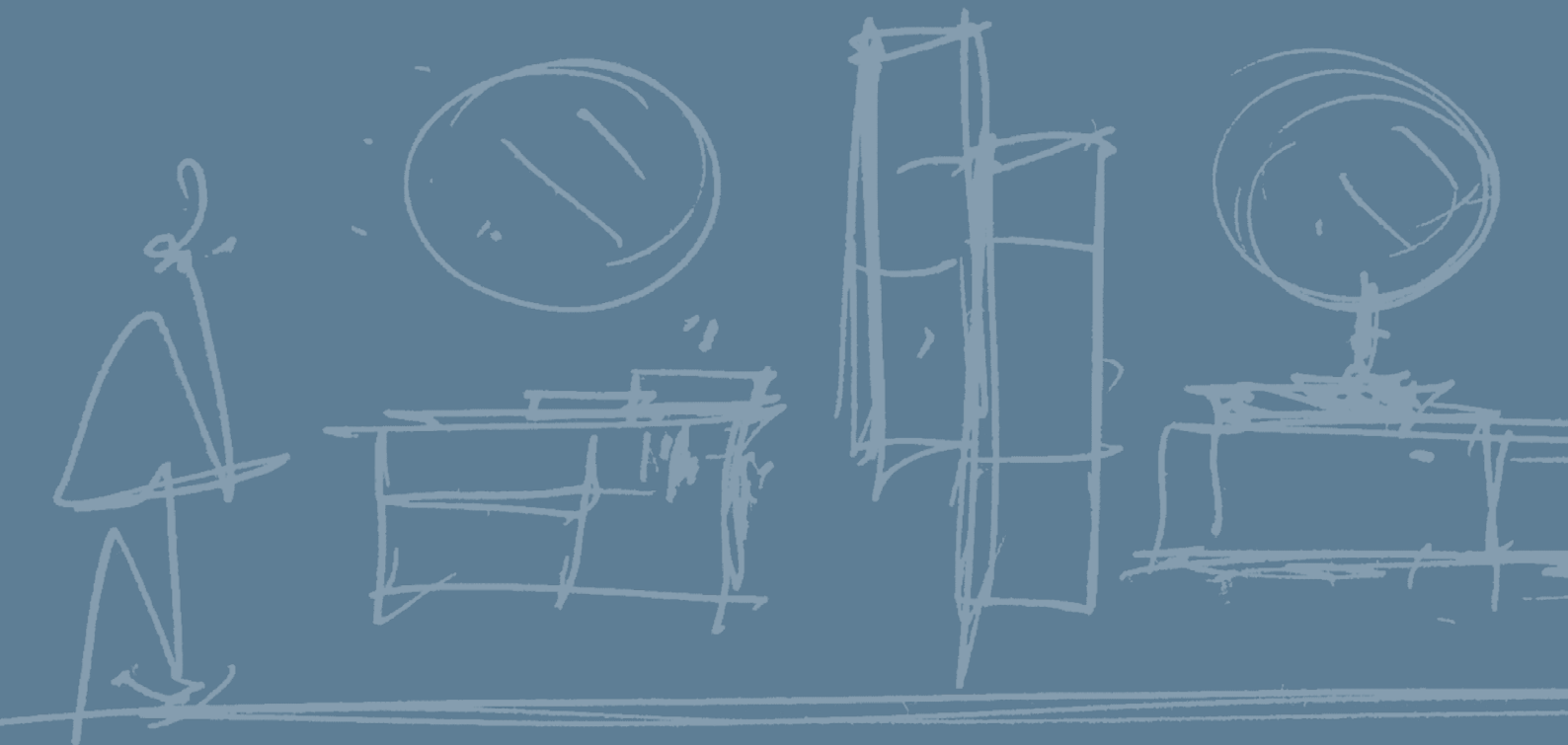


# Design Update—4

## The Wellness Issue

Featuring: — Arik Levy — Charles Holland  
— Sadie Morgan — Cristiana Caira and  
Seyhan Çiçek — Dr Lisa Ackerley



# VitrA

Hello again from *Design Update* and an edition dedicated to a subject on all of our minds – Wellness.

Physical health and hygiene may be at the top of worldwide agendas right now, but I think we'll all agree that the experiences of 2020 led to a growing collective awareness of the importance of wellbeing in the round too. So the aim of this issue is to explore some of the territories in design where physical and psychological wellness overlap.

Wellbeing is of course inextricably linked to being able to connect and engage with other people – and we hope that this Wellness issue of *Design Update* helps you feel connected. Even better, after a slight hiatus caused by you-know-what, I'm really delighted to be able to announce the launch of the VitrA London showroom in Clerkenwell.

VitrA London is a dynamic new place for architects, designers and thinkers in the capital and beyond – a new window into the world of design and bathrooms. More than showroom and specification space, we hope that VitrA London will become a physical and virtual social hub for the design community, hosting a range of dynamic and stimulating inter-disciplinary activities across different themes – from the fun to the educational.

We've been working hard through the lockdowns to keep our design communities connected and engaged with live online content. What's really spurred us on is knowing that VitrA London will in time be a place where the design communities can come together again. Find out more on pages 12–13.

I hope you enjoy our take on different aspects of wellness in and around design – and hearing from thinkers and experts on facets from the personal and home-oriented to the wider pictures of public health and our built environment, and I look forward to welcoming you to VitrA London.

— Margaret Talbot, VitrA UK



# The Wellness Issue

“The understanding of what makes a healthy architecture has changed radically. What used to be about hygiene and health is now more about psychological wellbeing. But it is also difficult to measure...” — Edwin Heathcote\*

“Architecture is really about wellbeing. I think that people want to feel good in a space ... On the one hand it’s about shelter, but it’s also about pleasure.” — Dame Zaha Hadid DBE RA (1950–2016)

“Architecture is an art when one consciously or unconsciously creates aesthetic emotion in the atmosphere and when this environment produces wellbeing.” — Luis Barragán (1902–88)

“Wellbeing starts with community.”

