at Voyager, an 18th-century coastal house in Mousehole, Cornwall (unique homestays.com). williamholland.com

Godrich Interiors has added a unique touch to a midcentury cabinet found on eBay by converting it into a washstand and using pink Covent Garden tiles on the wall (£20 a sq metre; wallsandfloors.co.uk). The Frome lamps cost £46 (tinsmiths.co.uk). Claremont basin taps (£129) and Berkeley radiator (£339; both burlingtonbathrooms.com)

Stamp your individuality on your bathroom with the unusual Huxley light from Balineum. The design comes in a choice of 15 metal finishes, including brass (£449), matt gold (£679) and shiny black, as shown (£619). balineum.co.uk

