

The background is a solid dark blue. Overlaid on this are white line art illustrations of various Vitra bathroom fixtures. There are several pedestal sinks of different shapes and sizes, some with faucets. There are also two large, oval mirrors. A long, narrow rectangular object, possibly a soap dish or a small shelf, is also depicted. The fixtures are arranged in a scattered, overlapping manner across the page.

DESIGN UPDATE No.1

Vitra

Vitra



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Welcome



Margaret Talbot
MARKETING MANAGER, VITRA UK

Welcome to the first Design Update from Vitra, bringing you the very latest in bathroom design and innovation.

In this issue we take a look at some of the factors influencing bathroom design today, introduce you to some technological advances, and provide updates on collaborations with leading designers from around the world including a 'furniture-based' collection from Terri Pecora. We report on modular bathroom innovation, trace the legacy of mid-century modern, and focus in on design for third-age living. We'll also show you around our world-class Innovation Centre – the heart of our main manufacturing plant – and introduce Erdem Akan, our design director.

Vitra is a Turkish bathroom brand with a global presence, working in markets across the world. Our long-standing experience and range of specialist manufacturing capabilities mean we offer architects and designers an exciting range of products.

This is an exciting time for Vitra and we're delighted to announce some new cultural partnerships here in the UK. In 2018 we partnered with Open City's Green Sky Thinking conference to bring together design professionals, thought leaders, academics and politicians to explore sustainable futures alongside a week-long programme of events. We're also delighted to be partnering with the RIBA on its 2018-20 Talks Series. In addition, we'll be launching new products at Design Junction as part of the London Design Festival. We look forward to meeting you.

VitrA's Design Ethos



Erdem Akan
DESIGN DIRECTOR, VITRA

‘Successful collaboration is key, so obviously our collaborative skills are also really important,’ says VitrA design director Erdem Akan.

Akan is explaining how design at the company, under his relatively new directorship, emerges from a closely collaborative commissioning process, highly integrated with the research and development strands of VitrA's on-site Innovation Centre. Akan balances external commissions from an international portfolio of original thinkers with the finely-tuned knowledge base of a talented in-house design team. ‘VitrA values creative collaboration very highly’, he says, ‘but we also need a very strong design team inside the company to really test the products, to ensure that we get things absolutely right for our markets across the world.’ The Innovation Centre is proving a valuable resource for VitrA and, being based in the midst of key production facilities, it means research into materials, processes and technology can be seamlessly integrated with product development – ‘I see it as our incubator for really ambitious, forward-looking design,’ says Akan.

VitrA has a long-standing tradition of working with acclaimed international designers, and has forged enduring relationships with the likes of Ross Lovegrove, Christophe Pillet and Matteo Thun to produce many award-winning ranges. Under Akan's design lead VitrA has been experimenting with new approaches to commissioning, such as the freer workshopping approach that led to collaboration with Terri Pecora on the Plural collection. ‘We are highly ambitious about what design can do,’ he says. ‘We are looking at brave new directions for the future of the bathroom.’ Under Akan the company held a workshop with seven internationally known designers, asking them to explore the future of

the bathroom, its relationship to daily routine and to the concept of time in people's lives. The ideas that emerged were prototyped and exhibited at the Salone del Mobile in Milan in 2016. Of these Terri Pecora's design concept has subsequently been developed to provide a clear new direction in thinking about bathroom design – a move away from a purely functional approach towards a bathroom intended as a core family space.

For Akan, a rising star in Turkish design in his own right before he joined VitrA four years ago, the most important aspect of working with external designers is to find out if they ‘speak the same language’. He carefully researches potential collaborations, preferring to approach designers for exploratory conversations rather than with a pre-conceived commission. The aim is always to build lasting collaborative relationships. Judging from the results to date, Akan's highly integrated approach to product development is worth keeping an eye on.

We are looking at
brave new directions
for the future of
the bathroom

Mid-Century Modern

As a radical movement, modernism had a somewhat brief life, particularly when it came to interior design. For ten years or so, shining chrome, floor-to-ceiling glass and wide expanses of veined marble or white tiles were the pinnacle of avant-garde design, all combined into rigidly geometrical forms. Then, in the late 1930s, a warmer aesthetic emerged. It turned out that people treasured generous, welcoming atmospheres in their homes rather than cool, formal elegance. Designers began to experiment with furniture that embraced human life, employing soft, organic forms, often in natural materials. The style came to dominate the vocabulary of design for two decades or more, gaining the description 'mid-century modern' retrospectively in the mid-1980s.

