

Shower power

It's official – we have become a nation of shower lovers as better technology has enabled users of all ages to enjoy the benefits of easy access without sacrificing a luxurious showering experience. Francesca Seden reports...

A whopping 88% of UK householders now have a shower installed in their homes, according to the latest figures from AMA Research, who also forecast that the market is set to grow steadily throughout this year and beyond.

However, it also believes that pricing pressures are likely to remain intense thanks to rising levels of imported product and the growing number of competitive distribution channels, such as the internet, DIY multiples and multiple retailers.

But all this doesn't mean the market is set to reach saturation anytime soon, as Twyford trade marketing manager, Nicola Hadcroft, points out: "Not only is the refurbishment market strong, but the modern multi-generational way of life means more homeowners are adding second and third bathrooms to their properties, giving further potential to the showering market."

So there are a number of factors contributing to the popularity of showers over bathing, with perhaps the most important being the continuing growth of the country's ageing population leading to a rise in multi-generational homes.

"However for some," adds Geberit marketing director, Raffaella de Vittorio, "those living in apartments in urban areas, for example, it is a matter of saving space by sacrificing the bath in favour of a shower. For others, it is a matter of expanding their homes by adding an en suite."

But, whatever the reason for installing a shower, it's future-proofing or making showers as accessible as possible that is driving trends most significantly within the market, meaning that wet rooms and large, level-access enclosures are most popular.

As Vitra's marketing manager Margaret Talbot puts it: "The popularity of wet rooms has helped resolve a problem for the 'inclusive' market. This has driven sales of all things related to wet rooms, including floor formers, tiles, seats, as well as other accessories, and especially floor-mounted shower screens. Of course, showers that deliver a good flow of water, but operate economically, will enjoy good growth, too."

At Kaldewei, vice-president for sales in west Europe, Angela Ortmann-Torbett, is also in no doubt that wet rooms are not just a fad. She says: "With wet



Heritage Avenbury
exposed shower



Left: Hansgrohe Rainmaker Select 580 three-jet shower
Below left: Opale shower tray by Keramag Design

rooms here to stay and established long enough to no longer be referred to as a trend, there are new innovations to help installers achieve the wet-room look more easily using a tray.”

She adds: “Cross-generational homes are a trend with consumers and house builders looking to create shower areas that are suitable for all ages. Easy access to the shower is central to this, coupled with a flat floor, with no trip hazards, and a safe non-slip surface. Choosing a material that will last is equally important, so it will stand the test of time.”

Wet rooms are known for being both luxurious and expensive, but Coram’s managing director John Blackburn says this option need not cost significantly more than a traditional bathroom installation, and that it can be easily adaptable with simple additions such as wall-mounted shower seating and grab rails, to offer complete showering freedom for anyone.

Made to measure

As well as noticing a growing trend for luxurious wet rooms, Coram has also noted a greater demand for bespoke, made-to-measure enclosures and shower panels. “Incorporating a glass option of choice, the units can be angled, wider, taller, notch-cut, etc. And this service is proving to be increasingly popular.”

On to the floor now, and when it comes to shower trays and wet-room floor formers, thin or level-access is king, and personalised options are on the rise, too. James Clark, managing director of shower surface specialist On The Level, comments: “Consumers are frequently asking for shower formers (trays) of different shapes and sizes, and sometimes other customisation, such as two drains or a specially engraved drain.”

Clark adds: “Retail is continuing to grow with the demand for wet rooms remaining buoyant. We are focusing even more on customised solutions for commercial contracts, such as hotels, care homes, hospitals and apartments. The Level Access side of our business, using vinyl flooring, is the strongest area of growth.”

Customisation is also a trend recognised by Aqata. Managing director Jayne Barnes explains: “Customised, bespoke design is one of the fastest-growing trends in



home interiors. A bespoke shower screen or enclosure is the ideal way of ensuring it is made to the customer’s exact specification to fit an awkward space or under a sloping ceiling or eaves. It is also perfect for creating unique personalised solutions with, for example, gold finish or etchings from our library or uniquely designed.”

