



Sink Style

When designers are conceiving the perfect bathroom, flexibility is vital. This is particularly true with regard to sinks and faucets, which must provide optimal functionality while also being seamlessly woven into the overall design of the room.

Often, the sinks and faucets serve as the finishing touches in the bath, providing a designer look through the shape, finish, silhouette or even the design of the water flow. Some of the hottest trends right now include clean looks that will endure the test of time, a variety of finish and style options and the blending of diverse materials within a space. That's according to manufacturers recently surveyed by *Kitchen & Bath Design News*.

"The overall design style of the bathroom has a huge impact, dictating the faucet and sink choices," says Eric Moore, interior designer at Kohler Design Center in Kohler, WI. "These pieces are crucial to pulling everything together in the room."

More thought is going into how people update the bathroom space to give it a stylish, yet timeless feel. "Whereas before it seemed everyone wanted the 'latest and greatest' when updating their bathrooms, now there is careful consideration taken before selecting products, colors and accessories to ensure that their investment can span design trends," says Benjamin Newcombe, senior product manager for Hansgrohe in Alpharetta, GA.

The faucet is often considered the jewelry of the bath, both the highlight and finishing touch of a beautifully designed bathroom, according to Lea Mendoza, senior product designer for Morrow, GA-based TOTO. "Just as when a woman dresses for an evening out and is careful to select the right jewelry to complete her outfit, so do we consider very carefully what interior designs are trending so we have the right faucets to complement the total design of any bathroom," she says.

Clean, Simple Styles

Although there will always be a place for traditional design, manufacturers are seeing a move toward both transitional and more contemporary designs that offer a clean, unfussy style.

"Homeowners want a design style that will last, and not get dated quickly. Transitional style can be unique and bold in its own way, without being overpowering," says Serge Magarik, founding partner at Kraus in Port Washington, NY. He adds that today's faucets have simplified shapes, complementing the sink rather than standing out on their own. Sinks with thinner walls and sharper edges are also gaining in popularity, he adds. "New technology is being used to create ceramic sinks with sleek designs that feature very clean shapes and a more modern look," he notes.

Lou Rohl, CEO and managing partner of ROHL, LLC located in Irvine, CA says, "Transitional faucet styles give homeowners and designers more flexibility in a space." A particular finish or handle style can help a bath feel either more traditional or modern without having the faucet design dictate the space, he adds.

Bathroom spaces are moving away from coastal, cottage and country, and toward a cleaner, contemporary look, says Judd Lord, senior director of industrial design for Delta Faucet Co. in Indianapolis, IN. "This trend has been rising for years and is anticipated to continue to grow," he says. "This doesn't mean spaces will be

sterile. To the contrary, we are seeing cleaner, more minimal forms finished in warm colors and textures such as dark bronzes and brushed nickels.”

Newcombe says that a clean and simple aesthetic allows the finishes to make a larger impact visually. “This trend has grown in popularity over the last couple years. In addition, I see a shift from the open spouts and wide waterfall type of faucets back to more timeless, clean designs,” he states.

A modern rustic design style has impacted bathroom spaces as well as the rest of the home, according to Naomi Neilson Howard, Founder & CEO of Native Trails in San Luis Obispo, CA. “People are enjoying soft, rustic materials, combined with cutting-edge technology and sleek, contemporary style,” she says. “Modern design is no longer cold and sterile; it can be warm and welcoming with state-of-the-art conveniences.”

In addition to a move toward a modern look, manufacturers say that consumers are mixing the styles they use throughout the room, creating a more personal and eclectic look. “No longer do homes only consist of *one* design style. More and more consumers are mixing styles between their room décor and faucet selection,” says Michael Poloha, wholesale bathroom senior product manager for North Olmsted, OH based Moen, Inc. “Faucet styles from modern to transitional and traditional can be used across all bathroom décors – it allows the consumer to create a customized look in their home with the faucet as the accent piece to the room.”

Geometric Variety

The shape of sinks and faucets is quite varied, allowing for a wide range of choices to accompany any design.