The mid-century movement was international. Finnish architect Alvar Aalto has a strong claim to be its originator, with immaculate plywood furniture that proved enormously successful in 1930s Britain. After the Second World War, American designers Charles and Ray Eames defined the entire aesthetic with an extraordinary ability to make the industrial beautiful, while their compatriot, the polymathic George Nelson, produced playful, sculptural furniture – and clocks – many of which are iconic today. In Italy, Gio Ponti offered witty, idiosyncratic elegance in profusion, while Robin and Lucienne Day transported the style across the Channel for the 1951 Festival of Britain.

But it is Scandinavian designers who truly epitomise mid-century modern – and those from Denmark in particular. They created an alluring, light, refined style, and one that we as consumers, then as now, feel comfortable bringing into our homes. And it wasn't just acclaimed masters such as Hans Wegner and Arne Jacobsen. A host of Danish firms, with their long heritage in cabinet-making, collaborated with many talented designers to produce sensuous rosewood and teak sideboards with smooth, tapering legs, and immaculately proportioned, sculptural chairs. Again, British customers found them irresistible – in the 1960s over a quarter of all Danish furniture production was exported to the UK.

The success of mid-century modern was not entirely of its own making; the style coincided with a period of economic growth and the birth of industrial design. The latter popularised the entire concept of design, and helped bring affordable, innovative goods – sophisticated, wall-mounted storage systems, colourful patterned textiles or sleek, innovative hi-fi – within reach of a wide range of consumers. And, for the first time, these goods were carefully matched to the scale and needs of contemporary homes. Mid-century modern, in its interiors and its products, was symbolic of a more relaxed, more informal lifestyle. It provided the vocabulary for a brand-new way of being, of socialising and relaxing in open-plan, light-filled environments. The style's heyday was, in many ways, the moment when today's patterns of living were formed.



An art deco bathroom in 1930



A modern London bathroom, 1957

Yet, strangely, this new mid-century spirit passed bathrooms by. Although its attempt to incorporate gymnasiums alongside baths failed to gain traction, modernism, with its valorization of the white tile, continued to be accepted as perfectly suited to the bathroom. In the following years, few thought to change the modernist aesthetic, and today's bathrooms are still shaped by its pursuit of rationality. Modernism's economic, compact layouts, its strict geometries and its integrated, standardised fittings predominate even now.

Of course, there have been experiments – 'autumn brown', 'spring green' and 'horizon blue' suites were marketed in the States as early as the 1920s, closely followed by his-and-hers basins (although such novelties found few European takers). Space-age 'bathrooms of the future' had a brief moment in vogue at popular housing shows. The arrival of colourful plastics into 1960s and 70s interiors did however make inroads into the bathroom, for instance with rather classy showerheads by Frogdesign and new versions of Arne Jacobsen taps with glossy epoxy finishes. And, of course, when the avocado suite, with its slightly softer shapes, spread through suburban homes the bathroom became, at least, a rather more expressive place.

And there were occasional pioneers in the 1970s, advocating an entirely new approach. Terence Conran, for one, proposed that the bathroom be rethought as a convivial environment, complete with couches, open fires, writing desks and telephones. In practice, however, layouts and fittings in this essential domestic space barely changed – today, despite the valiant efforts of Philippe Starck, bathrooms remain pretty much as they ever were. The basic choice is still between a white-tiled, neo-Edwardian look and a white-tiled, minimal

one, possibly with a cluster of pebbles scattered by the basin to hint at serenity. A recent embracing of natural materials and softer finishes only begins to hint at the bathroom's potential as an informal social space, recognised so long ago and so joyfully by the Finnish sauna, the Turkish hammam and the Japanese onsen.

Perhaps, half a century late, a change is finally taking place. With innovations in material, form and technology, and a new freedom in layouts, it is now possible to create open yet intimate spaces for personal and family relaxation. In Terri Pecora's Plural range for Vitra, soft palettes, rich, textured finishes and organic forms are introduced across the entirety of the bathroom. More, innovative technology allows basins to be angled into the room, and grouped in overlapping heights, to suit the individuality of interior spaces. These elements act as attractive, free-standing furniture in their own right, alongside tables, stools and mirrors, all in shapes and hues rarely associated with bathrooms. Rejecting the rigid geometries of modernism, this flexible approach generates a generous social experience that staring straight-on at a white-tiled wall simply cannot offer – the bathroom becomes a place to linger, a sociable family space rather than a solitary one. The whole experience, with its winning aesthetic and free-flowing compositions, finally introduces the alluring designs and laid-back lifestyles of mid-century modern into this most important of spaces.

