

What barbecue
is to Texans,
this delicacy is
to Hawaiians
D6



OFF DUTY



Dan Neil
test-chauffeurs
the Aston Martin
Lagonda Taraf,
a 195-mph limo
D8

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The End of the Lukewarm Bath

For decades, safely ‘tasteful’ bathrooms have been decorated in tepid neutral shades. But now resale-be-damned color—from truly cool blues to emphatic black—is on tap again



BLUE PLANK SPECIAL A bathroom in Millahue, Chile, designed by Alex and Carrie Vik, owners of Viña Vik retreat and VIK Winery, features board-like UonUon porcelain tiles from 14Oraltaliana.

BY DEBRA JO IMMERGUT

IN RECENT DECADES, Americans have maintained that the most desirable—and resalable—bathrooms should be scrupulously boring. A compulsively neutral color scheme has been the ideal: soothing whites, timid taupes, muted wood or stone. But graphic designer Constantine Giavos of Manhattan was having none of it. This year, he and his wife, Rachel Lamel, a fashion executive, moved into an Upper East Side apartment, escaping their old beige-tiled “absolute mediocrity” of a bathroom in

the process. Renovating with help from New York designer Wesley Moon, Mr. Giavos binged on color in one of the full baths, tiling the walls and floors in celery green and pink respectively. Bonus: Black Osborne & Little wallpaper featuring snowy swans floating through green water lilies with coral flowers.

Mr. Giavos knew he was bucking common wisdom—the extroverted tiling, in particular, was a resale red flag—and his own mother-in-law expressed skepticism. He shrugged. “We really wanted to love the space,” he said. “That’s so overlooked. Wouldn’t you rather enjoy the place you live?”

As home-design trends shift, Mr. Giavos appears to be ahead of the curve. Even if the powder room has traditionally been a canvas for decorating bravado, the full bath has long been a neutral zone. Permanent tiles, vanities and fixtures don’t come cheap and homeowners typically play it safe, following the lead of housing developers. Result: an understated Calvin Klein-like aesthetic that won’t offend anyone. Lately, however, designers say more clients are willing to go in a Gucci-like direction: idiosyncratic, colorful, even ornamented. “It’s a response to the boredom of two-and-a-half decades of neutral bathrooms,” said

Mr. Moon. His more fearless clients, he said, are thirsting for color and “ready to rebel.”

A gutsier palette may also reflect confidence in the strengthening real-estate market, said Jamie Chappell, who tracks trends as creative director of San Francisco’s Fireclay Tile. Sales of existing homes reached a nine-year peak this May, according to the National Association of Realtors, and Bill Darcy, CEO of the National Kitchen and Bath Association (NKBA), noted that “consumers are stretching themselves.” Mr. Darcy is mid-bathroom design himself, leaving behind

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INSIDE



TO BEAN OR NOT TO BEAN

Do you like your coffee cold—or prefer an icy turmeric latte? **D3**



SHAKE A LEGGING

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CYCLE EAST, YOUNG MAN

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BELOW-THE-RADAR BRONZERS

How men can maintain a ‘they’ll never notice’ tan **D5**

DESIGN & DECORATING

BATHED IN COLOR

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beige tiles in his previous home and opting for blue walls and dark cabinets: “My wife and I are fairly traditional people, but we’re using bolder colors than we ever have before.”

Not that we’re likely to revisit the candy-pink sinks and toilets of the mid-20th century or the mauve molded-plastic shower stalls of the 1970s—excesses that left American homeowners with a design hang-over, noted Peter Sallick, CEO and creative director of Danbury, Conn.-based bath-fittings firm Waterworks. To detox, he said, designers turned to the crisp, white subway tile, Carrara marble and polished chrome that are still popular today. The recession in 2008 pushed the achromatic trend further, with risk-averse consumers favoring

‘Purple, orange, acid green—you can tire of these,’ said one architect.

styles that were “very McMansion feeling, very depersonalized.” Over the years, whether borrowing Edwardian spit-and-polish from the Ritz or Zen-inspired earthiness from Canyon Ranch, a neutral bath became codified as “calming” and eminently tasteful.

Since 2014, however, Mr. Sallick’s firm has added 160 new hues to its ceramic tile lines—Peacock Green and Marmalade among them—and doubled its nonneutral offerings overall. At Fireclay Tile’s headquarters, Ms. Chappell has been watching a similarly colorful story unfold. “The packing table used to be a sea of white tile and maybe a handful of blues and greens,” she said. “Now it’s the opposite.”

According to a 2015 survey of designers belonging to the NKBA, between 10% and 15% of its members expect to decorate more baths in green, blue and black this year. Why the absence of reds? Biology, apparently. A study at Australia’s Curtin University, published in 2015, found that blue surroundings physiologically calmed students, while red and yellow increased heart rates.

Biorhythms aside, cool tones offer an entry point for the color-shy, said Los Angeles designer Emily Henderson, because they evoke water and feel intrinsic to the bathroom. Misadventures in reds, pinks and oranges are more likely to yield rooms of the “we must change this...tomorrow” sort.

For New York architect John Ike—who installed high-energy aquatic-colored tiles in the guest bath of his San Diego home—the trendier the tone, the shorter-lived its allure. “Purple, orange, acid green—you can tire of these,” he said.

Moody, cooler shades that have no whiff of faddishness enrich an early-20th-century master bath in Riga, Latvia, designed by Filippo Carandini and Maria Rodina of Milan’s Linee Studio. They covered the walls in Farrow & Ball’s Breakfast Room Green, then painted doors and woodwork in F&B’s Stone Blue. Mr. Carandini recommended less saturated hues, noting that “full tones look cheap. If you like red,” he advised, “use a light pink and bring in reds with details like towels.”

