

Smart solutions

Selina Denman , December 14th, 2010

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Technology is impacting the bathroom in myriad ways. First off, products – from faucets and bathtubs to mirrors – are becoming increasingly sophisticated, a result of new and advanced manufacturing techniques, innovative materials and integrated features.



Secondly, the bathroom is being digitised. Electronic devices are being used to create a fully-integrated experience, where sound, light, water flow and temperature can be controlled at the touch of a button. Thirdly, technology is in the front lines of the battle to make the bathroom more energy and water efficient.

People are increasingly looking to personalise their environments, and the bathroom is no exception. "People do not want purely functional or static products any more. They want something that they can interact with. I think you will see more and more interactivity in the bathroom, whether it be in the form of sound or light or smell," said Simon Shaya, president, East Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa, Grohe.

CID takes a look at some of the most advanced bathroom products around.

Grohe

Grohe is in the process of developing Ondus Digtecture, an extension of its Ondus line of products.

Ondus is the "iPhone of the industry", according to Shaya. "A couple of years ago, we spotted a trend, with all the new technology coming out at the time, so we launched Grohe Ondus, a digital performance mixer."

Ondus Digtecture will blend digital technology with imaginative design to create a modular collection fit for the contemporary bathroom. The collection will consist of rectangular glass panels and high-quality faucets and fittings.

The system centres around a 5cm x 5cm grid system, complemented by plumbing and fittings that are concealed within the wall. Innovative technology makes Ondus Digtecture intuitive to operate, as users can store their preferred combination of water temperature and flow rate within the system. The system has a 'pause' setting to temporarily stop the water flow, for example while the user is shampooing their hair. A 'play' setting then reactivates the water at the same temperature and flow rate.

"We have managed to take something that is rather difficult to communicate and transform it into an easy, accessible product for the end user.

"We don't talk about the technical aspects of the product, but about what's in it for the end user. Where does it enhance their life?" said Shaya.

Laufen

Laufen prides itself on taking a holistic approach to the bathroom, and its attitude towards technology is equally inclusive. For example, even the mirrors in the Ilbagnoalessi One collection are heated to ensure they don't steam up.

Laufen has also launched the Lb3 LumiTouch, an electronic faucet that was awarded with a 2010 Red Dot Design Award for its innovative control system and excellent design. The square faucet features cutting-edge technology that permits low-contact operation and allows for synchronised lighting elements.

Meanwhile, the Mimo series includes a smart and compact bathtub fitted with a whirl system that is controlled using touch-sensitive sensors that are flush with the tub's edges. This is safe, scratchproof, hygienic and easy to clean – and does not detract from the appeal of the curved bathtub. Everything from multi-coloured LED lighting to the intensity of the air massage can be controlled at the touch of a button.

Laufen is also using technology to enhance its environmental credentials. "Laufen's ceramic experts have devised some brilliant ways of reducing water consumption in WCs," said Ivan Zupanovic, head of international project sales and export, Laufen.

“With an enhanced water supply and flushing system, these WCs can be hygienically flushed with just 4.5l of water – instead of the 6l customary in conventional WCs.

“Furthermore, our faucets are equipped with the innovative Ecototal control cartridge that helps save water and energy when washing hands, taking a bath or shower.”

Roca

Roca has reiterated its commitment to technological advancement in the bathroom with the launch of its Khromaclin WC, an advanced version of its Khroma series. With Khromaclin, electronics are incorporated into the vitreous china of the sanitaryware, meaning users can easily control the shower and bidet function, and open, close and even heat up the seat and cover.

The company has also launched Transtube, a new 360°, showering space with an automatic door. The door is controlled by a sensor, and glass has been treated with Maxiclean to repel limescale and make cleaning easy.

Roca is also behind the W+W, which features a renovation system that filters waste water from the basin and reuses it in the discharge of the cistern. Its L-shaped design brings together in a single body what has been unthinkable.

Micromaster

VDA's Micromaster is a cutting-edge energy management system for in-room lighting and temperature control that caters predominantly to the hotel sector.

It has a stylish appearance and lowers a hotel's energy consumption and carbon footprint. Using touch-control technology, the Vitrum Smart Switch Glass Collection, designed by Marco Piva, features an elegantly-sculpted screen that allows guests to personally adapt lighting and temperature levels within limits defined by the hotel. It uses RFID technology, and can be remotely controlled via an iPhone or iPad.

One application of VDA's Micromaster System is the capacity to programme lights in the bedroom and bathroom to operate at specific dimmable settings throughout the course of a 24-hour period. Clever programming enables lower light levels that allow for safety but are also less likely to be disturbing at night when, for example, a guest gets out of bed to use the bathroom.

“In the future, more emphasis will be placed on how switches are integrated into bathrooms,” said Warren Edwards of VDA UK. “Audio-visual installations are increasingly becoming a part of the bathroom fit-out.”

Bagno Design

Bagno Design has launched the Identity range of digital taps and showers by Vado. With Identity, the flow and temperature of the water is operated by a digital touch-screen control. The colour of the display ranges from red through to purple and then blue, representing the temperature of the water.

As a result, fingertip control of flow and temperature is coupled with a clear visual temperature read-out. The unit is designed with a unique digital diverter so that multiple showering experiences can be built, without additional mechanical diverters. In addition, the unit is a two outlet processor which can deliver three bar water pressure.

Vado's Liquid Crystal Handset also offers a visual indicator of water flow rate and temperature, as the display changes colour from blue when cold, to purple when warm and red when hot.