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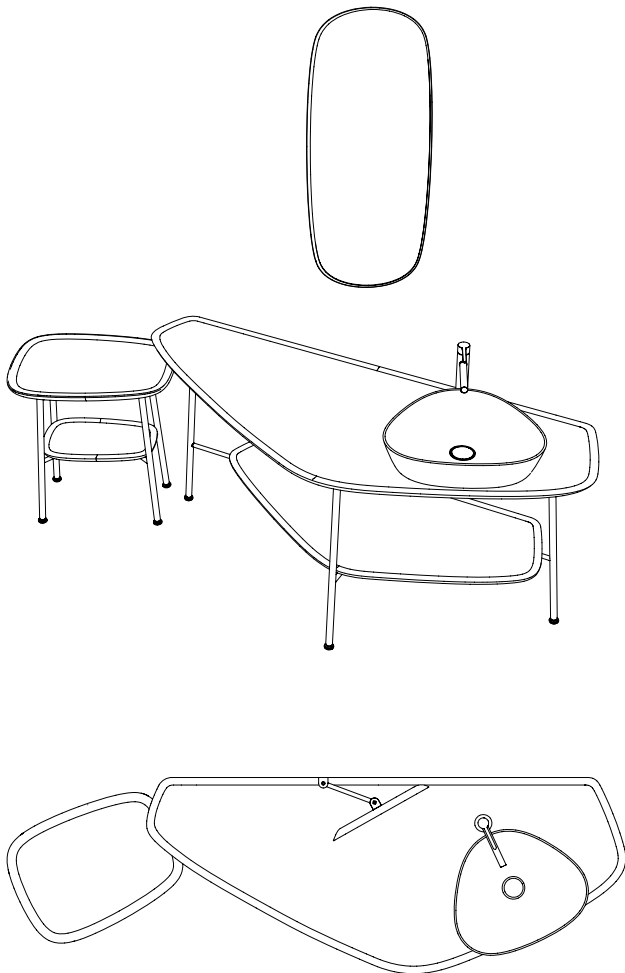


Plural collection by Terri Pecora for Vitra

The Sociable Bathroom



Terri Pecora
DESIGNER



What lies behind the new range of sanitaryware and bathroom furniture is a desire to rethink the bathroom environment as a sociable family space at the heart of the home

The Milan-based, American-born designer Terri Pecora has extensive experience in bathroom design but her latest project – and her first for Vitra – is, she says, ‘the most up to date and the most experimental concept that I have been fortunate enough to develop’. What lies behind the new range of sanitaryware and bathroom furniture is a desire to rethink the bathroom environment as a sociable family space at the heart of the home – a contemporary take on the shared bathing spaces and rituals of the traditional Turkish hammam. The range – appropriately named Plural – is ambitiously designed to enable a new level of freedom and flexibility in bathroom layout.

‘I wanted to free up the bathroom from the back-to-wall configuration, to create a more sociable space,’ says Pecora. ‘I also wanted to bring water into the centre of the room, to be able to make flexible, free-standing compositions or to angle basins off a wall in a friendlier way so that people can interact.’

The furniture-based concept consists of a series of beguilingly slender legged organically shaped elements that all interrelate and can be grouped together in multiple ways in flexible ensemble arrangements, including as a centrepiece to a room. And it’s not an all white concept – the range’s palette encompasses light grey, beige, anthracite black, matt white and sculptural surfaces in American Walnut with a matt waterproof finish for a richer bathroom experience. A key feature is the layering and grouping of different furniture pieces that enable them to work together in overlapping heights, colours and dynamic configurations. Even the mirrors in the range are flexible, with one version that can rotate between basins and another that can be angled from a wall for multiple viewing lines.

The concept, says Pecora, emerged during a Vitra brainstorming exercise in Istanbul that she attended along with several other designers. ‘Vitra really liked

the concepts that came out of the workshops and they decided to do an exhibit of all the prototypes at the Salone – it was called Bath Time Good Time. After the show, talking with Erdem, he decided that he really liked my ideas for a more user-friendly approach to the bathroom and wanted to develop them further.'