—Sadie Morgan, Director of  
The Quality of Life Foundation

“Buildings are deeply emotive structures which form our psyche. People think they’re just things they manoeuvre through. But the make-up of a person is influenced by the nature of spaces.” —David Adjaye\*\*

\*‘The Architecture of Health: How Buildings are Designed for Wellbeing’,  
*The Financial Times*, 28 September 2018

\*\*‘*Making Public Buildings*’, 2006



— Sustainability: screenprinting instead of plastic vinyls. A window into the new world of @vitalondon (see page 12)

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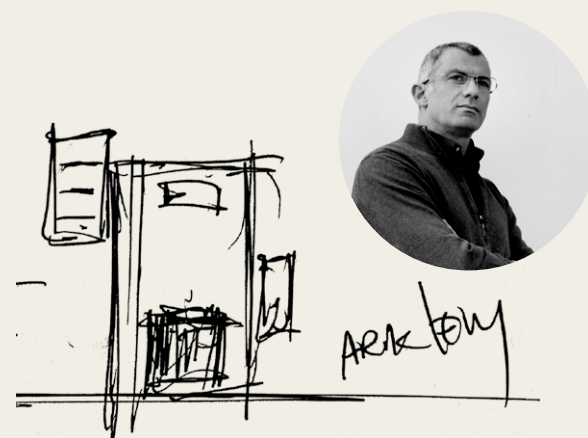


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# The New Balance

— Wellbeing moved into the forefront of design with the setting up of The Quality of Life Foundation. As the Foundation set out its inaugural goals, *Design Update* caught up on a video call with Professor Sadie Morgan OBE •

• Design Update: You established the Foundation with the aim of improving quality of life by focusing on built environments. Can you talk a bit about the Foundation's aims, and what led you to set it up?

Sadie Morgan: I'm passionate about improving quality of life, and I also believe that great design can transform lives.

The focus is really about understanding the fundamentals – the food and water of the built environment. It's about asking, when we talk about our homes in particular, what exactly is it that can improve quality of life? We hope to encourage the building industry and developers to understand – from the point of view of residents and communities – what really matters. It might not be the fact that a building has a pitched roof or a flat roof, is traditional or modern; other things might turn out to be super important.

— It's not all down to the architects; projects are the result of the full community of people behind them —

One of the first things we did was a literature review – and it's interesting that residents are not often asked what they think. We ask the great and the good, the professionals and the professors, but we don't ask people.

People want to have a say about their environment. Access to green space, freedom of movement, a sense of belonging, fun and wonder – all these things are vital to people and communities. Really it's about understanding human needs, making sure they are all included in the thinking.

DU How does the Foundation define wellbeing? Is it more about physical health or psychological wellbeing?

SM We're trying to achieve balance, and to ensure human emotions are in the mix. We're asking questions like: How does your environment make you feel?; Do you feel connected with your neighbours and community?; Do you feel safe and secure? It's those very intuitive things – the sense of wellbeing – that we're striving towards. And how that ties back into the built environment – although there's a lot of research around it, I don't believe we're fully making those connections yet. We're not really thinking about how and why we build with those glasses on.

DU Is there perhaps a missing link between the research community and the people who are practising as architects?

SM It's not all down to the architects; projects are the result of the full community of people behind them, and good architecture has always had a deep sense of responsibility to the people who live, work, play in buildings.

I think we're all looking for a bit of a shift. We all want to learn from lockdown, in thinking about work-life balance for example. These kinds of things are part of a wider story – a framework. And if we can make that gentle shift in the way we think about, plan and deliver our housing and homes, then I believe we'll see big improvements.

DU What type of research is the Foundation focusing on? Is it more qualitative or quantitative?

SM It's a little bit of both. We're trying to do research that is different and unpicks the big question of how environments make people feel. And we need to be able to translate our research into a better understanding of what good actually looks like.

One thing we're focusing on is a feedback loop that encourages communities to express thoughts and wishes – a sort of Trustpilot for development. We're partly doing this to collect data: if we can identify, say, a 4- or a 5-star development, we can then ask exactly what makes it good. If people are saying their quality of life is improved, what are the physical things that have contributed to that, and how can we encourage those in other developments?



— In conversation with Sadie Morgan. The full video interview is available to watch on Vitra's YouTube channel.



— Illustration for the Quality of Life Foundation. © Lizzie Lomax



DU So it is also about quantity of data, about creating a knowledge bank...

SM Yes, and best practice – encouraging the industry to do better. It's about saying 'if you think about these things, you're going to improve people's lives'. And who wouldn't want to do that?

DU There's also an emphasis on long-term thinking and on caring for, as well as creating, new homes and communities. Is this addressing a gap in understanding about what built fabric needs in terms of nurture over time?

SM Absolutely. If you have an interest or a stake in something over the long term, you care more than if you build and leave. It's a sort of master developer role – looking after property and nurturing communities over time. It's about engendering long-term trust, pride in the built environment, communities looking after their spaces, people knowing their neighbours – to create strong and resilient places.

DU Time is an important factor...

SM I think so, yes. We can build something that looks fabulous and ticks boxes. But we need to go back and ask difficult questions: Has this worked; what's the reality like? The industry tends not to ask because they might not get the answers they want. We need to be brave to improve.

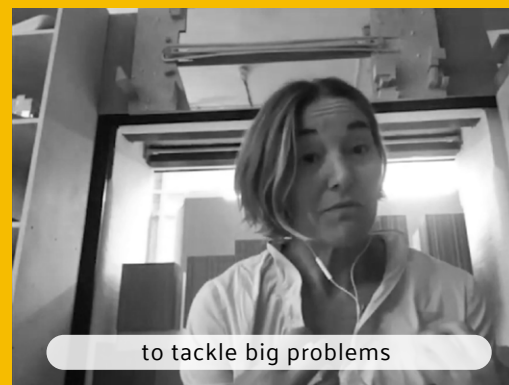
If post-occupancy evaluation happens not just within the first 6 months but over, say, 10 years, we could start to collect a very valuable national database. It might show us that shiny, new and wonderful buildings have gone wrong because of x and y. It might show us that buildings that haven't won any prizes are incredibly successful because of x and y.

DU It's perhaps about sharing data more?

SM Yes, I think with climate change we've learnt about working together to tackle big problems. The hope is that the development industry can work together similarly on best practice. It's not good enough just to be one of the better developers – there's a shared responsibility to encourage others.

DU Has the Covid-19 crisis affected the focus of the Foundation?

SM I think it's highlighted the kinds of questions we need to be asking, and the need for conversations that aren't just about built form. We need to be talking, too, about things like work-life balance and a sense of hygiene and cleanliness – which at the moment is very much tied in with feeling safe and secure.



—We're always looking for people who share the same values —

DU What are the next steps for the Foundation?

SM We've gone out for a nationwide piece of research and we're putting together a quality of life framework. We're asking how we can articulate the things that matter – we've talked about some of them – in a way that developers and communities can pick up. We're also developing the feedback app I mentioned. We're very excited about this because nothing like it exists, and it's a very positive step towards better communities.

DU If manufacturers like Vitra want to get involved, how might they help?

SM We're always looking for people who share the same values, who are interested in supporting our research. Whether you're a manufacturer, a developer or anybody trying to improve people's health and wellbeing – Vitra

being a very good example of that – it's about actively participating in making change.

