

MAY 2011: Volume 1 Issue 3

# h a r d

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# water closet camaraderie

By Katie Tandy

*Take a peek at the latest and greatest in bathroom design, highlighting a newfound focus on open-floor plans that foster intimacy between guests.*

Above:  
The LED-lit Stocco Origami Collection  
designed by Tepeak.

**BATHROOMS** are often overlooked and under designed, falling to the aesthetic wayside as guest rooms or public spaces are meticulously planned and primped. But HA+D sought out three venues whose bathrooms are not only stylish, but could actually spark a conversation.

At Upstairs at The Kimberly Hotel in Manhattan, Farnaz Mansuri, lead designer at De-spec, explains that she likens a bathroom to an intimate peek at someone's life. ▶

"Whenever I go to someone's house, I can tell more about who they are from their bathroom, than all their furniture and décor," Mansuri says. "I feel the bathroom is equivalent to the lingerie she wears. It's not the first thing you see, but it says a whole lot. We programmed it to allow for privacy and while you wait on the busy nights, it looks, feels and smells good. If the bathroom is like your lingerie, then maybe the question is what are the latest lingerie trends? And the type of lingerie depends on the sort of 'activity.' My guess is that the two extremes are 'Eres'—effortless, casual, clean—and on the other is 'Kiki de Montparnasse', oozing sex and calculating." To be honest, the bathrooms at Upstairs are a little bit of both, featuring rich paneled wood and Inca stone glinting warmly beneath structured Edison bulbs.

Rebecca Buchan of Denton House, designer for The Farm, a rustic restaurant in the heart of Park City, Utah, echoed Mansuri's belief that the bathroom can often be a neglected area. Buchan decided to make the restrooms an "experience" of their own, creating a sense of luxury and space through clever details and playful nods to a farmhouse theme. "Bathrooms should be the ultimate balance between an inhabited living area and cleanliness," says Buchan. "This was achieved by using mirrors and console tables typically not used in a public bathroom. Bathrooms are a great way to illicit conversation, and this is achieved at The Farm through the old farm tools that hang directly above the individual rooms for women and the urinals (pitchforks!) for men. The trough sinks pay tribute to an old farm feel, as well as the grey louvered cabinet doors, which are reminiscent of old shutters on a farm house." Part of creating a "conversation" among the guests is an open floor plan, a decidedly risky programming of space that could sacrifice privacy, but done well can imbue the space with a sense of breadth ideal for mingling.

"The way we figured it is to allow for one neutral bathroom usable by both sexes, one



Above:  
Trump Ocean Club Panama Deluxe  
Double bedroom.



Above from top to bottom:  
Upstairs at The Kimberly restrooms in  
New York;  
The Farm's rustic bathroom in Park City, UT.

handicap and one bathroom with urinal, which in and of itself deters use by women, unless absolutely necessary," says Mansuri of Upstairs at The Kimberly. "I would say it is a trend to do this sort of combination in lieu of the necessity for handicap bathrooms in small spaces, but as a whole, the waiting area if dimmed and elegant is a great place to meet people."

The new Trump Ocean Club Panama is another ideal illustration of the open floor plan, this time manifested inside a guestroom, allowing unrestricted views of the Pacific.

"There is no doubt the bathroom is a daring space," says Betsy Hughes of Hirsch Bedner Associates. "The owners and operators really must know the intended clientele and local competition. It was developed with the client specifically for this property." Specificity is becoming an increasing challenge to designers. With the ever-burgeoning levels of globalization creating accessibility to an unprecedented choice of materials, how does a designer begin to choose between them? For bathrooms, sometimes form must follow function, focusing on a deft straddling of beauty and ease of maintenance. For Upstairs at The Kimberly, Mansuri chose the dark Inca stone for the walls all the way up to the sills, making sure it was groutless, so the entire surface could be hosed and washed.

"Above the sill it transitions to oil-finished American walnut, which we used in the wine lobby and waiting area as well," explains Mansuri. "We prefer an oil finish as it can be maintained and kept clean and ages more elegantly. Nothing is worse than a tired, run-down polyurethane or varnish finish. My choice of materials hinges on where it comes from and how it was produced and finally ease of maintenance."

Mansuri also says that she is always reluctant to rely on decorative elements and depends instead on the "magic" of architecture to carry off the space. Utter simplicity found its way into the Trump Ocean Panama as well, highlighting as much glass and mirror as possible to refract the natural light.

"A lovely buttery honed yellow stone was chosen for the flooring and wet walls while a contrasting polished brown stone was used for the vanity ledge," says Hughes. "The daylight from the window wall just bounces around the bathroom, it is light and bright and feels tropical. A hotel is, after all, a temporary residence (no matter how temporary). Hotel guests, unlike visitors to commercial buildings, do not just pass through spaces." ❖