'It looks simple – which is exactly what I wanted – but the reality is that there's a lot of innovation behind it.' Pecora describes how she worked closely with the Vitra development team on the products: 'We had to rethink the basics of plumbing to achieve this level of freedom,' she says. With existing syphons, Pecora explains, a basin has to be placed at a 90 degree angle to the wall, so they developed a 360 degree syphon that allows positioning at any angle, along with a syphon column for water intake and out-take for freestanding elements. 'What's also fundamental to making the concept work is the syphon station we developed,' she says. 'Water routes are usually all over the place behind walls but this neatly groups together intake and out-take into an architectonic organisation.'

'The tech team were fantastic,' says Pecora. 'They took my conceptual input and made my ideas work. We would have meetings with 20 or so people around a table looking at the prototypes. We called the whole development process our "quiet innovation". It was a real pleasure to work with them.' Pecora hopes to expand the range to include baths and showers, even a sofa.

There's no doubt the Plural concept embodies a truer reflection of the ways many people now inhabit – or would like to inhabit – their bathroom spaces, offering a bold departure point for those who want more from their bathroom than the utilitarian. As Pecora says, 'Increasingly, bathrooms are for hanging out and sharing time with the people you love. Why shouldn't bathrooms include a sofa where you can read a book?'



Plural collection by Terri Pecora for Vitra

Bathrooms for the Third Age



Nest range from Vitra

Inclusive design, accessible housing and third age living are concepts rapidly gaining traction in the UK, where an ageing population is driving demand for innovative design solutions. ‘Design for All’ is one of Vitra’s core design principles. The approach to design is always to produce products that enhance everyone’s life at whatever stage they may be at.

Nisan Tunçak, an industrial designer in the Vitra team, explained the background: ‘We realised this design approach was very necessary,’ she said. ‘And it works in parallel with all our design values.’

As part of its research into inclusive design, Vitra commissioned a study from Sheffield Hallam University’s Lab4Living, a trans-disciplinary group from the Art and Design and Health and Social Care research departments. Tunçak was closely involved with the initiative, the results of which are published in *Inclusive Bathroom Design As We Age*. This Vitra guidance enshrines a ‘design for all’ approach, and summarises the key areas of focus in inclusive bathroom design as well as illustrating suitable products from Vitra’s existing ranges.

The guide addresses both physical and cognitive impairment as we age, looking at the factors of strength,

grip strength, vision, hearing, balance and cognitive changes. It provides practical advice on, for example, design for ease of use for people who find it difficult to bend or perhaps lack grip strength and flexibility. It illustrates how appropriate lighting can help people with reduced vision, and shows taps that are easier to use for those with reduced grip strength.

It also discusses the design of bathroom layout to minimise fall hazards and to accommodate potential personal care assistants, as well as ways to reduce echo and noise in bathrooms. It shows storage solutions that are simple to use, but also suggests leaving the most commonly used items in plain sight. ‘We wanted to match-up research information with real bathroom products,’ Tunçak said.

Among those real bathroom products are elements from the company’s Nest range, designed by Finnish company Pentagon Design. It was launched at the ISH show in Frankfurt in 2017, alongside the inclusive design elements of the Nest range of bathroom fittings. What makes Nest stand out in the market is that it in no way looks as if it is designed for people with disabilities yet it incorporates key safety features such as washbasins



Nest range from Vitra

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with an elegant integral grab bar, basins with dimensions suitable for wheelchair-based use, elements that can be used as seats by family members or carers or for just taking a rest, and an adjustable mirror that is necessary if you are seated or in a wheelchair rather than standing at a basin.

‘This is the future,’ said Tunçak. ‘Designing for ageing people means designing for our future selves. Especially in Turkey I am not sure how many people know about this. In the UK they are more aware.’

This awareness in the UK is in large part driven by the concept of ‘lifetime homes’ – homes that are designed for people to continue to live in as they age. The Lifetime Homes initiative sets out 16 design criteria to make homes more easily adaptable for lifetime use including detailed guidance for bathrooms, specifying for instance the amount of space that should be available in front of and between elements to make life easier for the less mobile.

In the UK architectural practice Woods Bagot has followed these criteria in the design of Carriages, a development of 28 third age living apartments for Pegasus Homes, a developer dedicated to creating attractive

homes for older people. The intention is to give people an appealing alternative to remaining in large and increasingly unsuitable homes by offering well-designed, more easily manageable apartments in a high-quality setting that includes communal areas for socialising.

