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WORDS ANGELINA VILLA-CLARKE

# SOAK IT UP



Photo courtesy of Finesse Earth

*Once the smallest and most overlooked room in the house, the bathroom is having a moment in the spotlight – with homeowners wanting to make the space a focal point in their home. Update yours with some of the latest trends*

## LAYER ON THE texture

One of the most exciting areas of development for bathrooms is surface design. Take tiling, for instance. Where once it was de rigueur to have a plain, pared-back look – perhaps with a contrasting border – it has now become all the rage to introduce pattern. Fashionable geometric designs give a retro feel – especially when teamed with claw-footed baths and traditional accessories, while dazzling, all-encompassing patterns, such as those available at luxury Italian tile brand Bisazza ([www.bisazza.com](http://www.bisazza.com)), are more akin to works of art.

Harriet Roberts, co-founder of Bert & May (020 3673 4264; [www.bertandmay.com](http://www.bertandmay.com)), a reclaimed tile specialist based in east London, comments: “The winning Alexis tile from our RIBA Design-a-Tile Competition is a beautiful geometric, thoroughly modern tile with its three tones. It translates beautifully in monochrome, picking up on a key trend in interiors this year. I can imagine the tile in a top London hotel or in a West End restaurant but it works equally well in a stylish home.”

Tiles that replicate a wood effect are also creating a buzz in the design world. The ‘Selection Oak’ range from Surface Tiles (020 7354 7000; [www.surface-tiles.com](http://www.surface-tiles.com)) consists of porcelain wood-effect tiles for walls and floors, available in a range of realistic natural colours. The brand’s Burlington range, meanwhile, faithfully replicates quarried stone – tapping into the leaning towards more matte tiles – and is available in wide ‘planks’ to allow the creation of different laying patterns, such as herringbone or parquet-style floors.

The wood-effect fashion has also been identified at tiling specialists the Stone & Ceramic Warehouse (020 8993 5545; [www.stoneandceramicwarehouse.co.uk](http://www.stoneandceramicwarehouse.co.uk)). “Textured finishes can now be applied to porcelain as seen in our Driftwood range,” says Stuart Wisbey, director at the company. “This has a fabulous wood effect grain texture and often gets confused with the real thing! A fully waterproof, scratch- and dent-resistant bathroom floor is a must for families with children and pets,” he adds.

At Cambridge-based Carpet Mill (01223 316866; [www.thecarpetmill.co.uk](http://www.thecarpetmill.co.uk)), manager Peter Day has noticed a rise in



**TOP** The Hayon Contemporary Cement Tiles by Bisazza give depth to a room. £98 per m<sup>2</sup> ([www.bisazza.com](http://www.bisazza.com)). **ABOVE** These Alalpardo geometric tiles from Bert & May, £7.50 per tile, tap into current trends (020 3673 4264; [www.bertandmay.com](http://www.bertandmay.com)).

## Vintage APPEAL

In terms of colour, a monochrome palette is making a comeback, giving a nod to Art Deco masterpieces of old.

Rob Whitaker, creative director of Fired Earth (01223 300941; [www.firedearth.com](http://www.firedearth.com)), renowned for their wide range of beautifully-crafted tiles and bathrooms, agrees: "Monochrome is a key trend at the moment. The simple combination of black and white offers endless design possibilities, from the very contemporary to the art deco and the classic, and it has a fresh look that's perfect for bathrooms.

"Use eye-catching patterns and luxurious finishes such as polished marble, sparkling glass and gleaming chrome to ensure plenty of visual interest and to counter the absence of colour. For all-out drama and glamour, opt for a predominantly black scheme with accents of white, using lighting to enhance jewel-like details and to create a sense of warmth," he says.

Harriet Roberts of tile experts Bert & May (020 3673 4264; [www.bertandmay.com](http://www.bertandmay.com)) lends her expertise: "Monochrome – black, grey and white lend gravitas to any floor, and can often be the most striking as they let the pattern speak for itself. In Mediterranean countries where the light is brighter, the colours tend to be brighter."

Complementing this look is a return to a 1930s-type of simplicity – combine period fixtures and fittings, utilitarian accessories, minimalist details and chunky wooden accents for a modern take on the industrial style. And if you're lucky and you have a bathroom big enough, the ultimate endorsement of this trend is the addition of a fireplace.

Owner of fireplace specialist Renaissance London (020 7251 8844; [www.renaissance-london.com](http://www.renaissance-london.com)) and expert in architectural salvage Owen Pacey reveals the growing trend: "I think a fireplace brings drama and glamour to a room. I love seeing fireplaces in every room and I'm seeing a returning trend of installing a fireplace in kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms. Fireplaces are the design focus for many rooms and people are seeing their power and potential.

"It also makes sense to invest in a working fireplace this winter as you can ignite your property's value by up to 5%, add an aesthetic glow of a real fire and save on heating bills too," he adds.



**ABOVE** Wall tiles in Black Gloss Mosaic, £99.90 per m<sup>2</sup>; Abbey porcelain floor tiles in Woburn, £84.90 per m<sup>2</sup> (01223 300941; [www.firedearth.com](http://www.firedearth.com)). **BELOW LEFT** Victorian marble surround (020 7251 8844; [www.renaissance-london.com](http://www.renaissance-london.com)). **BELOW RIGHT** Alexis tile, £225 per m<sup>2</sup> (020 3673 4264; [www.bertandmay.com](http://www.bertandmay.com)).



"With up to 20% more people choosing a real fire over the past couple of years, there's a definite trend towards investing in beautiful fireplaces."