DU People working together...

SM Absolutely. We're a small cog but if we can use leverage to help turn the much bigger machine – then we'll be doing our job properly.

DU What do you feel is likely to be the biggest impact of Covid-19?

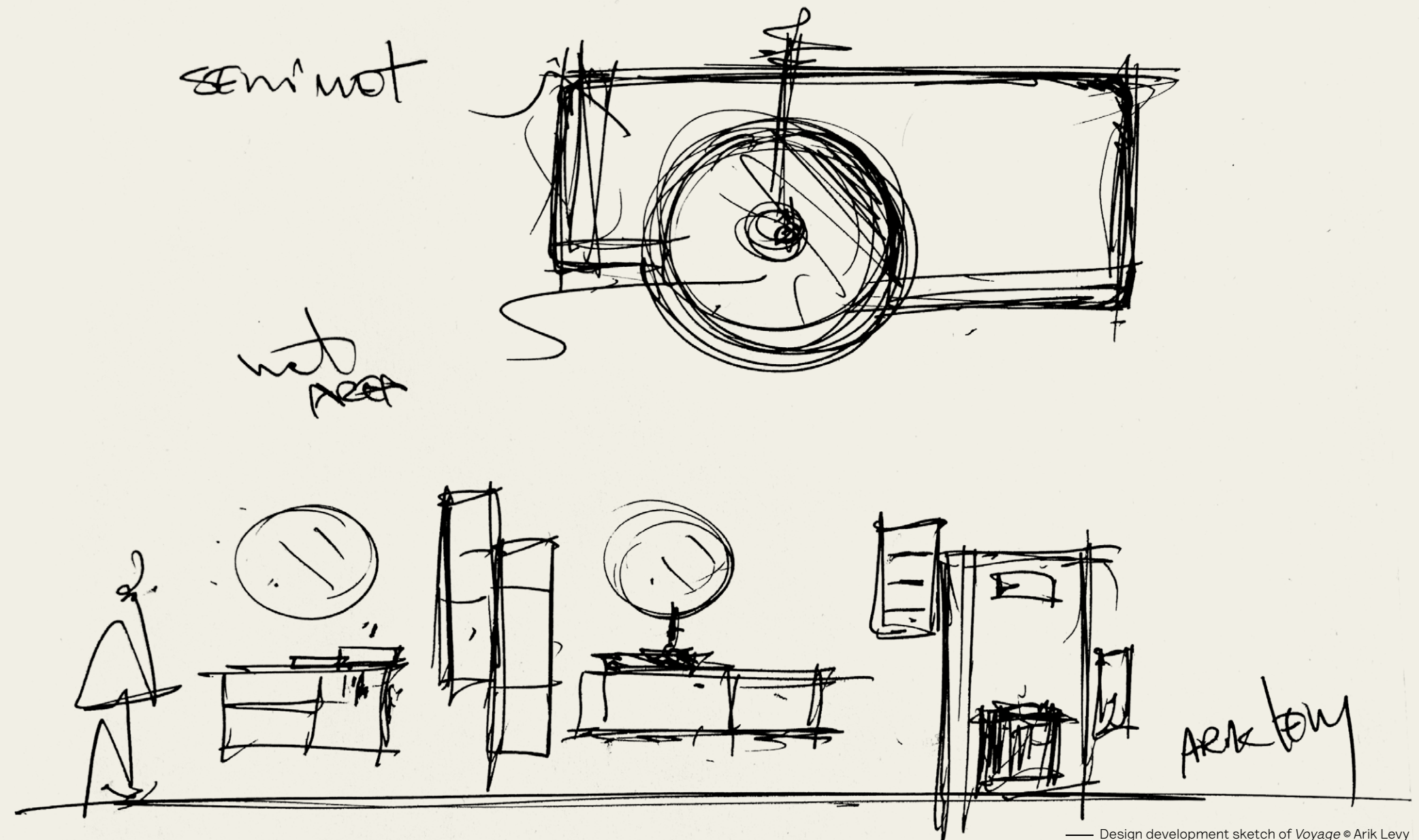
SM Encouraging people to take risk again will be a challenge. But there are also positives; feelings of gratefulness and lessons about looking after one another. Being caring, thankful to others, clapping on a Thursday night. That sense of togetherness and goodwill, I believe, will get us through. •





## Bathroom Spaces for Wellbeing – In conversation with Arik Levy

— With emotional wellbeing in the spotlight, the bathroom is increasingly being seen as a place of sanctuary. *Design Update* talks to award-winning multi-disciplinary artist and designer Arik Levy about collaborating with Vitra on *Voyage* – a new collection for a more personalised kind of bathroom that prioritises self-care and relaxation •



— Design development sketch of Voyage © Arik Levy



— The Voyage range, designed by Arik Levy for Vitra © Vitra



Photo by Daniele de Carolis © Arik Levy

— For the first time in my life we've been in a situation where most people have spent over 90 days at home... Arik Levy

• **Design Update:** New studies from Japan and Germany suggest that time spent immersed in a warm bath is particularly effective for boosting mood. What's your personal take on why bathroom time might be so important to mental wellbeing?

**Arik Levy:** A warm bath for many of us is a place to relax and refresh and take a moment to reconnect with what's important. We're all different, but I do believe that – just because we all emerge from the womb – humans share an instinctive joy in contact with water and the sensation of immersion.

**DU** You've said that a design driver for *Voyage* was celebrating time spent in the bathroom immersed in daily rituals of self-care – a sort of 'slow bathing' movement. In what ways does the collection encourage taking time in the bathroom?

**AL** It's all about being able to create less rigid and formulaic spaces and a more personalised environment where we can be ourselves in our own time. The surfaces and volumes of the sanitaryware are designed to be choreographed into one continuous visual movement, working in relationship to one another and in harmony with the more architectural planes of the counters, storage units and shelving. All the elements work together on an almost subconscious level; they can be grouped in more conventional or more unexpected configurations, depending on how the user wants to experience their bathroom.

— It's a toolkit that people can play with – interior architects, designers, consumers – with almost endless variables for creating a personalised bathroom space —

**DU** Earlier in your career you spent time working and living in Japan. How has the *Voyage* collection been influenced by this experience?

**AL** Experiencing Japan's communal bathhouses – sentō – first-hand while living in that country has undoubtedly influenced my design. The ritual of taking a bath – or rather, I should say, the process of purification – can be elevated to an almost spiritual experience. Washing away the literal and metaphorical sweat of the day, and along with it any residual bad vibes; eliminating physical and mental pollution is very much part of the picture. I know that the precious time I spend every evening absorbed in my bathing rituals – in the moment – influences me and informs my approach to design.