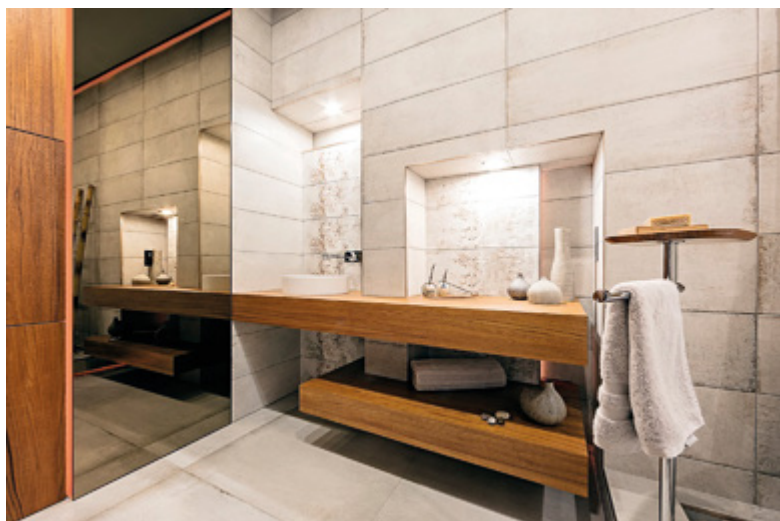
Woods Bagot has achieved this at Carriages, the conversion of a former office block in Purley, Surrey, transforming the street presence of the building as well as creating welcoming and elegant interior spaces that are intuitive to use. This approach is reflected in the design of the bathroom, a calm and contemporary space with no hint of ‘disabled design’ about it. Whereas less enlightened clients and designers following an accessible approach might end up with functional results but unappealing design, at Carriages the result is a bathroom that anybody would be happy to use. Davinder Ranu of Woods Bagot describes the bathroom as ‘an elegant balance between form and function’. Vitra sanitaryware was selected by the client and design and build contractor because it fulfilled their dual criteria of durable products with good design values. This is the kind of bathroom we can all aspire to.

A Balinese inspired bathroom escape in Edinburgh

Morningside Retreat



Colin Wong
CREATIVE DIRECTOR, DEVELOPMENT DIRECT



Eternity free-standing table from Vitra



Eternity range robe hook from Vitra



Vitra Memoria countertop basin and
co-ordinating wall-mounted brassware

In the affluent Edinburgh neighbourhood of Morningside, Colin Wong's latest project – Island Teak – has just been unveiled. The award-winning designer has long been an advocate of Vitra and, when asked to create a new bathroom within an attractive art-deco villa, turned to three of its ranges to realise his client's ambitions. The client was keen to recapture her experiences of travelling in Southeast Asia when converting an old kitchen at the heart of her house into a bathroom, imagining a calming sanctuary that would evoke the sensation of a spa retreat.

In response, Wong took direct inspiration from Vitra's extensive Eternity range of bathroom accessories, designed by Sebastian Conran to 'recapture Edwardian elegance for the 21st century'. Launched in 2017, Eternity offers innovative forms together with a high degree of flexibility. With its generous variety of materials and colours – brass, teak, black resin, gold and chrome – the range can match designers' precise goals for their projects. In this, Conran's range has fulfilled his self-proclaimed goal – 'to create something that works yet also has emotional engagement' – with considerable success.

Given the space's lack of natural light and complex shape, including an old stove recess, Wong opted to cultivate a sense of intimacy, calm and tranquillity for the new bathroom. To achieve this, he chose teak finishes for Eternity's rounded bathrobe holder along with an ingenious free-standing table from the range, which provides both a towel rail and a generous surface for soaps, books or refreshments. As Wong explains, 'The use of wood in bathrooms is prominent in Bali, so Conran's use of teak offered a starting point for my design. It provided the impetus to introduce the material in the surface for the floating basin and as a cladding for the walls, warming up the whole space, and giving it the feeling of a Balinese sanctuary.'

To complement the earthy, natural undertones of the wood, Wong selected Vitra's rimless V-care Smart WC – its new generation intelligent shower toilet – alongside sinks and taps from one of his favourite Vitra ranges, Memoria by Christophe Pillet. This French designer's 2014 collection has swiftly established itself as a leading choice among industry professionals, admired for its graceful lines and restrained forms. Discussing these decisions, Wong describes how Vitra's ranges 'make excellent use of space, and tend to be very minimal, with no visible fixes for sanitaryware. This understated approach ensures a look that is timeless and contemporary, rather than overtly on-trend. And of course they commission talented designers, which obviously helps to inspire my work.'

