

DECORATION

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Mondanité



Minimalism
A haven in Bur Dubai

Chez Chanel
An Art Deco renovation

Villa d'Este
Heaven on Earth

Almaz by Momo

An Aladdin's cave of design

UAE - Dhs 15



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'If you please design me a bathroom...'



Entering a badly laid out bathroom is almost physically unpleasant. It causes our senses to register that something is amiss. We cannot feel comfortable, welcome, encouraged to relax or enjoy the surroundings. As trite as it may seem to say it, our lives today more than ever call for spaces where we can isolate ourselves from the madness, the furore and the noise. For many of us, the ideal place to do just that is the bathroom. As interior designers, we find ourselves all too often approached by clients who are in desperate need of some guidance in order to make the most of their bathroom space. They wish for it to reflect the way they want to live, their approach to grooming, escaping or preparing for the daily bustle.

When we discover these ailing spaces, our first consideration is for the intrinsic attributes, advantages or constraints, on offer. Is the bathroom well proportioned with enough width, or is it small, an awkward shape, or too big? Beyond the initial ideal case scenario, and where the further two cases limit the options in laying out or even selecting the fittings and finishes, the latter has its own issues, as space should ideally not be wasted or left unaddressed, gaping and uncertain of its own purpose... Circulation is all important in a bathroom, as is ease of access and comfort. It is inconceivable to hit your knees on the vanity when sitting on the WC or your elbows on the walls when showering, as it is to have the room door swing conflicting with that of the shower or opening of drawers, for example.

Does the room benefit from natural light or is it land-locked? The presence of a window is more often than not very desirable in a bathroom, both from lighting and



Marie-Noëlle widerski has been a design professional since 1993, when she graduated from the International Academy of Design in Montreal and headed for an internship at Écart in Paris, Andrée Putman's design studio at the time. After a brief contract in an interior design office catering to the very high end residential market back in Montreal, Marie-Noëlle seized a unique opportunity to travel the world for the French Canadian national television directing documentaries and later producing the news for the French and Canadian foreign news desks in London. Weary of bad news, she returned to design in 2001 'to comfort her soul with beauty' and became a senior designer in the Blanchard team in London. After managing many diverse projects, from apartment redecoration to full refurbishment of listed Georgian conversions among others, Dubai beckoned. Marie-Noëlle set up the Blanchard interior design studio in Design House in September 2006. More than one very full year on, the Blanchard team in Dubai has grown exponentially, the projects from one 10,000 sq. ft colonial style-inspired residence in Dubailand before the studio even had a desk, to several properties in the Marina, Palm Jumeira, Emirates Hills and two formidable 30- and 50,000 sq. ft residences in Al Khawaneej.

ventilating points of view. It also brings on certain concerns, however, in deciding which aspect of the bathroom will be directly served by the opening and how best to retain functionality as well as aesthetics. In placing a vanity near the window, to enjoy the natural light, view, ventilation, decisions need to be made as to the location of the mirror for example. If the shower wants natural light, how can practical issues of maintenance and water-tightness be ignored?

If there is no natural light, how does one create a warm and welcoming bathroom that can be bright and functional as well as intimate and atmospheric? I am a big fan of wall lights in bathrooms. They act as task lighting, as a direct source of light onto the face will permit thorough examination of potentially offending areas. They will also, very importantly, provide a level of style and detail that will help define the bathroom's overall direction. Ceiling fixtures are also great, again with the idea of layering in mind. One can opt for a rather rococo, boudoir-style with a chandelier, as long as it is hanging a good 2-3 metres away from a hazardous water source, whereas recessed fixed or directional downlights will offer more functionality and flexibility in illuminating crucial areas.

Is there any scope to play with ceiling or floor height, with wall depth? When faced with issues of limited, or conversely excessive space in a bathroom, it can make a huge difference to layer the space. A lowered ceiling panel will allow for the creation of a more intimate area with specific lighting features. Raising a central portion of the ceiling and delineating its perimeter with hidden strip lighting will in turn provide the bathroom with a touch of glamour. At floor level, a step will lend grandeur to an otherwise bland room.

Appropriately located and finished, these details can also offer great options to hide waste, air circulation or water pipes that would otherwise spoil a well thought-out overall impression within additional unsightly boxing. Finally, if space permits, increasing wall thickness will offer the opportunity to create decorative as well as practical niches, adding interest through perspective and depth but also offering alternatives to hide plumbing and conceal cisterns.

Far from insurmountable, these many considerations are what brings on the most interesting solutions and cleverly designed spaces. ■