**DU** In some ways *Voyage* is an endlessly flexible kit of parts for the bathroom, with scope for numerous

horizontal or vertical storage configurations with flexible mounting heights, wide-ranging colour combinations, and open or closed storage. What was your inspiration for this approach?

**AL** It's a toolkit that people can play with – interior architects, designers, consumers – with almost endless variables for creating a personalised bathroom space. With *Voyage* I thought of the bathroom walls as the canvas and the elements of the collection – the basins, cabinets, wall boxes, horizontal and vertical storage units and accessories – as paintbrush and colours.

**DU** The introduction of a supporting palette of storage and cabinetry in nature-inspired colours is a striking characteristic of *Voyage*. Do you think the clinical bathroom aesthetic is a thing of the past?

**AL** The collection offers a way out from the era of the clinical bathroom. I wanted *Voyage* to be a shift – to generate a new visual vocabulary and new ways of thinking about the bathroom and how we use that space; what it means to us. The idea is that the bathroom can be massively enriched with personal thoughts and experiences; that it's no longer about rigid and fixed, one-size-fits-all elements.

**DU** To what extent was awareness of cultural differences relating to bathing rituals – and the different ways bathroom spaces are perceived and used in societies – something that influenced the design of the collection?

**AL** It was an exciting challenge at the very heart of *Voyage*. Thinking about the different ways people inhabit their bathrooms – not just for cultural reasons but also because of personal choice – was a driver that we tuned into again and again throughout the design development process. So, the collection is much more than just another set of static bathroom forms to either like or not as a passive observer – instead it's a sort of DNA of the bathroom. Through it we can voyage to the centre of our souls!

**DU** What do you think might be the single biggest impact of Covid-19 on spatial design?

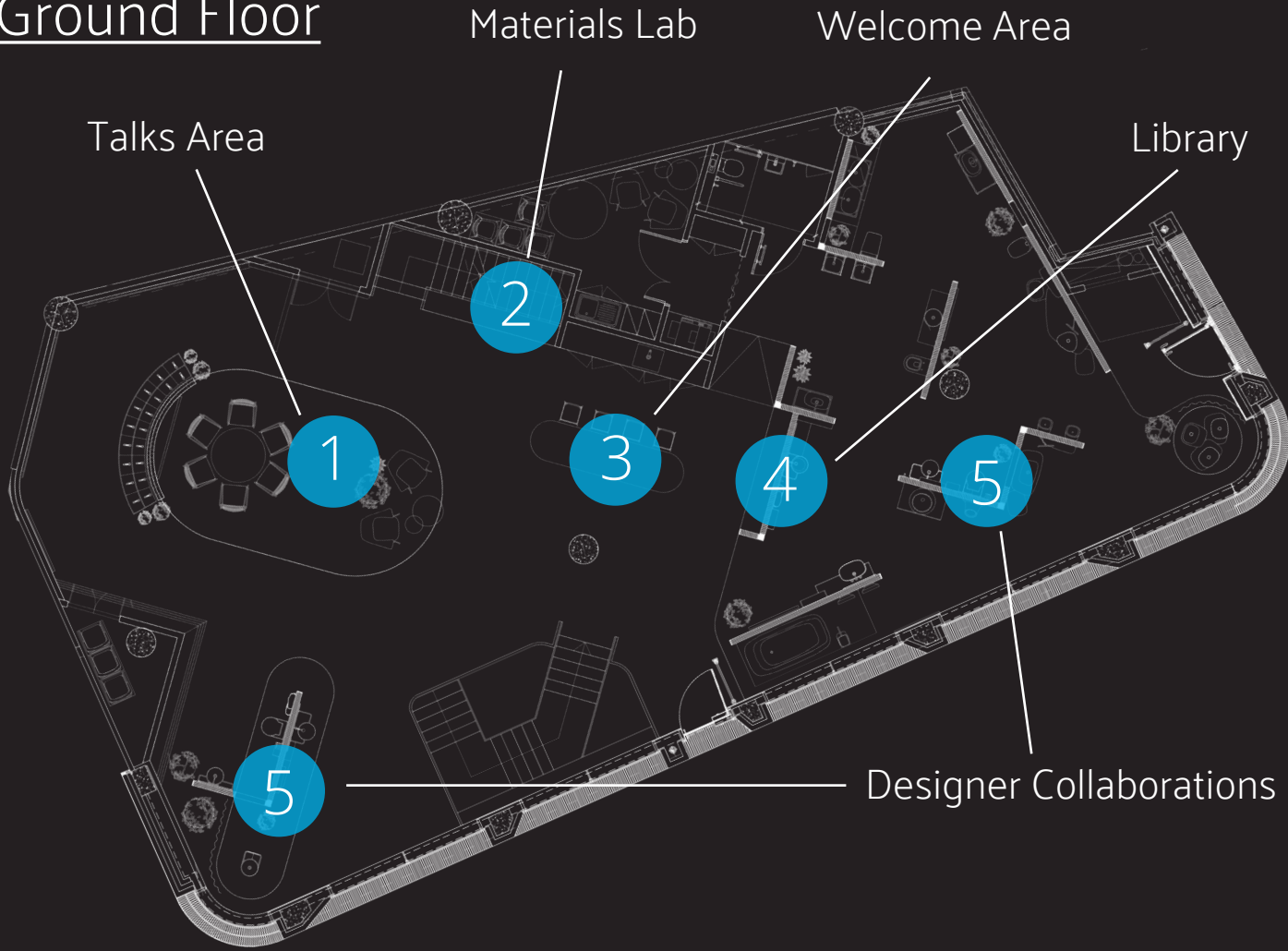
**AL** For the first time in my life we've been in a situation where most people have spent over 90 days at home – not going to offices, restaurants, galleries, theatres, gyms or any of those places we might usually go. I think many of us will see our domestic spaces differently now. With all that time spent in just one environment, perhaps we will see how little details and elements in our living spaces can change our mood, and also influence our feelings and perceptions. I think we have all been compelled by recent circumstances to focus more on the relationships between our body and the objects around us, and also between our feelings and what's going on in our minds. •





— Vitra's new flagship showroom is now open in Clerkenwell, London. Here we take a look at the thinking behind the space •

Ground Floor



- 1 Vitra Talks Area: A dedicated space for social events seating over 40. As well as talks, the space will host exhibitions, training, events and more. A floating canopy draws visitors to the space, its rippled aluminium an allusion to water.
- 2 Materials Lab: Here a full range of samples are available to support your specification process.

- 3 Welcome Area: The showroom is open to all, with an open-door, no-appointment policy (except during Covid times!). The welcome area includes a hospitality station where you can grab refreshments, and there's informal seating for chats with our showroom team.
- 4 Library: A resource of design and architecture books for those looking for inspiration and ideas.