In the past, Wong has made use of other Vitra ranges, including Nest by the Finnish agency Pentagon and M-Line by German design studio Noa, describing the



Rimless shower toilet from Vitra

I want clients to
be able to leave their
everyday routines to one
side while relaxing at home
– that is the key to
all my designs

latter as 'a minimalistic range that will remain in use for a long time'. Such attention to classic design has made Vitra an invaluable tool for Wong, who aspires to match clients' ambitions rather than pursue futuristic styles or provide flashy centrepieces. For Island Teak in particular, he hoped 'to capture the sense of lying in an isolated Asian hut, of sheltering in a rainforest, rather than being trapped in the confines of a five-star hotel. I raised the bath, added simple details such as a bed of pebbles and a recessed 'glimpse' window, so it felt very much like an escape. If what a client is focusing on is memories of relaxing while on holiday in Bali, that is my inspiration, I will provide a space for them to light up the candles, run the bath and wind down. I want clients to be able to leave their everyday routines to one side while relaxing at home – that is the key to all my designs.'

Modular Home, Modular Bathroom

The spotlight is on ways to speed up the supply of housing in the UK. It's estimated that a million new homes are needed in England by 2020.

One solution to the housing supply problem lies in prefabricated construction – here we take a look at two modular schemes that specify VitrA bathroom products to improve on both speed and quality in volume housing delivery.

Case Study 1 Town House

The Town House development in Manchester's New Islington quarter is the culmination of six years' development by architectural practice ShedKM – and the start of a new chapter in housing delivery for the developer Urban Splash. The 43 two- and three-storey canal-side homes were factory prefabricated as timber-framed shells with fixed bathroom and kitchen positions then delivered to site for rapid assembly. An advantage of the modular approach is that it allows cost effectively for a variety of layouts within the same footprint, so purchasers can configure their house to suit their particular needs, choosing for instance the number of bedrooms or between an open plan or more room-based layout. Some buyers have opted to locate living spaces on the ground floor, others on upper floors. Future internal adaptation is also designed to be straightforward, with all structure and most of the services located in the external walls. The period from first site delivery to occupancy with these houses was typically just four weeks.

The Town House model includes a family bathroom that is large enough to be adaptable under Lifetime Homes standards, and also offers options for en-suites as well as, in the case of the three-storey model, a second bathroom. The main bathroom can be located on either

ground or first floor. At present, the only variable within the bathroom in terms of customer choice is the colour of the rubber flooring.

All bathroom fittings are by VitrA and include the Neon bath, S20 washbasin and wall-hung WC designed by NOA. Ian Killick, director at ShedKM, says, 'We needed a manufacturer that could supply volume reliably. They had to be of good quality and a recognisable name. We chose the particular suite because it was clean and simple, and a little bit timeless.'

Following the completion of the first Town House as a highly successful pilot project in 2016, ShedKM is designing a sister concept of modular apartments alongside, known as Mansion House, as well as building further modular developments in Tyneside, Salford and Birmingham, all of which incorporate VitrA bathrooms. 'We may at some point offer purchasers different specifications,' says Killick, 'but at the moment we are very happy with what we have. It's a good bathroom and a good specification.' If he does expand the choice available to purchasers, the generous range available from VitrA will make this an easy option.



Town House, New Islington, Manchester



S20 washbasin



S20 bathroom setting from Vitra

Urban Splash/shedKM Show House
2 Keepers Quay, New Islington
Manchester, M4 6JL

Case Study 2

nHouse

Launched at international property industry show MIPIM in Cannes earlier this year, nHouse is a prefabricated, modular home designed by Studio RHE, the practice of architect Richard Hywel Evans. Intended as a partial solution to the shortage and poor standards of volume housing, it offers an attractive, practical and eminently affordable alternative. The two-storey, three-bedroom homes have greater floor-to-ceiling heights and glazing areas than the vast majority of what's on offer elsewhere. They also provide 25 per cent more space.

The spacious homes can stand-alone or be arranged in either semi-detached or terraced groupings. The houses are supplied in four factory-finished units, which 'click together' on site with a new technology for which the patent is pending. This system contributes to the fact that this elegant alternative to the kit house, which is more vulnerable to poor on-site assembly, can be delivered for as little as £190,000 in just three days.

