

Lifestyle

Smart devices are transforming the bathroom experience

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THE WASHINGTON POST – One of the last places you might expect to talk to Alexa is the bathroom. And yet this most private of rooms is becoming smarter, with everything from voice-activated mirrors to aromatherapy shower heads. A popular toilet in Japan, the Toto Neorest, has a “heated seat, automated controls, bidet and memory sensors to provide a customised experience,” said founder and principal of Kadlec Architecture and Design in Chicago Steve Kadlec.

Because smart tech in the bathroom can quickly get pricey – smart toilets run up to around USD17,000 – Kadlec recommends keeping costs down elsewhere. Update the throne room by cleaning the tile and grout, replacing shower curtains with glass panels and finding a large-format porcelain or ceramic tile for big impact on the floor. Also consider installing affordable heated floor mats under the tiles, he said. Co-founder of the home-goods store Beam in Brooklyn Greg Coccaro also recommends paint and artwork, specifically warm hues to bring out warm tones in the skin. Small, relatively inexpensive changes leave more in the budget for smart upgrades.

“Alexa, turn on the shower”: A command made possible by the U by Moen Shower 2-Outlet Digital Shower Controller in beige or black. Recommended by designer Kadlec, the tool allows shower control from voice, phone or controller.

Set a time for your shower, start and pause to control water use, and control the temperature. It’s also available with four outlets.

The Sensor Mirror Hi-Fi 8” Round from Simplehuman has five-times magnification for makeup application or shaving. “I just love that it turns on upon approach and simulates natural sunlight,” said Interior Designer in McLean, Virginia Tracy Morris. “In this latest version, you can apply your makeup and complete other tasks in the room with Alexa.”



U by Moen Shower 2-Outlet Digital Shower Controller. PHOTO: THE WASHINGTON POST

Casey Hardin, North Carolina-based designer for Decorist, recommends hands-free (and thus, germ-free) faucets, such as the Zura Single Handle Touch2O Vessel Bathroom Faucet by Delta. Once only for commercial bathrooms, these faucets are making their way into homes.

Turn water on and off manually with a light touch to the spout or handle or by placing hands near the faucet. It uses 20 per cent less water than industry-standard faucets.

Although Kirsten Gable, a kitchen and bath designer at Maryland-based Anthony Wilder Design/Build, has ordered Toto's new Drake Washlet+ S500E toilet for projects, she knows the USD2,035 cost can be prohibitive. The Drake features rear and front wash, a deodoriser, adjustable water temperature and a heated seat, as well as a super-effective flush; however, "Toto offers simpler models for less," she said, including the Washlet Electric Bidet Seat. A control panel adjusts water pressure, temperature and position. The seat is heated, and the lid closes softly.

The seat also includes a warm air dryer and air deodoriser.

Sticklers of cleanliness, rejoice: A portable toothbrush sanitiser is now available to sterilise toothbrushes between uses. The MAXOAK UV Toothbrush Sanitiser Case "is a really convenient way to help keep it germ free and it only take three minutes," Interior Designer Cocco said in an email.