

Washroom Design For Tomorrow

Expert insight and commentary
about sustainability, aesthetics,
gender and carbon


SingularTM
from Ideal Standard



Ideal Standard

*Armitage
Shanks*

‘Washroom’ is a term that describes a vast array of different public spaces. It could be a beautifully designed luxury experience in an opulent hotel, an elegant and minimalist office convenience or a robust and durable facility in a sports stadium.

Like all design, washrooms have changed beyond recognition over the years, from the beautifully crafted porcelain creations of the late 19th and early 20th century – many of which are now protected by law – to the more functional steel and ceramic installations that followed.

There are, of course, many increments between those two extremes. But all washrooms have certain things in common: somewhere to go to the toilet and somewhere to wash your hands.

Ideal Standard and Armitage Shanks have a washrooms pedigree built on well over a century of designing and manufacturing products for these most essential of spaces.

Although we look back proudly on our history, we never stop facing forwards, striving to stay at the forefront of both design and performance when it comes to products for bathrooms, washrooms and cloakrooms.

As part of this, we are constantly engaged with architects, designers, installers, developers, academics and end customers to listen to their thoughts and ideas about what the washroom of the future looks like, whether that’s in five years or 50.

We are also influenced by external forces, most notably in recent years the Covid pandemic. A legacy of this is more frequent handwashing and the welcome removal of charging to access washrooms in many major transportation hubs, such as railway stations.

This publication brings together some of those open and often frank conversations, with a broad range of people whose opinions we think deserve sharing. Together we look ahead to make predictions for issues such as sustainability, design, gender and carbon – and we think it makes for fascinating insight.

The views and opinions expressed in the document are those of our contributors and may not necessarily represent those of Ideal Standard.



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What is changing in the post-Covid world?

And which other key topics are occupying the minds of architects, designers and installers?

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◀ Intellimix®
Smart sensor tap

▲ Contour 21
Under countertop basin

Where it all comes together.

From inspiration to installation, Singular™ is our end-to-end journey for creating endless cross-category washroom and bathroom solutions for all of our customers.

It's built on our understanding of customer and sector needs, and brings together our specification expertise, design and performance to create solutions that make life easier for everyone.

Reducing carbon footprints.



Washroom products with lower embodied carbon will be favoured as investors press developers to decarbonise.

“The requirement to embody carbon calculations is going to grow and grow. It’s just a matter of time before everyone is considering this in their decision making.”

When we are reviewing a project’s environmental impact, embodied carbon is a key indicator of its sustainability credentials, and this includes the specification of washrooms.

If a manufacturer produces low carbon products, design teams and clients will consider their carbon intensity along with budget and aesthetic.

The requirement for embodied carbon calculations is continuing to grow. At this point it’s just a matter of time before everyone considers this in their decision making

Clearly this is being driven by the climate crisis, meanwhile financial investment funds also demand that their projects be safe climate assets in the long run and that means low carbon products are a good investment for them.

That along with growing public awareness, are among the main reasons why we are seeing a lot of push towards low carbon specification.

CATHAL HENEGHAN
Director and Sustainability Engineer

**M E E H A N
GREEN**

Meehan Green is a leading Dublin-based consultancy providing sustainability and LEED AP consulting services.

Bringing home comforts into the workplace.



Fun but functional workplaces – including washrooms – are an important part of bringing people back into the post-Covid office and attracting new talent.

“People have spent a lot of time working and being at home where everything is nice and comfortable. Clients are now looking to bring that into the workplace.”

“We are now seeing clients wanting their office washrooms to have relatively luxurious showers and WCs. These kinds of areas, which would previously have been more functional, are now getting a lot of focus. They are bringing all the touchpoints into the employee experience, including showers, changing rooms and WCs. People are commuting on bikes for environmental and cost reasons, and having a nice shower experience at the end of their journey.



Clients want something fun but functional. Previously, these aspects of the workplace were more clinical whereas now everything about the workplace is becoming considered. Clients are looking to make the experience more memorable with the intention of making people want to return to the office. How we can do that is a big conversation everyone is having. It doesn't necessarily need to be a high-end budget. It's just focusing more on design and layout. It really adds to the employee experience.

People have spent a lot of time working and being at home where everything is nice and comfortable. Clients are now looking to bring that into the workplace because they know they need to attract employees back into the office and also stand out if they are going to attract new talent in a very competitive jobs market.

MAEVE LARKIN

Senior Interior Architect

TOT ARCHITECTS

Celebrating 40 years in business this year, TOT Architects is a practice with a worldwide project portfolio.



Effects of policy on unisex washrooms.

New rules on unisex washrooms in public buildings might only change the way they are labelled, not the way they are designed.

“We are a major supplier to schools and over the past few years we have noticed an increase in the number of unisex washrooms, at least partly because more people have been talking about issues around gender.