- 5 Designer Collaborations: Here Vitra's designer collections are showcased in displays designed as full room sets – a zone to both inspire and inform your decision making.

Our aim has always been to create a state-of-the-art design destination. Vitra London is a place where different design disciplines can connect in creative discourse, learn and have fun – as well as being a space where everybody can interact with our products and industry experts, picking up really knowledgeable advice from space planning to plumbing.

We chose Piercy & Company's Turnmill Building for its award-winning architecture, airy spaces and great engagement with the street, moments from Farringdon Station. And we worked with TP Bennett architects to create an interactive interior that really pushes the boundaries of what a showroom can be.

An arena for Vitra Talks forms the nexus of the showroom, and around this we've created environments that put people right at the centre – from trying out working taps to comparing different products in real scale. You can even explore our immersive 4D theatre to visualise and walk around layouts as you design them.

Lockdowns may have thrown a few obstacles in the path towards opening but we're delighted that our space showcasing the very latest from Vitra is now ready to welcome you safely. •

Lower Ground Floor



- 6 Virtual Reality Space: You'll be able to immersively engage with our products and designs in 4D in this space, including any products not on display at the showroom. The showroom team will be on hand to guide you through the possibilities of your designs.
- 7 Products by Category: Here products are more specification-led, being set out by typology for easy comparison of different options across the ranges.

- 8 Meeting Room: This is a dedicated space where we'll work with you on your specification. You're welcome to use it for your project meetings, networking or social events too. And don't forget there are other additional working spaces for smaller groups dotted throughout the showroom.

## An Expert Perspective

# Public Health and Design



— Margaret Talbot, Vitra's UK Marketing Manager, talked to hygiene expert Dr Lisa Ackerley online to discuss public health and what design can do to help promote healthy environments •

• In a fast-moving landscape of public health messaging, the first thing I wanted to know was Dr Lisa Ackerley's take on the basics – what are the key hygiene factors to bear in mind in our domestic environments, now that so many of us are working from home?

Dr Ackerley – also known as 'the Hygiene Doctor' – has been a Chartered Environmental Health Practitioner for over 30 years. As a Trustee of both the Royal Society for Public Health and the International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene, and a Visiting Professor of Environmental Health at the University of Salford, she's well placed to answer my question. At the time of our chat the virus had been found in sewage systems, but it wasn't yet known (and still hasn't been confirmed) whether it could be spread by the faecal route or even via plumbing. What this means in terms of the home, Dr Ackerley told me, is that bathroom hygiene needs to remain firmly in the spotlight: 'If you live on your own you can stop the journey of the germ at the front door by washing or sanitising your hands. But when lots of occupants are sharing a bathroom, or if you've got visitors, then it becomes really important to consider how easy the space is to clean, because touch points are key'.

Ackerley singled out door handles as the biggest flash points for transmission in the bathroom (and elsewhere): 'Make sure they're easy to clean, because they're going to be touched frequently.' Unsurprisingly, she's also a fan of automatic flushing and soap dispensers – 'fantastic, because it removes a touch point and that reduces cleaning work'. Her personal preference is for mixer taps you can switch off with an elbow to avoid retouching a surface previously contacted with dirty hands.

During our chat Dr Ackerley agrees that plumes from toilet flushing are a potential means of transmission of coronavirus (at the time of going to press not enough is confirmed about the roots and rate of transmission to be able to say for sure). She did reveal, however, that toilet seats being left up has been a hygiene bugbear of hers for some time, and admitted to having had her own family bathroom designed so that the toilet seat has to go down before you can flush. In a similar vein, she came down firmly in favour of paper towels over air dryers in public facilities – on the basis that hand dryers potentially stir up aerosols as well as dispersing droplets that would otherwise fall to the floor.

When we spoke, most of the UK's public toilets were still out of action but the Government had just contacted local councils about reopening. I wanted to know Dr Ackerley's take on this, and it turned out that she'd been on what she called a 'mini campaign' to lobby for reopening. 'The trouble is that the messaging in the UK so far has been that people can travel as far as they want,' she told me, 'but nobody has thought this through in terms of needing to go to the toilet'.

Ackerley's view is that public toilets are in some ways a 'barometer of civilisation'; an essential component of health, mobility and equality in society. 'If you think about all the extra delivery vehicles on the road at the moment – parcels and food deliveries, and the fact that those workers don't have anywhere to go to the loo – the cumulative health effects are a concern,' she cautioned. On this she referred me to a recent Royal Society for Public Health publication on the decline of the 'great British public toilet', a report that found that workers without

access to toilets tend to dehydrate deliberately, with detrimental effects to health that can be serious in the long term. The report also found that the decline in the UK's provision of public toilets (one in seven were shut down between 2010–13) has disproportionately affected the lives of women, outdoor workers, the elderly and people with poor health or a disability.

Asked what architects and designers might need to be thinking about in terms of hygiene, Ackerley's view was that measures are likely to fall broadly in line with existing hygiene practice. But, she added: 'much more can be done to improve washroom hygiene in office spaces and public spaces generally, like reducing the number of doors that people touch. The journey of people using buildings is also likely to become more important in design'.

At the time of our chat, Ackerley was in the midst of risk-assessing the reopening of buildings in the Covid context. She described how she'd been advising property and facilities managers to think about uses, mapping out exactly what people do and where in a building, and working out from there how to make spaces safer. Washroom facilities in public buildings and workspaces, she suggested, might benefit from new design thought in light of Covid: 'If we think about toilet spaces – somebody comes in and generally has to open a door and then, to go to the loo, they have to open another door. And then shut it. What if we don't have so many doors just to get to the cubicle? Or could doors, flush and seat all be automatic? All of these measures might help'.

Another interesting suggestion from Ackerley is positioning washbasins outside enclosed areas. 'In schools I'd like to see washbasins at the side of classrooms, and at the building entrance. In the case of public toilets that would mean people on the street could use the handbasins too. In some countries I've visited in the past it was quite normal for hand-washing stations to be outside. I think with design we need to get back to fundamental principles of hygiene.'

It was great to meet Dr Ackerley and encounter an upbeat and pragmatic approach to hygiene. Her can-do approach was heartening, and I found myself looking on the bright side towards a new normal that's really just about learning, in small ways, to adapt. •

The full video interview is available to watch on Vitra's YouTube channel.



