

Dear Utopia

For January, a time of new beginnings, I decided to look at the main trends I foresee shaping kitchens and bathrooms this year. Our open-plan style of living sees the kitchen play a pivotal role in the whole home approach to interior design. We have definitely moved away from 'the kitchen for life' of our parents' generation. Instead we are showing off our creative skills as well as intellect, re-evaluating our spaces and making home improvements that bring value. The bathroom will become increasingly more indulgent with a new-found glamour, and will grow in stature. There'll be a fluid transition from the bathroom through to the dressing room and into the bedroom, reminiscent of luxury boutique hotel suites. The results will be both inspirational and pleasurable and intended for serious rest and relaxation.



I look forward to receiving your questions

Andrea Maflin is an interior designer, TV presenter, author, artist and design consultant www.andreamaflin.co.uk

Star letter

Q We're tired of having to buff our black glossy granite kitchen worktop all the time to get rid of smears. What can you recommend?

Richard Morris, Bottisham

A Polished granite can look like a sheet of glass but over time may become soiled, dull, and hard work to upkeep. Many household cleaners contain chemicals like ammonia that break down the manufacturer's protective seal making the granite more vulnerable to staining. My first suggestion would be to try wiping with a just damp E-cloth. Made of millions of tiny fibres that trap minute particles, they'll clean grease and dirt without smearing. You won't need chemicals, just water; the cloths are so absorbent that you won't need to buff and polish afterwards either. I would also contact your installer/fabricator and see if they will come and reseal the surface, or recommend the correct upkeep products for your exact type of granite.

Do you have a question about your kitchen, bathroom or interior design? Write to Andrea at Utopia, The Old School, Colchester Road, Wakes Colne, Colchester, CO6 2BY or email Andrea at dearutopia@propub.co.uk

E-cloth The star letter winner receives an E-cloth cleaning kit worth £100. It includes the new Hob & Oven Pack – one cloth to tackle grease or burnt-on food and another to polish any shiny surface. E-cloths are quick, easy to use and there's no need for chemical cleaners. www.e-cloth.com



Stoneham's Penhurst kitchen in light oak, character oak, maple or cherry is shown here with sculptured Madura Gold granite worktops. Stoneham kitchens start at £20,000. 020 8300 8181 | www.stoneham-kitchens.co.uk



Andersen Windows is one of the world's largest wooden window manufacturers. Frenchwood gliding door from £1,110. 01283 511 122 | www.blackmillwork.co.uk

Q I am looking for quality oak sliding doors for my kitchen diner in a new extension. Please could you help me find something suitable?

Vie MacKintosh, via email

A A wall of glass panels will immediately open up the room with a greater sense of light, space and comfort. To give the illusion of a more capacious area, use the same stone or tile flooring inside and out. You should also consider how you want the doors to open – fully, inwards, outwards or sliding – and consider insect screens that can be used when the doors are open. Check out Johnson Doors (0800 731 4075 | www.johnson-doors.co.uk) and its Cheshire Set system in oak. Doors And More (01205 363 999 | www.doorsandmore.biz) offers a choice of Vufold doors.

Q When holidaying on the Continent, I noticed that the choice of towels is more varied than in the UK, with multi-coloured designs, trims and asymmetric designs. Here things seem to be so regular or plain. Where should I be looking?

J Rice, Potters Bar

A Injecting some well-chosen pattern and colour with bathroom accessories is a way to personalise and energise any bathroom scheme. For me it's the everyday luxuries that count, such as the sumptuous touch of ultra-absorbent cotton towels. Designer's Guild (020 7351 5775 | www.designersguild.com) has a superb collection of towels that correspond with various ranges of bedlinen, perfect if you're wanting to co-ordinate with an ensuite. Other places to try include Bedeck (028 3831 3000 | www.bedeck.co.uk), Zara Home (020 7432 0040 | www.zarahome.com) and Missoni Home (www.missonihome.it).



Bedeck's Saray towels come in several hues. From £3 for a face cloth to £20 for a bath towel



RAK Ceramic's compact range includes wall-hung WCs, perfect for petite bathing spaces

Q Can you tell me who makes really shallow depth loos please?

Mrs C Wright, Holland On Sea

A Try RAK Ceramic with its Compact 615mm projection close-coupled floor-standing WCs (01730 237 850 | www.rakceramics.co.uk). No Code also offers a modern 600mm projection Qube WC (01962 870 078 | www.nocode.co.uk). Or try Ideal Standard's Space collection – it features corner loos and pans that sit at an angle to the wall which might help the layout (0800 590 311 | www.ideal-standard.co.uk). Alternatively to free up space, Sanlamere's Profile™5 WC-cum-basin features an integral basin atop the cistern that fills it with every wash (020 7207 5802 | www.sanlamere.co.uk). It will also conserve up to 70% of your total water usage in your bathroom. And finally, have you thought about a Saniflo? The floor-standing 435mm depth Sanicompact model doesn't have a cistern, vastly reducing its depth when compared to a standard loo. It also has the macerator waste system neatly housed within the pan rather than a separate box (020 8842 0033 | www.saniflo.co.uk).