There is a lot about unisex washrooms that helps to prevent bullying and increase personal safety, such as full height cubicles, which allow for open plan design and mean there is no need for an entrance door, creating more visibility and therefore safer spaces for pupils.

We recently created washrooms for a school according to these design principles and the school management fully intended them to be unisex. However, enough parents objected for the school to decide to label them as male and female toilets, although the design hasn't really changed.

I think we will see schools and other publicly funded organisations hedge their bets and create washrooms that could be unisex if they are labelled up that way. Things have a habit of coming around again and I wouldn't be surprised if changes in cultural attitudes mean unisex washrooms are on the table again in a few years.

“The sensible thing to do could be to create washrooms that are suitable for anyone, with the labelling being the only thing that needs changing”

CHRIS KIGHTLEY

Director and owner

Inspired Washrooms is a washroom refurbishment specialist for settings such as schools, leisure centres, offices and hospitals.

INSPIRED
WASHROOMS

The UK's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has announced a Technical Review on increasing the accessibility and provision of toilets for men and women in both municipal and private sector locations.

The government's stated position is that there needs to be provision of gender-specific toilets for both men and women, with a clear steer given by way of building standards guidance.



It is expected that it will be mandatory for new offices, schools, hospitals and entertainment venues to have separate male and female lavatories, in a move away from the sole installation of gender-neutral or unisex facilities.

A technical consultation is expected to follow with guidance applying to non-residential buildings over a certain size.

Allowing for hygiene technology in washroom design.



As sensor and smart technology increases, repair and maintenance access will need to be considered more in design.

Over recent years, the design-led trends from larger cities have started to spread. In London, grade one offices have always had a very high specification. In the north, it was function rather than form but certainly form is taking a lead now across the country.

There's also much more touchless technology being specified, such as sensor taps and toilet flush sensors, as customers are putting a lot of thought into hygiene because of the pandemic.

Although touchless technology is providing improved user hygiene, the practicalities of installing items like sensor taps have to be considered right at the front end when designing.

While something might look great, sometimes the functionality doesn't quite work. There's a balance between making it look good and creating something we can look after and maintain.

The customer is now asking for form as a lead in washroom specification, so the architect is in turn changing their thinking. However, we are often seeing products specified that aren't suitable for a particular washroom. For example, installing a sensor tap in a tiled wall. Customers and designers don't want to see access hatches in walls as they don't look right, so now, for example, we have to run a cable two metres through a tiled wall. It becomes difficult for all involved if you can't access the cables, control boxes and mechanisms you need to.

The building owner doesn't want someone having to go in and take all the tiles out of the room and put it out of action, while they are working on it. It's how we can overcome that; ensuring the installer, architect and designer work collaboratively to ensure it's future proof.



"There's a balance between making it look good and creating something we can look after and maintain."

SHAUN MURPHY
Head of Plumbing and Heating



Cubicworks are specialists in commercial sector fit-outs, from full building refurbishments to small offices to entirely new washrooms.



The efficient use & re-use of water.

If we really believe in sustainability we should be flushing with grey water from integrated basins and wash troughs.



"In the UK, the water going into cisterns is generally drinkable, which seems wrong when millions of people across the world struggle to access safe drinking water."

People have different rituals and habits related to going to the toilet in different countries and cultures. In Islam, the preference is to wash rather than to use paper. In the Netherlands, toilets are designed very deliberately to have an inspection shelf where most other European toilets have the water. Then, in other countries, you have different ways of sitting, which are supposed to be much more efficient and kinder to your bowels.

A number of countries embrace the idea of having a basin on top of the cistern so grey water goes into the cistern. We are very concerned about sustainability and how to minimise everything so this seems like something we should pick up on.

The increased focus on hygiene and handwashing resulting from the Covid pandemic, is clearly going to result in the production of more grey water so it makes absolute sense that it is re-used in this way.

It's not something that would cause a terrible inconvenience to anyone. It's something you use on a daily basis so if it's well designed I see no reason why it wouldn't happen. Wash troughs could easily be connected to the cisterns too, so even if you are not having the basin integrated with the cistern, you could supply the flush with grey water from there. In the UK, the water going into cisterns is generally drinkable, which seems wrong in the context of millions of people across the world who struggle to access safe drinking water.

PHILIP LO
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Arts,
Professional and Social Studies



LJMU runs a variety of architecture courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level.





Making beautiful design accessible.

"I think one area we could see more focus in the coming years is the aesthetics of the accessible washroom."

We go to such lengths to make washrooms into beautiful spaces. Accessible washrooms deserve this too.



Compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act (now largely subsumed into the Equality Act 2010) is still a huge topic and we often have challenges with helping clients to understand the requirements laid down in legislation. It's not unusual for us to be asked to adapt washrooms that haven't been touched for many years.