## RSHP Report The Key Findings

Inadequate provision of public loos is a threat to health, mobility and equality, argues the Royal Society of Public Health report *The Decline of the Great British Public Toilet*. It's time for these services to be considered as essential as streetlights and waste collection, says the report, which also calls for:

- 1 Breaking down 'toilet taboo' with public debate and awareness, including an architectural competition to design the best public toilet in the UK
- 2 Compulsory national provision on a well-planned and regulated basis
- 3 Government funding settlement to enable local authority provision
- 4 Exploring new models of funding via national and local government pilots
- 5 Equality of access to public toilets across genders and for transgender individuals.



# Thinking Small, Thinking Big

— *Design Update* discusses child-centred approaches to design with Cristiana Caira of White Arkitekter and Seyhan Çiçek of Vitra's Innovation Centre •



— Exterior of Queen Silvia Children's Hospital.  
Image: White Arkitekter



— Cristiana Caira © White Arkitekter



— Seyhan Çiçek © Vitra



— Queen Silvia Children's Hospital interior. Image: White Arkitekter

• In a zoom chat between Sweden, Turkey and the UK, *Design Update* finds out about child-friendly design focuses from specialists in architecture and product design.

Design Update: Cristiana, what is the current situation with child-centred approaches to design in Sweden?

Cristiana Caira: In January this year the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child became local Swedish law. This is going to bring more focus to the needs of children and young people. Children may have no voting rights but they represent a large part of our communities – in Sweden it can be 20–30 per cent and in developing countries up to 50–60 per cent. And children, of course, are very much affected by the choices we designers make about how we plan our cities and schools, transportation and parks.

DU Seyhan, how does that compare with in Turkey?

Seyhan Çiçek: Awareness of child-focused design has definitely been increasing in Turkey in recent years, especially in educational and pre-school contexts as a result of changes in the educational landscape.

When we're designing with children in mind, of course there are some international standards that we apply but I would say that standards alone aren't enough to ensure the most suitable design for children.

DU The new Vitra *Sento Kids* range is aimed specifically at younger children transitioning into educational environments. What was the research process for this and how does the collection address specific needs?

SC We describe the collection as 'better solutions for beginners'. It's aimed at children in the three- to six-year-old ranges, as they start to attend nurseries and schools. It's the age bracket where children are beginning to be away from their parents for longer periods during the day, and when they have to learn to manage their toilet needs by themselves.

We knew we wanted to make the design colourful and attractive but when we started our research we realised there was very little existing data around the subject. So we went to kindergartens to talk to children, and we developed prototypes for the children to interact with – making it into a game. We observed how children of different ages and heights engaged with different designs, looking at things like whether they could place their feet fully on the floor because that's really important for bowel movement. We observed that the children tended to hold one side of the pan because they want to feel safe. That's when we decided to introduce grab handles into the design, and an extra colour-coded grip in the seat to make it easier and more hygienic to lift. It's really important for building self-confidence that children feel comfortable and safe when starting to use sanitaryware on their own.





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— It was crucial to acknowledge how important the wellbeing of the parents is —



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- 1. Sento Kids incorporates unique colour-coded grab and grip handles into WC seats
- 2. Prototypes were tested by children in fun workshop games
- 3. Colour blocking of basins, taps and pedestals is aimed at children in the 3-6 age ranges
- 4. The scale and forms are designed to build confidence in young users
- 5. School washrooms don't need to be intimidating. Sento Kids is designed to help make them fun and friendly places
- 6. Child-friendly colour coding means that forms that hold water are white

All images © Vitra

DU Cristiana, you've also recently completed a pioneering project – a hospital designed specifically around the needs of younger children and teenagers. Could you tell us about your project, and some of the research behind it?

CC Yes, the project is the Queen Silvia Children's Hospital in Gothenburg. It's a big hospital – 33,000m2 and a centre of specialist care for children and young people in Sweden. One of the most important design considerations was that this is a hospital building for children – and parents – in a high-stress situation. There is fear and uncertainty, and also physical pain involved. It was crucial to acknowledge how important the wellbeing of the parents is, because if they feel well and can sleep they can better support their children.

Another design consideration was creating spaces for calmness and a home-like feeling, so that families and children can recover while feeling safe and relaxed. We created other spaces where playfulness is encouraged, because that's how children learn and playing also helps recovery. This has been translated into a balance of environments, with some calm spaces where we use daylight, greenery and natural materials, and some spaces that stimulate play with a lot of colour and artwork. Views of the forest just outside of the hospital also help to create a serene environment in specific areas, and we used a lot of wood in the hospital interiors – quite an innovation in a hospital environment.

DU How did you engage some of the younger children during your consultation process?

CC With children under two it's really more about dialogue with the parents. But with children old enough to communicate for themselves we created conversations around drawing and painting in response to questions like: 'What is a dream hospital for you?' and 'How would you like this new hospital to look?' Drawings say so much more about the child's perspective than a normal interview because children have the ability, when they draw, to really focus on detail and the things that are important to them.

DU From what both of you have said, colour is an important aspect in designing for children. Seyhan, how did you approach the issue of colour in the design of *Sento Kids*?

SC We used strong colour contrasts to attract the attention of children, with colourful pedestals, taps and toilet seats. But for the elements with direct water contact like washbasins and toilets we used white for a more hygienic and cleaner appearance – a sort of colour coding that relates to the way children interact with the products. We also intentionally didn't use colour as a gender differentiator. That was important to us.

DU Cristiana, how did you approach colour at Queen Silvia Children's Hospital?

CC In the indoor environment, we don't use colour everywhere but in specific spaces such as dayroom areas for playful activity. There are play spaces throughout the building, so the children know 'this is a place where I can move around, move furniture,

express myself and play'. When it came to the choice of colours it was interesting to discover that the children we interviewed in our workshops, of all ages, were actually focused on pastel colours that reminded them of flowers and nature, the sky and insects. So we used a broad range of pastel shades that are quite natural.

— Colour isn't just about playfulness, but also function and wayfinding and feeling at home in the environment —

As well as using colour as a signal for playfulness we used it in wayfinding, with a dominant colour for each floor and unit so that even children who don't yet read can find their way. We also used artworks to help with orientation, even for small children. The use of colour isn't just about playfulness, but also function and wayfinding and feeling at home in the environment.

DU Finally, what impact do you think Covid-19 is going to have on design in the longer term?

SC The importance of personal and environmental hygiene has certainly been highlighted by Covid-19, especially the importance of careful hand washing. Maybe we'll see hand hygiene stations appearing in the streets and in the entrances of buildings. I also think that smart technologies

and touchless products will become more widespread, especially in public areas. I think the concept of wellness will gain importance all over the world – as we all know, the impact of coronavirus isn't limited to physical harm, but is related to our feelings. As designers, I think we'll need to touch the feelings of users much more after this.

DU And Cristiana?