Lines for both sinks and faucets are more organic, and softer in appearance, says Christine Hau, senior product manager for Danze, Inc and Gerber Plumbing Fixtures in Woodridge, IL. Faucets are more streamlined, she adds, while sinks have a thinner profile. She also sees a movement toward an integrated product.

Neilson Howard says Native Trails has seen an increased demand for vanity tops with integrated sinks. “Integrating these two pieces creates such a sleek look, and provides for very easy maintenance. We see this as a trend that will continue to grow,” she notes.

Lord says that there has been a rise in what he calls a “Simple Geometry.” This trend pairs simplistic design with angled blocking to result in balanced and clean environments.

“When it comes to designing, circular shapes have long been the go-to,” says Poloha. “But now, consumers are becoming more adventurous in their home designs and are looking for square details, in everything from bathroom faucets to furniture and accessories, such as lighting.”

While round and oval undermount sinks are the most popular options, Magarik says, rectangular and square shapes are also becoming more popular due to the increased surface area available. Semi-recessed sinks, a combination of vessel and undermount styles with a top rim 3 to 4 inches above the countertop, are also on the rise, he adds.

Focus on Finishes

The finish or material chosen for the sink and faucet has a large impact on the way the room comes together, and manufacturers say the time is right for a range of options.

“Finishes are having their moment in the spotlight right now,” says Newcombe. He says that gold and brass finishes are making a small comeback, and some manufacturers are displaying these choices more

prominently. “Polished nickel is also very popular in the bathroom and not just paired with traditional designs – there is a demand for this in contemporary/modern faucets as well,” he adds.

“Special finish faucets and brassware are also definitely on the rise, with more choices available and people opting for custom solutions to add a special touch of individuality to a project,” adds Jonathan Carter, marketing director at the U.K.-based Victoria and Albert Baths.

Magarick says that gunmetal finish and metallic fixtures are becoming popular. “Particularly trendy are warm colors such as copper, brass, gold and bronze. These finishes are making their way into modern spaces, which were traditionally dominated by cool colors and finishes such as chrome,” he says. White faucets are also a hot trend for 2015, he adds, well suited to a clean, pared-down, flexible transitional style.

Finish selection shifts with the preferred styling of a bath as well. Rohl says that in traditional or transitional bath design, the metallic finishes like gold, copper and an un-lacquered brass are in demand more than ever. In contemporary spaces, he adds, the urban/industrial feel lends itself more to satin or brushed nickel rather than polished chrome.

While white porcelain has long been an established selection for basins, and is expected to continue to be a top choice, there are many other materials also making an impact in sinks, say manufacturers.

According to Michael Zimmer, founder and president of Stone Forest in Santa Fe, NM, neutral colors like white or gray are preferred. He adds that some of the firm’s older designs are cycling back into style, such as the massive Round Vessel, which has a rough chiseled exterior with a polished interior and rim.

Ceramic and fireclay are holding firm, notes Carter, and Victoria & Albert’s ENGLISHCAST composite material has also gained traction due to the increased demand for vessel sinks over undermount. “Revealing the outside of a sink means that it requires crisp edges, something that only the very best ceramic can get close to,” he says.

Magarick states that solid surface sinks are exploding in popularity. This material is easy to shape and allows for the creation of smooth sinks with edges that are thinner than ceramic, he says. Solid surface inserts are also being used to customize faucets, matching them to the solid surface sinks, he further notes.

At Native Trails, Neilson Howard cites the firm’s recently introduced NativeStone, a blend of cement and natural jute fiber, as a hot up and comer. “The fact that these pieces are stain resistant and lighter than standard concrete has really been well received, and the earthy, yet sleek aesthetic really fits into the popular modern rustic design style,” she says. Hammered copper sinks in both antiqued and brushed nickel finishes also continue to be popular, she notes.

Hau says that there is an emergence of material mixing as well. Looks she anticipates seeing more of include metal with plastic, glass or ceramic.