The houses come entirely finished, right down to the lightbulbs, and are packed with environmentally-minded technological features such as solar roofing that powers a home and car battery pack, and rainwater-recycling guttering. This level of attention to detail extends to the bathrooms, which – in keeping with the forward-looking

approach elsewhere – are designed with Vitra sanitaryware. Product ranges on offer in the modular house include basins, units and accessories from the Nest range, the Neon bath, and elements from the Sento and M-line collections as well as a selection of Vitra showers and taps. Vitra's ability to supply all the elements of a bathroom make it ideal for the prefabricated approach, and also offers difficult-to-beat choice and availability.

Richard Hywel Evans explains his thinking: 'Often I see these standard houses being produced which are mostly built on a budget with an eye on the bottom line, rather than focusing on the happiness of the end occupier. A home isn't just a machine for living in, it's somewhere that captures your heart and shapes your life, so it needs to be special.'

'I designed the nHouse as I wanted to put design first and see if we can build a home that makes people happy and yet still allows the building industry to make a sufficient profit. By utilising the latest technology and materials, we have built a home with space, light and design in mind. The nHouse could help provide more homes by significantly speeding up the building process and providing cost effective homes that people genuinely want to live in.'



Nest range from Vitra



nHouse modular home



Nest washbasin in grey natural wood
with close coupled Sento WC by Vitra



Nest washbasin in waved natural wood
with Sento Close Coupled WC

nHouse Show House
Lesko Modular Group
Unit A&B Gateway Park
Newcombe Way, Orton Southgate
Peterborough, PE2 6SF



VitrA showroom in Suadiye, Istanbul, opened in 2018

5m

PIECES OF CERAMIC SANITARYWARE
produced each year

30m²

OF TILES
manufactured each year



Kiln at VitrA factory

14

PRODUCTION SITES

An international approach

The VitrA Company

VitrA's main manufacturing facilities are concentrated in its native Turkey. The largest plant, a mega-complex, produces around 5 million items of ceramic sanitaryware a year alongside around 3 million taps, 2.5 million accessories and 30 million sq m of tiles. The Tuzla plant in Istanbul is focused on tiles and bathroom furniture, while the factory at Gebze concentrates on acrylic products including baths, whirlpools, shower trays, and shower systems. With two further factories on the outskirts of Moscow producing ceramic sanitaryware and tiles, VitrA is leading the way in terms of scale of manufacturing capacity – providing clear benefits for specifiers and the roster of international designers who collaborate with the company.

Sebastian Conran is one designer full of praise for VitrA's manufacturing expertise, commenting on his collaboration with the company on the Eternity range of bathroom accessories: 'We spent about three years working on this range, getting it absolutely right and testing different forms'. The sheer scale of production at VitrA means that the company can offer an unusually wide range of sizes, for example many of the basins are available in 5 cm increments giving architects and designers flexibility in design specification.

VitrA's long history of selling to many countries means the company has built up considerable expertise and a deep understanding of the differences in international markets. Some of these differences are cultural, such as the popularity of shower toilets in Turkey or of bidets in Italy, while others are technical – the size of plumbing fittings, for instance, varies from country to country. 'Through our international presence,' said design director Erdem Akan, 'we benefit from detailed feedback on a vast range of products from diverse markets. As a result, we have a broader perspective, and can look for instance at how we might combine the needs of the UK with those of, say, Morocco or India. Every market has different requirements. And VitrA is a good listening partner. We understand, for example, the interest in Germany and the UK in age-friendly products.'

External designers who work with VitrA benefit from being able to see where their entire range will be made, rather than working with a company that outsources around the globe. This may be one reason why VitrA has succeeded in establishing such successful long-term collaborations with high-profile design talent from across the globe.

Innovation

Introducing VitrA's world-class Innovation Centre.

Innovation lies at the core of the VitrA brand strategy. And its headquarters in this respect is the new Innovation Centre, a state-of-the-art incubator building accommodating the company's research and development strands. It's an environment specifically designed to facilitate the meeting of conceptual ideas with design, research and technology, conceived as a place where design collaborators, in-house design teams and technicians can work alongside each other to exchange knowledge and explore shared goals. Whether in terms of form, function, materials, process or technology, every branch of science or industry is a potential candidate for exploration at the Centre, from elemental dynamics to nanotechnology to electronics. Located at the heart of VitrA's main production plant, the Centre is also positioned adjacent to many of VitrA's extensive production facilities including advanced technologies such as high-pressure casting, rapid-drying moulds and fettling robotics.