CC When it comes to design, as Seyhan says, there will be more attention to hygiene – and on the way we plan buildings and cities and design products in relation to that. But the most important reflection I have is about the importance of outdoor spaces. If we had planned more child-friendly schools with smaller rooms for smaller groups with more provision for outdoor learning, I think many more children would have been able to go to school during Covid.

When it comes to urban settings, we've seen the value of access to green areas close to our houses and apartments, and how important it is to be able to cycle instead of using crowded buses or metros. So sustainable transportation and outdoor spaces in high-density urban settings will be key. ●

The full video interview is available to watch on Vitra's YouTube channel.

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# The Water–Paper Divide

— What does a run on toilet paper say about cultural conventions and the bathroom? •



— Juggling our environmental concerns © Anna Shvets

• The sight of empty toilet paper aisles in the supermarket was, for many of us, how the reality of the pandemic first hit home. Herd behaviours of panic buying may have been duplicated across the world but – in relation to toilet paper at least – the phenomenon seems to have been particularly pointed in the UK, America and Australia. In a not-unrelated turn of events, as the pandemic took hold in the US, bidet sales are reported to have soared, with one manufacturer announcing a tenfold increase in orders during the month of March 2020.

So while panic buying and shortages of toilet paper were a particular feature of pre-lockdown Australia, for instance, which like the UK doesn't have a bidet culture, it probably isn't a coincidence that countries relatively unaffected by the toilet paper syndrome included Italy and Portugal, where bidets have been mandatory in new-build housing since 1975.

The use of paper for hygiene was first recorded in China in the 6th century, discovered in the texts of scholar Yen Chih-Thui. In the year 851 AD, during the Tang dynasty, an Arab traveller to China remarked that the people: 'do not wash themselves with water when they have done their necessities; but they only wipe themselves with paper'.

Since then the world has continued to be divided on the issue of whether cleansing with water or paper is better for our health and hygiene. In Europe, for instance, bidets are unusual in some countries but are embraced enthusiastically in others – including France, where it is thought the bidet was invented in the late 17th century. (The word 'bidet' is an allusion to the seating position, deriving from the Old French verb 'to trot', later the name given to a type of pony kept by the aristocracy.)

If you look at the geography of bidet use around the world, it's hard to define any overriding cultural pattern. As well as being popular in southern Europe, they're common in the Arab world and also in West Africa, southern Eastern Europe and South American countries including Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. Shower toilets are gaining popularity in Japan (where they're now present in around 60 per cent of households) and elsewhere in Asia but continue to be relatively unusual in northern European bathrooms, although paradoxically bidet showers are common in Finland.

It seems from the picture of bidet uptake emerging from across the Atlantic that something of a cultural shift in the water–paper divide might be underway. It also seems that reasons beyond the pandemic could be the real drivers, with increasing awareness of sustainability certainly appearing to be a factor. It was reported recently that the average American uses three toilet rolls per week. If you do the maths, that adds up to somewhere around 50 billion rolls a year – or a lot of trees.

A *Scientific American* article once claimed that washing with water after going to the loo uses a lot less of the world's water resources than is taken up by the

manufacture of its toilet paper, let alone flushing it away. Inevitably, it's a complicated debate, involving long supply chains on all sides, but is certainly something to think about.

Another environment-related factor behind the trend might be greater understanding of the problems and expense caused when supposedly flushable toilet wipes are washed into the shared infrastructure of our sewer systems – including damage to the environment caused by overflows, and related public health implications.



— Shower toilet technology can improve accessibility © Vitra

Growing awareness of personal health issues is probably another reason for the trend towards washing with water. Whereas hygiene and comfort are perhaps more subjective considerations, there's an uptake of interest around the question of whether water might actually be the better option for health. There is as yet no hard evidence either way but some doctors are known to support water washing in the context of specific conditions such as haemorrhoids and urinary tract infections.

With the average bathroom size in the UK getting smaller, there isn't always space for a separate bidet. Vitra reports that shower toilets are proving an increasingly popular solution. There are many options, from the simple combined WC and bidet models to those with full technology capabilities including washing and drying functions, variable water pressure and air purification modes, all accessible through a remote control.

Shower toilets are also increasingly popular in accessible and age-friendly design contexts. Aside from any potential hygiene benefits, this reflects a general societal move towards harnessing design to prolong or promote independent living for people with poor or declining mobility or other accessibility challenges.

The water–paper debate will no doubt rumble on, with any underlying shifts in global trends unravelling over time. What is clear is that personal preference will always be high on the agenda when it comes to the essentially rather private matter of our toilets. •



# Hopes, Dreams and Bathroom Suites

— Architect and commentator  
Charles Holland on cultural meanings  
and the ‘smallest room’, observing taste  
and social trends, and the pursuit of his  
own particular kind of bathroom idyll •



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- The bathroom was a particular enthusiasm for architects and designers in the early twentieth century. The Austrian architect Adolf Loos for example was obsessed with plumbing, writing paeans to the functional advances of American bathroom design, and haranguing his native countrymen for their retrograde attitudes to ablution. He liked to display the mechanics of plumbing in the houses he designed, treating water systems as an advertisement for cleanliness and hygiene. U-Bends, brackets, taps and pipework were often on show, and in the Rufer House – designed for Viennese clients in 1922 – he even placed a hand basin in the entrance hall. Like a baptismal font, it was an instruction to anoint oneself in modern architecture.

— 1. Spliced bath of FAT's installation Bathroom Sweet  
— 2. Siamese handbasin of FAT's Bathroom Sweet  
— 3. Family bathroom by Charles and Jennifer Holland.  
© Andy Matthews

There is a contradictory quality at play in the Rufer House, a desire both for transparency and an interest in psychological games involving concealment and display. If mainstream Modernism was meant to be about structural honesty and truth to materials, it also had another foot in the subconscious explorations of the Surrealists. The bathroom, with its emphasis on private, intimate bodily functions, is only ever partly about health and cleanliness. It is also about how we think of our bodies, about social attitudes to privacy and to pleasure.