Barnes adds that to make it easy for retailers, it offers ‘Made 2 Measure’ and bespoke options to create unique enclosures for any space and retailers can show these options to customers using Virtual Worlds 4D software.

Keramag’s marketing manager Sara Johnston, meanwhile, adds: “Solid surfacing is the material of the moment for shower trays. Its matt finish

and warm, smooth surface gives it a very different aesthetic to acrylic and creates a design-led finish, which is also highly durable.”

JT’s John Schofield continues: “We’ve found the products that add differentiation and added value are performing best. Different materials, such as the cushioned JT Softstone, anti-slip and new pallets of colours based on trends, are performing well. Very low level trays, which provide the aesthetics of a wet room with the confidence of a defined shower area, are still our biggest driver for the consumer.”

A similar point is raised by Bette’s head of marketing Sven Rensinghoff, who says there’s been a shift in the colours and finishes being manufactured and chosen for shower trays and floors. Matt colours, coordinating with the bathroom flooring, are becoming very popular, because they can help to make the bathroom appear larger and create a stylish look, he says, while matt white is in demand, as well as various shades of grey and beige.

Frameless

Aqata’s Barnes, meanwhile, points to the rise in popularity of minimalist, frameless enclosures: “Spans of clear glass create the illusion of more space and minimal, contemporary styling creates a stylish and sleek look. We have noticed a growing trend towards ‘completely frameless’ enclosures and screen designs that use high-quality, chrome hinges and brackets to secure the glass to the wall or ceiling. In response to this demand, Aqata will be launching a collection of luxury frameless shower enclosures and screens later on this year.”

Streamlined, seamless bathrooms that are easy to keep clean are particularly popular at the moment so large-format tiles and wall panelling are also doing very well.

As Claire Lambert, product director at IDS, which distributes Showerwall, comments: “It is a 100% waterproof system that is quick and easy to install, fashionable, high-performance and very easy to clean and maintain – all important factors for multi-generational bathrooms.”

As for how the market is faring for this area of the showering sector, Bushboard’s marketing director, Jo Gilhooly, is confident: “We’re seeing a lot of confidence in our retail base. More and more consumers and retailers now regard wall panelling as a design alternative to tile and grout and this is driving sales very significantly.”

As well as choosing products that offer greater convenience, such as shower wall panelling, consumers now are indulging themselves in products that offer a more luxurious experience.

For example, says Frontline’s Michael Sammon, bigger heads, heads with different flow options, body jets and different mounting options are all available on the market to allow the consumer to create a showering experience that suits their personal needs and requirements.

Adds Grange Design’s Clive Griffiths: “This new trend is more about well-being and a heightened showering experience, more akin to a spa, albeit slightly more expensive. These revolutionary advancements in head design are also bringing a need for greater layout consideration and this has ultimately led to a rise in wet-room design.”

And this luxurious and trendy design can be for everyone, too, as Andrew Cullen, owner of The Bathroom Shop, Carlisle, points out: “Inclusive design has also transformed again the way consumers



Above: Kaldewei KA90 Ultra Flat Waste with Scona shower surface

Top right: Options round shower head from Bagno Design

Below right: The Hydr8 Bow Quadrant shower enclosure from Twyford



are using their shower, with some premium manufacturers offering a range specifically tailored to later life, yet still in line with current trends. Wet rooms are the ideal solution for a bathroom design that requires a practical space for all of the family. Features such as level access, doorless entry, slimline shower trays and full wet-room systems are now available to eliminate awkward or laboured entry when showering.”

Heritage Bathrooms product manager Tina Robinson adds: “Due to the growing popularity of larger, statement shower roses and rainfall-inspired designs, showering is no longer a purely functional market, with customers increasingly willing to spend extra to achieve a more invigorating and drenching experience.”