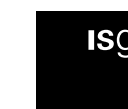
I think one area we could see more focus in the coming years is the aesthetics of the accessible washroom. For example, Doc-M packs which perform their function but which also look attractive and stylish.

People go to such great lengths to make beautiful spaces in their buildings but the accessible bathroom doesn't get the same attention. When they have put so much effort into making the décor and lighting in the main areas so attractive, why not do the same in the accessible bathroom? It's often in a reception area as well so a lot of people are going to see it and it may be the only bathroom in that area for reasons of space, so potentially could be used by everyone.

The accessible washroom has to be big for a reason but I'd like to see manufacturers challenge themselves more on toilet design. I think many could also improve the aesthetics of their taps. When you're designing you never treat a disabled person differently so why do that with washrooms?



DEBRAH MCARDLE
Workplace Design Sector Lead



ISG is a global specialist offering construction, fit-out and engineering services.

The growing importance of the circular economy.



The throwaway consumer phase is over. Higher quality products are more sustainable and better for recycling.



"Everyone will now look at making products that are more recyclable. I think our industry is already changing."

I think there's going to be a major change now. We are living in a world where recycling is important to us but the starting point has to be creating higher quality products that last longer, both for the customer and for us as installers who want to fit and forget. We have gone through that consumer phase where you buy something and then you throw it away and replace it.

Many of the new, cheaper alloys that are coming out are not as well made as some of the older metals, so they don't last as long and they don't recycle as well. Compare that with a solid tap made 50 years ago; you still occasionally see them running, even now, and when they do reach the end of their life, they can often contain more recyclable materials.

Everyone is now looking at making products that are more recyclable. I think our industry is already changing and that all sectors will go through this transition.

Another big part of it is sourcing locally; actively manufacturing and creating jobs locally is a key component. Sourcing within the UK reduces your carbon footprint. Sustainability is one of the key forces at play at the moment and will only grow in importance going forward.

CHRIS BOURNE

AS Mechanical and Electrical offers commercial plumbing and heating services, as well as providing consultancy on sustainable heating solutions.





Beware of false economies.

“It is often the project stakeholders who are trying to reduce the corporate carbon footprint. But at the same time, there’s a lot of value engineering going on. People want low carbon and low cost. Currently the focus is more on the operational ‘carbon footprint’ of products and less on the embodied carbon energy, I think this will change and is where also the robustness of a product is important.

We recently specified a washroom and it was value engineered. When we compared the toilet we specified to the one that replaced it, the cheaper toilet had about half as much weight of ceramic as I’d specified. There’s no way that is going to be as robust so it’s essentially a false economy.

Of course, the client is going to be more interested in quality and sustainability if they are the end user too as it’s their staff who will be using it. If they are just building it for someone else to occupy, it’s generally less of a priority for them.

Educating clients is the key to specifying products with lower energy and water consumption.

“I think sustainability is key now. Everyone is asking, ‘Will it use less water? Will it use less energy?’”

DAN ROBINSON
Crusoe Architects Ltd



Crusoe Architects is a UK-based RIBA Chartered Architectural Practice with a portfolio of clients focused predominantly in the commercial and industrial sectors.



I think clients need to understand that there’s a capital cost to achieving better sustainability. Products which use less energy and water are generally more advanced, so they cost more. Then there’s the issue of cheaper products being less robust and therefore needing to be replaced sooner so that’s a sustainability issue too.

Manufacturers need to make it easier to understand the benefits of their products. This could be by providing data with comparisons so for example if you use a normal tap it will use this much water but if you use this tap the consumption will be this much less, and try to give a cost saving value to that.

Education is crucial so that clients can understand very easily the benefits of choosing better products. ”

The growth in self-contained cubicles post-Covid

Office settings appear more likely to specify basins within cubicles since the pandemic.

Good and Tillotson work in a variety of sectors from schools, offices and healthcare providers, as well as a whole mix from nurseries to residential developments to industrial units.



Since the pandemic, there has been a big focus on infection prevention and this has become more of a concern for all clients for obvious reasons.

We have noticed a significant increase in customers wanting cubicles with handwash facilities inside them as they seek to use washroom design as a way to control infections.

The idea is that the user can have clean and dry hands before they leave the cubicle. They minimise contact time with other users at communal sinks and are less likely to spread germs in this way.

For schools in particular, this can be an issue as a basin (which is hidden away) in a cubicle is more likely to be damaged than, for example, a wash trough in a public area.

When it comes to office buildings full height cubicles with their own handwashing facilities, enable the client to have unisex facilities, potentially saving on space.

I expect we will continue to see more demand for cubicles with basins, especially in offices, as infection prevention and control continues to be a primary area of focus.

"I expect we will continue to see more demand for cubicles with basins, especially in offices, as infection prevention and control continues to be a primary area of focus."

KIERAN CROSSEY

Partner

Architects with a portfolio of commercial projects including offices, business parks, retail developments, restaurants and public houses.





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