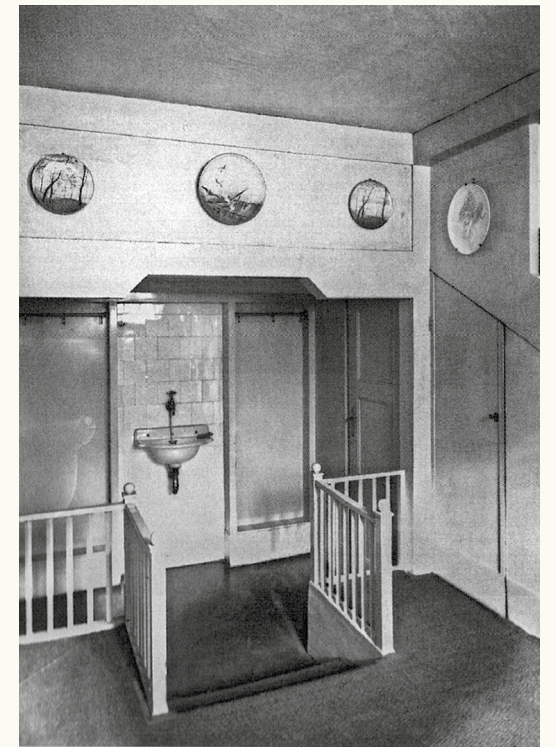
Some of these contradictions are explored in Bathroom Sweet, an installation by my former practice FAT in 2003. Originally intended for a notional celebrity couple, Bathroom Sweet offers a machine for sharing our most intimate moments. Two sets of standard bathroom equipment – bath, hand basin, shower, loo – are spliced together like Siamese twins. There are two of everything, and in this act of doubling, strange formal consequences occur: the twin baths make a heart shape in plan while the loos and hand basins naturally form deep clefts and mysterious protuberances. In case the allusion to intertwined bodies is missed, the whole ensemble is sprayed baby pink. This is a piece about the desire for intimacy, if not its realisation. It inverts the bathroom, abandoning the enclosing walls and turning equipment into the room itself. Like a Public Display of Affection, it is also oddly unconvincing. If it is about the desire for two people to do everything together, it also communicates how impossible that desire is.

— Taste in interior design  
comes and goes, ebbing and  
flowing alongside wider  
social trends —

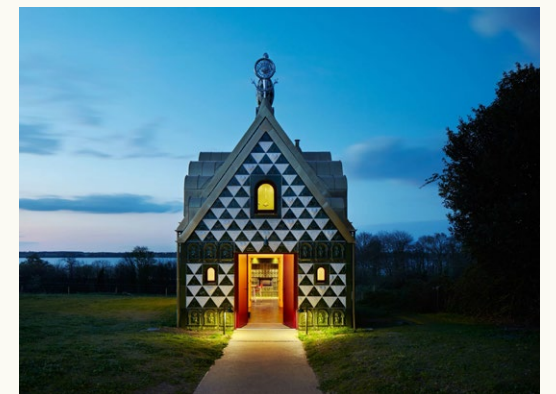
Bathroom Sweet is also a homage to the interior design trends of the 1960s and 70s. The death of Terence Conran in 2020, pioneer of Modernist domestic taste in the UK through his company Habitat, prompted a flurry of interest in his DIY books from that period. I have been collecting them for a few years now because, as well as offering a revealing slice through the changing landscape of interior fashion, they are a fantastic design resource.

*The Bed and Bath Book* is particularly remarkable, not least because of a surprisingly priapic lustiness that goes beyond the usual unreconstructed shots of women showering. Despite this, the designs are fabulous: baths sunk into the floor, showers incorporated into free-standing GRP 'pods' and all-in-one tiled island units like the deck of the Starship Enterprise; playpen and techno-fantasy rolled into one.

A House For Essex (2016) was a collaboration between FAT and the artist Grayson Perry. The house was designed around the story of Julie Cope, a fictional Essex



— Entrance hall handbasin at Adolf Loos' Rufer House, 1922.  
Image: Charles Holland



— A House For Essex exterior, FAT and Grayson Perry.  
© Jack Hobhouse



‘everywoman’ created by Grayson. During the period we designed the house together, we talked a lot about the kind of person Julie was and the sort of house she would have owned. An upwardly-mobile child of the 1950s, Julie would undoubtedly have had a copy of Conran’s *Bed and Bath Book*. The bathroom at A House For Essex might well have sprung from its pages. Its interior is almost entirely clad in two different shades of avocado green tiles. The bath is positioned directly over the entrance hall so that reclining in it affords an uninterrupted view of the approach to the house. From the shower, a one-way mirror links the space to the hallway. The reflectivity of this mirror changes depending on the respective light levels of hall and bathroom, adding an element of voyeurism (or exhibitionism) to proceedings.

— These objects evoke a powerful sense of nostalgia, at least for people of a certain age —

Taste in interior design comes and goes, ebbing and flowing alongside wider social trends. Bathroom design reflects these trends in a particularly intense way. Recently I visited a company that specialises in discontinued sanitaryware. Their ‘showroom’ is a remarkable testament to changing tastes: set out in a series of old, industrial greenhouses are hundreds of loos, hand basins and baths, all colour coded in a vast ceramic rainbow of yesterday’s flavours. Along with the ubiquitous baby blue and avocado are colours that time has chosen to forget: Primrose Yellow, Kashmir Beige, Penthouse Red. Most people visit here to replace a cracked sink or a chipped hand basin from a beloved matching suite. Sometimes there are set designers looking to recreate a period interior. Very few people want to fit out a whole new bathroom but I went for two new sets – an ambitious order that it appeared was unprecedented in the company’s commercial history. I settled for a Harvest Gold hand basin and a Sorrento Blue loo for the family bathroom and a matching suite in Flamingo Pink for the en-suite.

These objects evoke a powerful sense of nostalgia, at least for people of a certain age. For those of us who grew up in the 1980s, they lingered on in grandparents’ houses, signifiers of an already outmoded taste and imbued with the mysteries of old age. And they are coming back – too much ‘good taste’ it seems has provoked a return to the *recherché* design of previous decades. It is inevitable, really. One generation’s luxury equals another’s kitsch. In the gap between lie a lot of hopes, dreams and bathroom suites. ●



— Tiled avocado green bath at A House For Essex, FAT and Grayson Perry © Jack Hobhouse

VitrA



— Ben van Berkel, UNStudio, Istanbul

The RIBA + VitrA Talks partnership reflects a shared commitment to add social, economic and cultural value to society. VitrA are proud to support this inspiring programme, which features emerging and established international voices in architecture.

The critically acclaimed series takes place across the UK and in Istanbul. Speakers have included celebrated names such as Ben van Berkel, Jeanne Gang, Daniel Libeskind, Kazuyo Sejima, Sir David Adjaye, Kate Macintosh and Frida Escobedo. Keep up to date with the latest talks at [architecture.com/ribavitra](https://architecture.com/ribavitra).



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— Dorte Mandrup, Dorte  
Mandrup Arkitekt.



— Yasmeen Lari, V&A Dundee © Erika Stevenson



Vitra Design Update 4:  
The Wellness Issue

Editor—Ellie Duffy  
Design / Art Direction—foxallstudio.com  
Printed and bound by Aldgate Press

With thanks to Caro Communications

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