And looking back down to the bathroom floor for a moment, Kaldewei’s Ortmann-Torbett points to another emerging trend: “In order to create a sleek and seamless finish for the shower floor, there is an increase in demand for waste covers in the matching colour to the shower surface, as opposed to chrome. Kaldewei has launched coordinating waste covers this year for its Scona shower surface.”

Digital

Finally, one emerging trend in showering that cannot be ignored is the rise of digital showers, which according to AMA Research, are likely to continue to grow in popularity as consumers become more aware of the benefits of digital control and also of the ‘smart home’ concept. Plumbers, the AMA says, will also become more familiar with digital showers and the installation benefits they can offer.

“Plumbers were among the earliest adopters of digital,” comments Aqualisa’s senior product manager Simon Cornelius, “as it’s so easy to install, while consumers were slower to see the benefits. The market grew gradually until 2013, when we saw more rapid growth with a projected 20% increase by 2018. The nature of the market is changing as consumers lead demand for smart showering in line with smart homes.”

Bristan’s product group manager Lisa Ward adds that electric showers, far from being “the kettle on the wall”, are now much more design-led and aspirational. “And electric showers can be installed

just about anywhere, as they only require a mains cold water supply and an electrical connection.”

The UK’s ageing population also could have an effect on the number of digital showers being sold, as the latest designs, according to Hansgrohe’s head of channel marketing (trade) Sara Evans, are all about quality manufacturing, and simpler design for ease of use. “Intuitive operation by pushing buttons rather than gripping and turning dials are popular, as they are not only easier to use for all ages, but also enjoyable as part of the showering experience.”

Finally, the Sanipex Group’s sales director Richard Nicholls believes digital showers and controls offer a way for retailers to encourage and upgrade, particularly from those customers who are keen to have the latest technology in their homes. “Performance is also key though,” he adds, “and those shower mixers that offer high performance and a variety of functions will always be good sellers. Consumers are increasingly realising that their choice of shower and brassware can have a massive impact on the look and feel of the room as a whole and are driven very much by design first. So displaying these products to their best effect is key to securing sales.”

Performance, however, must be balanced against economy for consumers facing increasing utility bills. They are also aware of the environmental impact of

excessive water usage.

As a result of this growing awareness, which has also increased thanks to the BMA’s Water Label scheme, the prediction of the demise of the bathtub could become a reality. Because, as Croydex product and procurement director Peter Pegden points out: “On average, a shower uses 20 gallons of water, whereas a bath uses 30 gallons.”

He adds that, as a result, Croydex’s range of Aqua Air overhead showers and handsets continue to prove popular with consumers looking to save water. “With greater recognition of the Water Label,” he says, “it is getting easier to spot water-saving products on the shelf. Clear, consistent information is key to helping people choose water-saving products and we are committed to rolling out the Water Label across our product range by incorporating it into packaging and other promotional material. Information is also provided on our website.”

Demonstration

Hansgrohe’s Evans acknowledges that eco products can sometimes be a difficult sales proposition. She advises: “As utility prices continue to increase, consumers are becoming more open to eco products. Water-saving bathroom products can make a real difference to the cost of running the home and save a significant amount of water and energy. The Water Label scheme is helping consumers identify eco products more easily.”

But she sounds a note of caution: “Customers still need reassurance, however, that eco products deliver good performance. When we put working models into a showroom, our percentage of EcoSmart sales goes up. This is because customers can see a standard and EcoSmart shower working side by side and they can’t see or feel the difference – same design, same performance except one uses nine litres per minute and the other 16. There is no compromise, so it is an easy decision. It also allows the retailer to provide good service and add value by explaining this to the customer.”

However strongly considered the eco credentials of a product are, Ideal Standard category manager Jeff Williams warns that most consumers still count the time it takes a bath to fill and the performance of a shower as key criteria when it comes to selecting their new bathroom. He suggests the industry needs to make the benefits of eco products easier to understand.

In conclusion, this is why it is so crucial for retailers to demonstrate these products, to prove to customers that their experience needn’t be compromised for a product that uses less water. And in doing so, they will also be offering a shopping experience and level of advice and guidance that cannot be matched online. **kbb**