Sized to Fit

Sink and faucet sizes are directly correlated to the personal tastes of the homeowner, the space available and the way the space will be used. “We find that sink size depends on the needs of the consumer, which can vary dramatically,” says Mendoza.

There has been polar movement in two distinct directions, according to Carter. One is toward a larger sink, sometimes with modular vanities and integrated storage. The other is toward smaller vessel sinks that work well in compact spaces.

Many manufacturers are seeing a shift toward the larger products when space allows. “When dealing with a larger space, consumers are moving towards a larger size to find a nice balance between the basin and counter space,” says Moore.

While a standard 18" to 20" sink makes up the bulk of their sales, Neilson Howard says that the popularity of trough sinks suggested that designers and consumers are looking at larger widths. "There is increasing demand for sinks which will accommodate two faucets, for master baths," she adds.

Zimber says that Stone Forest is seeing a movement toward larger sinks. "A good percentage of our custom work involves sculpting larger versions of our existing designs," he says.

Hau, on the other hand, says that the trend of millennials and boomers living in urban settings prompts these homeowners to seek a more trim, sleek, slimmed-down version of sinks and faucets to match the scale with the rest of their living space.

Sink size determines the size of the faucet. A vessel sink will require a tall faucet, Moore says, while a self-rimming or under counter sink allows for a variety of faucet sizes. Kohler and Sterling see a big shift toward single-handle faucets, he notes. "Homeowners like the simplicity of a single handle, and the ease of cleaning."

Smaller baths, like a guest bath or powder room, need faucets that require less space. "Single-handle, high arc faucets are ideal, as well as wall-mount versions, since they free up more valuable countertop space," Poloha explains. "Widespread options take up the most room, as there are three separate pieces, so these are more on trend in master bathrooms."

Carter says that European formats, such as wall-mounted varieties, are being asked for more. "These have the advantage of being very flexible in installation with vessels, so they can be mounted higher or lower depending on the exact application," he says.

Though the U.S. is probably the largest widespread market in the world, says Newcombe, single-hole models are becoming ever more popular. "Traditionally, the single-hole designs have been geared toward the modern/contemporary customer, but many manufacturers have done a great job of embracing very traditional and transitional single-hole designs as well."

Making a Statement

The powder room is the perfect place to be a little more daring and make a bold design statement created with the "wow" factor in mind. "The powder room is the bathroom most likely to be seen by guests, so homeowners are using the space to make a design statement," says Rohl. "It is an opportunity to be bolder in their design choices and add more ornamentation."

Lord agrees, stating that in the powder room, it's easier to take more risks with colors and materials. "It's a show place for the home and is designed to impress or 'wow' in many cases," he says. "Consumers can be a little less constrained and have a bit more fun here."

Zimber adds, "For our niche, the powder room remains a place to feature works of functional art...from exotic onyx sinks to bronze vessel sinks."

Neilson Howard says vessel sinks continue to grow in demand in these secondary bath spaces. "When a space is going to be seen, a showy sink is often what it calls for – and an above-counter or vessel sink can provide the 'wow' factor."

Master Retreat

In contrast to the powder room, the master bath is designed less for making a statement, and more for creating a personal refuge. Not meant to be seen by outsiders, the master is intended to be a retreat from the outside world.

This bath continues to have a more spa-like atmosphere, says Rohl. “Calming color choices, attention to lighting and introduction of natural elements are popular,” he says. There is heavy influence from the hospitality industry, he notes, explaining that master baths are often transformed to reflect an amazing hotel or spa the homeowners have experienced.

Carter agrees. “The trend we’re seeing for master bathrooms is to incorporate a complete hotel suite feel, one that merges storage using elegant furniture and a unifying design style in the fittings and fixtures. This helps to create that pampering environment in their own home.”

Functionally, double sinks are still highly desired in the master bath, say manufacturers. “The double vanity is created specifically for the master bath,” notes Neilson Howard. “The larger trough sink is a friendly companion to the double vanity, with taps placed comfortably apart so family members can tidy up side by side.”

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