If you use similar paint colors at least somewhere else in the rest of your home, entering your bathroom won’t seem like an abrupt swerve into peacockitude. Mr. Carandini also chose Stone Blue for the nearby living room. That way, he said, it’s not “a regular house with a ‘crazy’ bathroom.”



Watery Hues Make Sense Blues and greens suit a bathroom’s purpose as well as the SoCal location of architect John Ike’s San Diego home.

Adventurous sorts are also exploring the absence of color. While browsing online images of bathrooms glammed up in black tile and ebony paint, Mr. Givavos wondered why he’d rarely seen such inky spaces in the analog world. He and his wife, guided by Mr. Moon, took the plunge in their apartment’s master bath, choosing oil-black Ann Sacks tiles (oversize for a more modern look), smoked mirrors and faucets in a toned-down French Gold finish. “I have this weird fetish for super-luxurious ‘80s style,” Mr. Givavos admitted.

For some, shiny black bathrooms trigger unwelcome memories of reckless nightclub antics. Mindful of that, Los Angeles designer Betsy Burnham used soft, matte blacks in the master bath of a local client’s home. “Not harsh, not glossy, nothing Italian modern,” she said of the lightly distressed vanity painted in Benjamin Moore Ebony King, the dusky mosaic marble underfoot and the antiqued-glass mirror. Paradoxically, the clients reported that it brightened their mornings.

For now, most sinks and toilets remain starkly white, but Pirch, the high-end kitchen-and-bath retailer with a newly opened showroom in New York’s Soho district, touts matte black MGS faucets and a swooping charcoal Apaizer tub. Neutrals still sell best, said Pirch chief marketing officer Laith Murad, but an edgier aesthetic is emerging: “Think of fashion in the late 1990s. It’s all about colors that accentuate shape.”

Of course, even professionals commit color blunders, as Meredith



Muted Beats Candy Bright Mid-toned Farrow & Ball paint lends a Riga, Latvia, bathroom by Linee Studio quiet, palatable personality.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: WILLIAM WALDRON; LINEE STUDIO; JEFFERY GROSS



Pattern Need Not Overwhelm In an Oakland, Calif., bathroom, Christina Zamora used the same geometric Heath Ceramics’ Half Hex Mix tiles in two colorways for a graphic but not overly loud effect.

WC WISDOM FROM PROS

Homeowners are more likely to bust out in the bathroom with a designer’s help. Here, some privy tips



▲ **Get tap happy.** Boston designer Rachel Reider recently juiced up a neutral bathroom with a lemon-yellow Vola sink spigot, a 1968 design by mid-century master Arne Jacobsen, offered in 19 powder-coated brights and metallics. “It’s a fairly easy change up,” said Ms. Reider. *Vola HVI Faucet, from \$1,300, [hastingstilebath.com](#)*

Don’t start from scratch. Your house has a working palette, so draw from those hues,

said Cambridge architectural designer Kimberly Barnett. “Not that a room can’t be quirky and different,” but colors should feel as if “they belong to the same composition.”

Check your closet. New York’s Wesley Moon asks clients to show him a favorite outfit, then riffs on the colors and textures.

Don’t bring home strays. Tones and patterns lovely in one setting (say, a Marrakesh hotel) may be painfully wrong in another (your minimalist home). “Context is crucial,” counseled Filippo Carandini, a Milan designer.

Build a mood board. Putting samples of flooring, fittings and paint together makes the big picture easier to visualize. “John has an exhaustive selection of



tiles and material in his office,” said Hymie Mamiye, a client of New York architect John Ike. “He lays them all out so we can see them.”

▲ **Forget wimpy accessories.** Palm Springs designer Christopher Kennedy is a fan of white bathrooms punctuated by bold strokes and art that makes a statement. He’s even installed a sculpture in a shower stall. “I always find it a bit juvenile to say, ‘Just bring in colors in towels and bath mats.’” Try these graphic

powder-coated pendants. *Mini Pendants, from \$225 each, [bendgoods.com](#)*

Remain in light. At a client’s request, New York designer Brett Beldock recently decked a master bath in burgundy and chocolate brown, illuminated it with high-voltage LED fixtures and a lighted mirror. “Have great light on your face and overhead,” she recommended, “and install dimmers so you can opt for the ambience of a dark bath.”

Flatter yourself. “We avoid

pea greens and acid greens,” said Mr. Kennedy. “They aren’t so great on the skin.” Said Ms. Beldock, “The color that’s hippest right now is blush because it makes you look beautiful.”

Think superficially. The same color tile can be jewellike in a gloss finish and earthy in a matte finish, explained New York designer Phillip Thomas. Go for high shine if your bathroom could benefit from more light, and less reflective finishes for quieter but still-saturated color.

▼ **Steep in it.** “We’re seeing clients paint the underside of free-standing baths in stronger shades,” said Farrow & Ball’s Charlotte Cosby. Top choices: Pelt

(a deep aubergine) and Rectory Red (a black-tinged crimson). Drummonds, a British bath-fittings firm, newly showing within Lapidica’s space in New York’s D&D Annex, will custom paint one of their cast-iron soakers, such as this multihued Liffey model. *Liffey Bathtub, \$10,350, 212-794-0157*

Throw back, but modernize. Retro looks need refreshing. While their celery-and-pink palette nods to the 1950s, the tiles in the guest bath of Mr. Moon’s recent project are an updated 6-inch square, and the frameless glass shower and recessed medicine chest have modern lines.

