

As seen in



Luxure:
Fittings for a King
December 2015



1. Regulator kitchen faucet



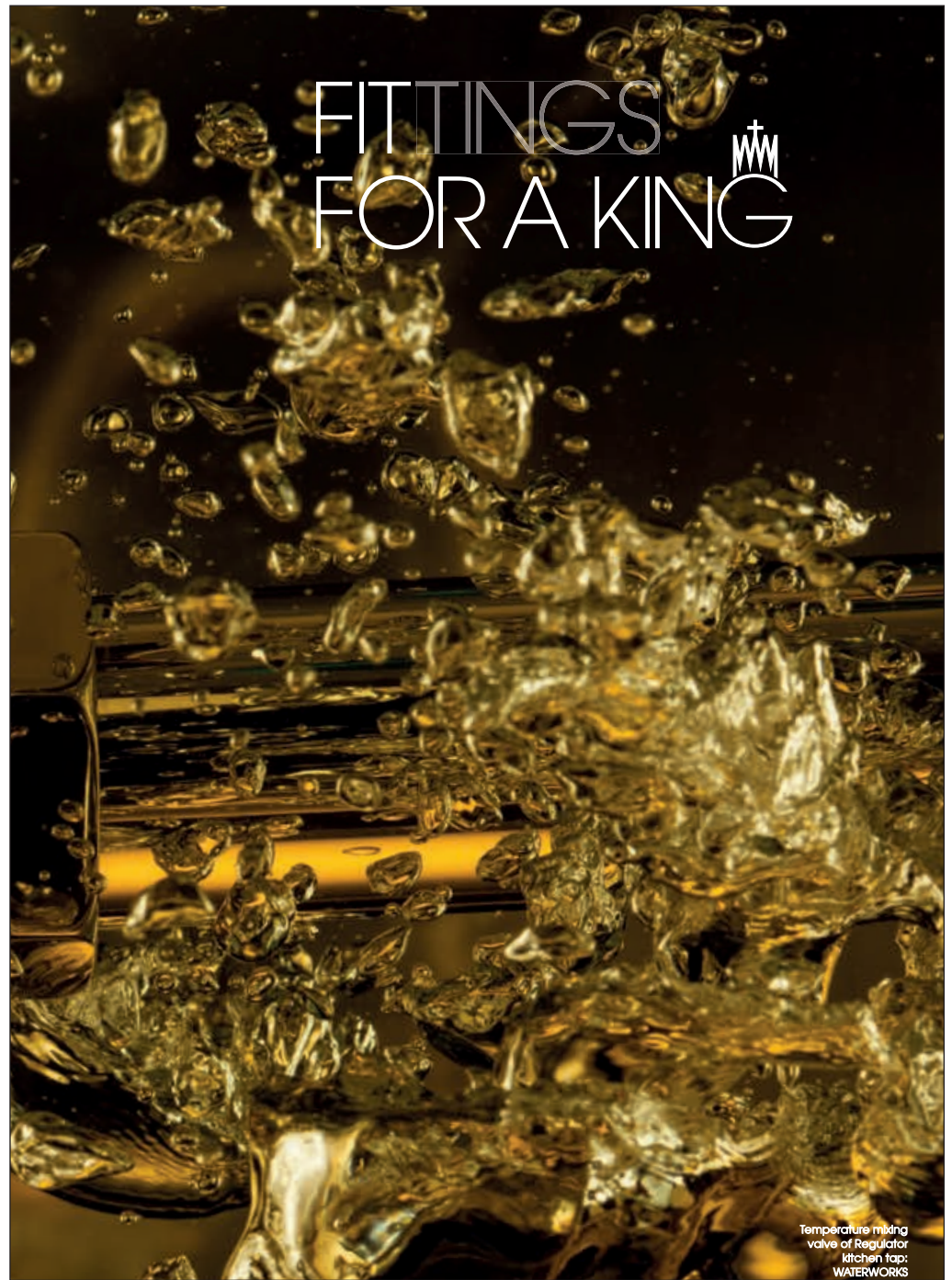
ESTD. 1978

WATERWORKS

As seen in



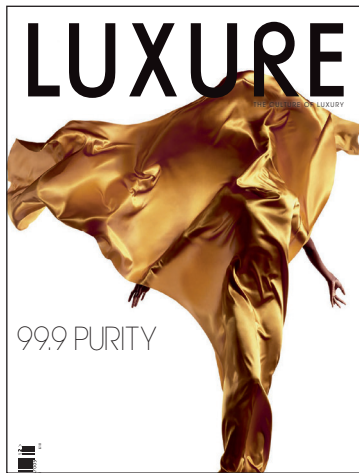
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HARDWARE THAT GRACES THE HOME HAS BECOME THE JEWELLERY IN THE BATHROOM AND KITCHEN – EXQUISITELY CRAFTED AND GLEAMING IN GOLD AND OTHER OPULENT FINISHES. HISTORY REVEALS THAT TAPS AND BASINS SIT VERY COMFORTABLY IN THE LUXURY ARENA

WORDS: JULIET POSPIELOVSKY
PHOTOGRAPHY: JONATHAN KNOWLES

When did a tap become so much more than a tap? Today the fittings around the home – just like the man-about-town’s wristwatch or a fashionista’s clutch – are just as likely to be indicators of wealth and taste. The mark of quality of a crisply designed tap or a subtly hammered metal basin – even if discreetly labelled – can be spotted at once and not just by an aficionado of interior style.

Yet it’s only recently in domestic history that bathrooms (and kitchens) were just a functional space to be hidden from visitors. The fact is – when it comes to interiors where water is delivered for humankind’s ease and pleasure – these places have always been special. The Romans and Greeks were famous for their love of bathing and imbued their ablutions with purifying properties. Wealthy Roman families had their own private thermal baths as well as visiting public baths. The Greek writer Homer had his battle-weary heroes bathing in water to restore their strength.

