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Alno believes we will see the use of more antibacterial surfaces in kitchens



Kitchens and bathrooms in a POST-COVID

WORLD

Sales are picking up again, but how has Covid-19 and lockdown affected what buyers are looking for and what are manufacturers doing to meet that demand? **Chris Frankland** finds out

There are unmistakable signs of an upsurge in demand for kitchens and bathrooms.

With people having spent so much time at home, not going out, not going on holiday and not commuting, they are coming out of lockdown with a desire to spend the money they have saved on home improvements.

And some research has put the figure for the amount consumers have saved at an average of £500 a month.

This is confirmed by Matt Phillips, head of UK operations at Rotpunkt, who says: "Figures in June were up

décor management Klaus Monhoff agrees: "In the next six months, consumers will start to settle into the new normality. While their consumption levels have been low during the pandemic, we expect to see an increase in demand as consumers refresh their living spaces and adapt to new guidelines."

Everyone is talking about a 'new normal', so we asked our experts what they believe that will be for kitchen and bathroom design in the future.

One overwhelming trend concerns the use of materials and designs to promote cleanliness and hygiene. Keeping areas free from bacteria and viruses will be a long-term priority for manufacturers and designers alike.

Graeme Smith, head of retail and commercial design at PWS, picks up on that trend: "Hygiene can come in both obvious forms and more subtle design elements. Easy-clean surfaces that are durable – such as quartz – give consumers the peace of mind for worktops, while handleless kitchens may be sought for their ease of cleaning."

This is echoed by Tom Howley, design director of the kitchen showrooms

susceptible to staining."

Rotpunkt's Phillips comments: "Surfaces that promote new levels of hygiene and sustainability are going to influence the future of post-Covid kitchen design."

He adds: "I believe special treatments and new laminate finishes that ensure a high resistance against scratches and chemicals, along with anti-fingerprint properties, will become a favourable option for minimising the spread of unwanted germs."

Handwashing

Another trend spotted by our experts is the inclusion of a second sink for handwashing. The 1810 Company's national sales manager Daryl Southwell



station. We have put together several sets that include a sink, tap and integrated soap dispenser. These have proved to be extremely popular."

This is a trend also noted by Sarah Goebel, southern area retail sales manager with Nolte Küchen, who points out another key area in kitchen or bathroom hygiene – namely, sensor taps.

Juan Pillay, marketing manager at bathroom specialist Crosswater, also mentions this trend: "We are starting to see more of a growth towards touchless designs – making it more hygienic and easy to clean."

Grohe's marketing manager Raj Mistry agrees, pointing out that it has seen "extraordinary growth" in touchless, sensor products since the start of 2020. He adds: "Another area of the home that could become "touchless" is the toilet. Shower toilets have been on the market for years, but their full potential for optimum hygiene and well-being is only beginning to be realised by consumers in the wake of the pandemic."

He continues: "As well as 'touchless' technology, voice activation and app-control will also be popular contenders for operating taps, appliances and other everyday items in the home."

Bathroom specialist Geberit's consumer marketing manager Holly Aspinall confirms the importance of 'touchless' products: "Even before the advent of Covid-19, we were seeing the growth of infra-red and touchless products, and we can expect to see this trend continue with products like sensor-activated flush plates, such as our Sigma80 option, automatic taps and toilet lids and sophisticated hand-drying technology becoming the norm."

Roper Rhodes says the pandemic has driven its designers on a programme of innovation that has led



More people are requesting a second sink. This is the Studio model from Abode

“ We are starting to see more of a growth towards touchless designs. There is no need to press a button or touch it – making it more hygienic and easy to clean

Juan Pillay, marketing manager, Crosswater

to sensor-activated lights on mirrors, touch-free flushing, rimless WCs that leave nowhere for germs to lurk, and quick-release WC seats.

Abode meanwhile offers a range of pull-out taps to make rinsing the kitchen sink easier, while Blanco combines sensor-activation and a pull-out hose in its Solenta-S model. Geberit and Grohe also advise that wall-hung sanitaryware aids cleaning regimes and eliminates tricky-to-reach areas around the pan.

Materials

Materials technology will also play an important part in the ongoing fight

against such threats as Covid-19.

Michael Spadinger, chief executive at Alno, says: "We will see antibacterial surfaces, and the use of open shelving and units, which are accessible and easy to keep clean."

This concern with cleaner surfaces extends to the bathroom. Vitra design director Erdem Akan explains: "The consumer's increased understanding of hygiene will lead to different material choices, like a preference for copper alloys with high anti-microbial surface qualities." He adds that all Vitra ceramic ware comes with Hygiene Glaze.

Pillay at Crosswater tells kbbreview that the company already offers many

TOP Geberit iCon wall-hung WC with sensor-activated flush plate

ABOVE Roper Rhodes motion-activated flush sensor helps keep surface contact to a minimum

products with antibacterial properties and expects to see increasing interest from consumers in these, while F&F and Rowe's marketing director Nick Palmer points out that Shaws fire-rated sinks are inherently antibacterial. Geberit says its KeraTect glaze is non-porous and maintains "high levels of hygiene and prevents bacteria gathering".

The lockdown certainly created a sea change in how kitchen/dining areas are being used, functioning as food prep and cooking area, family social hub, children's homework area and even a home office.

This has prompted many to suggest that kitchen designs will need to be adaptable and flexible going forward, with open-plan giving way to multi-zone or 'broken-plan' as some call it, with separate zones for different uses.

As Julia Steadman, head of operations at retailer Brandt Design puts it: "Current open-plan or broken-plan schemes are generally focused on cooking, entertaining and leisure so it will be interesting to see what manufacturers offer us in terms of new, versatile furniture that is designed for working from home."

Keller national sales manager Steve Spann believes the trend is here to stay: "The key to kitchen design moving forward will be flexibility and adaptability. I think we will see a rise in multi-use options. House remodels more multi-plan, as opposed to open-plan, will be the way forward for many. We've seen how this allows consumers to organise working from home