The Innovation Centre is, says design director Erdem Akan, 'world-leading in terms of the bathroom, and it has also been approved by government as an exemplar for innovation centres of all types in Turkey.' The value of such a resource for the manufacturer is that it encourages ambition and promotes strategic design thinking, as well as allowing product development to be fully integrated across the disciplines. It is also, of course, a way of making the most adventurous designs happen.

The 50 people who work at the centre tackle a diverse array of projects that might range from developing new surface finishes or materials to fluid dynamics. Their efforts have resulted, for example, in the ultra glossy, highly durable finish employed in Matteo

Thun's Water Jewels collection. In classic organic forms, this range of washbasins offers highly polished 'metallic' finishes in gold, copper and platinum. The innovative surface was achieved through the transfer of a physical vapour deposition process previously employed in products such as thin-film solar panels, food packaging and coated cutting tools. VitrA's researchers adopted the process, adapting it to their ceramic substrates and testing the finish to ensure not only the desired visual appearance but also that it would withstand a regime of daily use and cleaning.

A 'smart connected laboratory' within the Innovation Centre is responsible for developments in connected technology such as remote WC flushing (particularly suitable for the arthritic) and the VitrA Smart Mirror, which through wifi and Bluetooth displays information such as traffic reports, social media posts and weather updates on the mirror surface. VitrA may not have been the first company to develop a smart mirror product, but its offering stands out in this emerging sector due to the quality of its design, material and finish.

Another development from the test-bed of the Innovation Centre is the V-Care shower toilet. Again, this wasn't the first product to reach the market but its slender proportions and unassuming appearance makes VitrA's offering unique in the marketplace. Aimed at people who either just prefer this approach or perhaps have mobility issues, the toilet's electronic elements have been built into the pan, enabling its form to be considerably less bulky than competitor products.

The next development in bathroom technology? Who knows, but given the commitment to innovation at VitrA, it's bound to be interesting.



The Innovation Centre
– the place where design
collaborators, in-house design
teams and technicians
work together

6th

LARGEST MANUFACTURER
in the sector

4th

LARGEST SUPPLIER
of ceramic sanitaryware

17

AWARDS WON
in one year (2012)

2,000

SALES POINTS
across the world

The Eczacıbaşı Group

VitrA is a leading brand of Eczacıbaşı, a prominent Turkish industrial group originating from 1909, when the renowned Turkish pharmacist Süleyman Ferit Eczacıbaşı began producing bathing and cologne products at his pharmacy in İzmir. His son, Dr Nejat Eczacıbaşı, continued to expand the family business in 1942, by establishing a pharmaceutical laboratory in İstanbul. With the establishment of Turkey's first ceramic sanitaryware factory in 1958, VitrA was born.

Today, the Eczacıbaşı Group consists of 41 companies with 12,500 employees. Eczacıbaşı's core sectors are building products, healthcare and consumer products. Additionally, the Group is active in finance, information technology, welding technology, mining, and property development.

International partnership is a central component of the Eczacıbaşı Group's growth strategy. The Group has four international joint ventures and numerous cooperation agreements with leading international companies. All of these are grounded on the principles of long-term mutual benefit and sustainable business practices. Through sponsorship and responsible corporate conduct, the Group is active in promoting social and economic development that nurtures cultural and scientific activity, protects the environment and preserves scarce natural resources.

The Eczacıbaşı Group is the founding sponsor of the İstanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV) which was established in 1973 on the initiative of Dr Nejat Eczacıbaşı. In 2004, the Group also founded the İstanbul Modern and continues to be the core collection donor.

VitrA was adopted as the brand name for Eczacıbaşı sanitaryware in 1966. The opening of a faucet production plant in 1979 heralded the strategic decision to diversify into complementary bathroom products. A high-achieving competitor in foreign markets since 1983, today VitrA is the leading global provider of a full range of bathroom components. Fifty per cent of the brand's production is sold abroad through a powerful distribution network around the world.





Celal Bayar, former Prime Minister of Turkey, opening the first factory



Factory production line



Entrance to the Eczacıbaşı factory



The original kiln

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Vitra (UK) Ltd
Park 34
Collett, Didcot
Oxon
OX11 7WB

+44 (0) 1235 750990
info@vitra.co.uk
www.vitra.co.uk

Copywriters: Ruth Slavid & John Jervis
Editor: Ellie Duffy
Design: Fernando Gutiérrez
Design assistant: Michael Curia at Studio Fernando Gutiérrez
Illustrator: Berto Martínez, page 3, 5, 8, 12

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