

# designed for living

Lifestyle and technology are behind some of the most notable K&B trends of 2016, writes Gabrielle Chariton.

**A**s homeowners' lifestyles evolve, the way we design and use houses alters accordingly. This is perhaps most evident within kitchens and bathrooms, where functionality and aesthetics now encompass a sense of holistic family living.

'It's gone beyond just knocking walls down to create open-plan kitchens; we're now creating integrated, cohesive living spaces,' says Darren Genner, director of Minosa Design.

This integrated approach now also extends into a new kind of living space – the parents' retreat. 'We're getting these beautiful, open rooms that incorporate the main bedroom, the wardrobe and the bathroom into a single, luxurious whole,' Darren explains. 'We're creating a seamless transition between sleep-bathe-dress.'

Kim Duffin, design director of Sublime Architectural Interiors in Brisbane, says the trend is being driven by a new emphasis on 'liveability'. 'Rather than having a small bedroom, a small wardrobe and small ensuite, we're opening these rooms up into one large, liveable space.'

When designing these areas, the emphasis is on creating a resort-like opulence, and it's important to 'hide the nasties', Darren advises. A sculptural, freestanding bathtub, or custom vanity becomes the focal point of the room, while the toilet – and sometimes the shower – should remain private. This can be achieved with the judicious placement of sliding doors or screens,

to create an open space that's also flexible enough to be practical.

Di Sebbens, executive director of HIA Kitchens & Bathrooms, says there are also several technical imperatives to consider when creating an open-plan master suite. 'It's vital to ensure adequate provisions for waterproofing and overflows,' she says. 'We look at the technical considerations for open-plan bathrooms in the newly-released *HIA Guide to Bathroom Planning and Design*.'\*

A trend that's emerging in tandem with the parents' retreat is the indoor-outdoor bathroom. From rooms that open onto an enclosed courtyard or atrium, to luxurious poolside showers, this trend is all about celebrating the outdoors and emulating the soothing ambience of a resort or day-spa.

This connection with nature is also seen in the renewed interest in timber, which is being applied in a whole new

range of creative ways to bring warmth and individuality into kitchens and bathrooms. There's a focus on texture, and the stark, almost clinical styling that dominated kitchens and bathrooms a few years ago is giving way to a softer, warmer aesthetic.

**Re-create the look of timber using some of the new, incredibly realistic, engineered products**

Timber finishes, however, can stain and rot when exposed to water, which doesn't always make them a practical choice. 'Sometimes there has to be a little bit of common sense,' says Kim Duffin. 'If you do use timber on the floor, for instance, look at having an overflow on the bath to protect it from water damage. It's all about matching your fixtures with your fittings.'



Photo courtesy Stylemaster Homes

Or, he says, re-create the look of timber using some of the new, incredibly realistic, engineered products. ‘Timber-look floor tiles, for example, have come ahead in leaps and bounds in their quality and their look. The technology is improving all the time.’

Darren agrees: ‘There are many different timber-replicating materials on the market now – including melamines and laminates. They look remarkably realistic, but they’re waterproof and more durable than real timber.’

**A range of innovative large-format surfacing products have hit the market, and they’re already making a massive impact in the K&B sector**

Engineered surfaces are also enabling unprecedented design flexibility in the kitchen, says David Bartlett, owner of Sydney-based Art of Kitchens. ‘Timber naturally has so many variations in colour, grain and pattern, but the public have this perception that it’s all going to come out looking exactly the same. So one of the great things about the new veneers and engineered products is being able to achieve a consistent look across the whole project.’



Photo courtesy Rix Ryan Photography and Sublime Architectural Interiors

Engineered finishes aren’t just confined to timber-lookalikes. In the past 12 months or so, a range of innovative large-format surfacing products have hit the market and they’re already making a massive impact in the K&B sector. Brand names include Neolith, Dekton by Cosentino, and Laminam. These ceramic-based products are incredibly durable, and are available in sheets as large as 1.5 x 3.4 metres. Thicknesses vary from about 120mm to just 3mm.

‘There’s a whole heap of good reasons to use these surfacing products,’ David Bartlett says. ‘The fact that they don’t stain and they’re non-porous makes them a great choice for countertops.’

In fact, the potential application for these products is almost endless. Last year, Kim Duffin finished an entire kitchen – cabinets, bench and splashback – in a rusted-iron-look surface from Neolith. The show-stopping result is a stunning showcase of the far-reaching potential of these new materials.

‘The technology at the moment with computers and the ability to print and replicate patterns, and in some cases make it solid, is amazing,’ Darren Genner says. The variety of patterns is seemingly endless – the products can replicate the look of wood, marble, travertine, concrete, oxidised metal sheeting, even textured or embossed patterns.

While K&B designers certainly wouldn’t agree that engineered decorative surfaces are an improvement on nature, they’re providing unparalleled flexibility, enabling the creation of the multi-functional spaces that today’s lifestyles demand.

*\* The HIA Guide to Bathroom Planning and Design is available from HIA now. Check online or phone 1300 650 620 to order your copy. See page 57 for more. **H***



Photo courtesy Minosa