In more modern times, palaces and castles, monasteries, stately homes and gentlemen’s clubs had some splendid examples of early bathrooms, but for the vast majority of the population the means to have water delivered – albeit carried by a servant – was not an option. As Terence Conran says in *The Bed and Bath Book*: ‘When the Roman Empire decayed, Europe went unwashed for more or less a thousand years.’ It is not an exaggeration.

Cleanliness was not so important – even for royalty – and the peculiarity of the hygienic Queen Elizabeth I who ‘hath a bath once a month, whether she need it or no’ is noted in domestic records as exceptional. A few of the very finest houses did have bathrooms by

the 18th century – with freestanding rolltop baths – but these had no system of running hot-water and were painstakingly filled by maids. The arrival of plumbing – with taps being manufactured in brass in 1870 – would slowly transform the bathing experience.

Until well into the 20th century people – except the very privileged – did not have hot and cold running water. They bathed in a basin filled with a jug – often in the corner of a bedroom – or perhaps frequented one of the new public baths. Most towns in England by 1915 had a bathhouse where you could rent towels and purchase soap. Across the ocean, New York City’s People’s Baths opened in 1891 and by 1904 there were 46 public bathhouses across America. During this era, to bath in privacy was indeed a luxury.

It wasn’t until after 1900 that houses in Britain were being built with bathrooms. With the rise of mass-built middle-class housing in the Thirties, the bathroom became a very utilitarian place – usually small – with fitted units and chrome-plated taps replacing brass. As chrome became the norm, taps and other fittings with speciality finishes such as bronze, copper or gold became desirable at the highest end of the market. Rudolf Nureyev notably had a freestanding bath in tinned copper in the very theatrical bathroom of his Parisian home.

It was, of course, the movies of Hollywood that played the biggest role in glamourising the bathroom. In 1918, Cecil B. De Mille began to use bath scenes to tell the story of the film, which became a popular dramatic device to be embraced by other filmmakers. Actresses such as Gloria Swanson, Joan Crawford and ▶

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Normandy oval basin
with plug waste:



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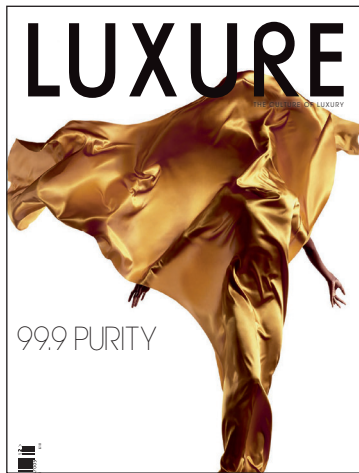
Henry bathroom
tap with cross handles:



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Marilyn Monroe frolicked in bubble baths or appeared fetchingly *déshabillé*. Jayne Mansfield famously created a pink bathroom with a heart-shaped gold mosaic bath at her Sunset Boulevard mansion.

Glossy magazines also played a role in promoting the bathroom. In 1917, *House & Garden* wrote 'The bathroom is an index to civilisation. Time was when it sufficed for a man to be civilised in his mind. We now require a civilisation of the body.' The USA led the way with its eye for comfort and convenience. The Statler hotel in Buffalo, c1908, was the first to offer a bath in every room, while multiple bathrooms became *de rigueur* in the American home. By the 1970s, en suite bathrooms were fairly common Stateside while in Britain they were still seen as a luxury. Mixer taps that didn't scald were standard in the USA and, in the kitchen, elaborate hardware included potfillers and sprays to make cooking far more efficient.

USA bathroom company Waterworks was one of the first retailers to display their hardware in beautifully styled vignettes, featuring basins, cabinets, mirrors and tiles. Inspired by the grand hotels of the 19th century, the luxury brand also excelled in showing their customers how to recreate these dream bathrooms at home, offering countless finishes and styles.

Françoise de Bonneville in *The Book of the Bath* sees the contemporary trend to decorate the bathroom as beautifully as the living room as a crucial change in thinking. 'On the one hand the bathroom is an indicator of wealth, but it is also the place in which one invests the most of oneself.' Today's spa-like bathrooms offer

the chance to be gloriously self-indulgent. These temples of pleasure often look nostalgically to the past and include hand-crafted fittings, but they can also feature the latest high-tech features.

A tap from Waterworks – which has now expanded to the UK – is pricey, perhaps as much as or more than a clutch bag or a watch. Their premium finishes – gold, copper, brass and bronze – are flying off the shelves. 'Warm finishes are attracting attention for their sense of old world elegance and richness,' says CEO Peter Sallick. 'These finishes work well with almost all other materials – light and dark, richly veined and clean. Hardware in the home has the potential to be its jewellery, acting as a bright accent.'

A close look at Henry, one of Waterworks' best-selling product lines, demonstrates how a tap can be an object of beauty. Geometric angles and deep curves – including a pronounced hexagonal nut, arched spouts and dimpled cross handles – make Henry a best-seller, but so does its quality engineering. All fittings are rigorously tested and have the ability to withstand 500 psi (pound force per square inch of water pressure) or last beyond 500,000 uses.

In a property article in *The Times* 'The Rise of the Stealth Luxe Home Brand', Waterworks was among the 'reassuringly expensive' brands that matter to those with money. But though these elite interior brands can and do help to sell a multi-million-pound home, it is no longer necessary to have a large logo emblazoned. Gone are the days of Hollywood brashness. Quality has to be obvious.

www.uk.waterworks.com +44 (0)20 7384 4000

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Boulevard bathroom
tap spout in matte gold



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