

CREATING THE *Ultimate* COUNTRY BATHROOM

Whether for a charming cottage or a grand manor house, we look at the key elements that contribute to the successful design of a beautiful, relaxing and functional bathroom that reflects its rural location

Country bathrooms may be large or small, traditional or contemporary, but one thing they all have in common is a strong connection with the natural world. Making the most of scenery will often be the starting point for the design of the room, perhaps by placing a bath near the window so that the view may be quietly enjoyed. Another factor is the relationship to the architecture of the house, with characterful features such as a fireplace or a beamed ceiling becoming an intrinsic part of a thoughtful scheme. Tradition may be emphasised with the use of period-style fixtures and fittings, but modern elements, whether subtle or bold, can also enhance the space. A well-planned country bathroom will also include pleasing textures and plentiful storage, so that a sense of uncluttered calm and luxurious relaxation prevails. ▶

Draw inspiration from this bathroom in the Mansion House Premium Suite at Coworth Park hotel, Ascot.

Storage

A clutter-free bathroom is the key to creating a feeling of ultimate luxury and relaxation – and that requires careful attention to storage, whether it be bespoke, fitted pieces that can follow the uneven walls, floors and ceilings of an old home, or freestanding pieces such as antique armoires, chests or cupboards, which offer in-keeping character and patina to suit a country property.

“If you are lucky enough to have a fireplace in a bathroom, a statement piece can go in the alcove on one side, with a chunky washstand on the other,” suggests George Miller, home designer at Neptune. “Washstands offer the option for open or closed storage – things that are easily accessible versus things that you want to hide. For cleaning products, cupboards or tall drawers are a good option. The less you can see the better in order to create a calm, tidy space, with surfaces clear and nice things displayed in glass-fronted cabinets, storage jars and baskets.”

RIGHT With the bath in a separate space and next to a window for quiet contemplation, Jeffrey's Interiors commissioned a wall-to-wall double vanity from Sculleries, with plenty of drawers for storage.

BELOW In Neptune's Chichester double drawer washstand, £2,893.50, two faux drawers neatly conceal the undermounted ceramic basins for a seamless worktop, with six further drawers below for storage.



ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS On storage



“The starting point for a bathroom is to think about who is going to be using it. For a guest bathroom, there is more of a need for things to be visibly to hand, whereas in a private bathroom you don't need everything to be on display, so the less you can see the better for creating a calm, tidy space. Coat pegs are a wonderful form of storage in a bathroom. They're great for hanging dressing gowns and towels, and for coat hangers if you're getting changed in the bathroom.”

George Miller, home designer, Neptune

Symmetry

Our eyes are inherently drawn to symmetry and balance, and this applies to the design of a country bathroom just as much as to that of any other room. Symmetrical floorplans look especially good in a spacious room, and elegantly complement the classical features of a period house, often making the most sense when designed around a central window or fireplace. “Symmetry is pleasing, and really does help in terms of keeping things neat and tidy,” says Henriette von Stockhausen, creative director of VSP Interiors. “I like to design his and hers basins, with matching mirrors and wall lights above. Where there isn't enough wall space to place them next to each other, the basins may sit either side of a large window.”

With a symmetrical bathroom scheme, it is best to keep the elements quite restrained, Von Stockhausen points out. “Because everything is

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS On symmetry



“Symmetry does lend itself well to a country bathroom, where one is often not limited for space. It's not quite as nice if you see the main pieces from the side, so consider which wall to work on and what you first see when you walk into the room. If possible, try to place the key pieces so as to get that symmetrical view from the front.”

Henriette von Stockhausen, creative director, VSP Interiors

doubled, it could mean overwhelming pattern and colour. Instead, concentrate on making the most of the architectural details.”

ABOVE In the Juniper bathroom at Foxhill Manor, a country house hotel in the Cotswolds, perfect symmetry combined with muted, natural colours creates a sense of calm relaxation. Together with the roll-top bath and generously sized basins, a cushioned window seat adds to the feeling of comfort.



Grandeur

Employing sumptuous materials, whether marble or brass, Venetian glass or a heavy curtain fabric, will always enhance a sense of grandeur in a bathroom. In a spacious country home, use of scale will also be a key factor. As James Lentaigne, creative director of Drummonds, points out: "High ceilings gives the opportunity to use the volume to grand effect. This could mean choosing a high-sided bath and tall towel radiators, a high-level cistern, big feature mirrors above the basin(s) and decorative pendant lights."

It is harder to achieve the same feeling in a small bathroom – but not impossible, says Lentaigne. "Cottage bathrooms with lower ceilings need to constrain the verticals. Choose lower-level sanitaryware, keep ceiling lighting flush and definitely consider built-in storage to eliminate clutter. Create some open shelves for displaying beautiful accessories, and the effect will be every bit as impactful as in a grander room."

Fittings

To ensure the highest quality, it is important to invest in the moving parts of a bathroom – in other words, the taps, bath filter and shower controls. An important tactile element, the brassware should always feel comfortable in the hand, and it can often be the finishing touch to a scheme. As Slane Lefroy Brooks, chief creative officer of Lefroy Brooks, says: "It is the jewellery of the bathroom."

Traditional pillar taps, either wall or deck-mounted, with cross or lever handles, tend to have the look of a traditional country bathroom, although mixing things up with lever handles and wall mounting can introduce a nicely contemporary touch. "A brass finish is popular at present, and is very traditional and warm," says Lefroy Brooks. "A natural brass finish means that there is no lacquer to peel off, and either the patina can be allowed to develop naturally, or the shine can be brought back with metal polish. The most traditional is the nickel finish, which has a lovely warm feeling, and goes very nicely with a country bathroom."

ABOVE LEFT
A bathroom at The Newt Hotel in Somerset with Samuel Heath's Style Moderne bath/shower mixer, from £4,255.20.

ABOVE RIGHT
A wall-mounted basin set with country spout and crosstop handles in nickel, from £634.08, Perrin & Rowe.

BELOW LEFT
1900 Classic polished brass bath/shower mixer with white levers, £2,592, Lefroy Brooks.



Marble and brass combine for magnificence in Drummonds' Double Ladybower Vanity, from £9,360, designed by Martin Brudnizki.

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

On fittings



"The bath/shower mixer is a very classic, traditional English product. It works very well with standpipes, which free you from having to plumb a bath into a wall. If you have the high ceilings of a large country house, installing a towel warmer that reaches all the way up a wall gives a feeling of plenty. It can really be a statement piece."
Slane Lefroy Brooks, chief creative officer, Lefroy Brooks

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS

On choosing new designs



"Traditional craftsmen were highly skilled, and they used to love adding detail that made pieces stand out. Look for goods handmade in the best possible materials, with attention to detail and made to last."
James Lentaigne, creative director, Drummonds



Drummonds' statement Ashburn bath with a polished exterior, from £3,390, stands out against a neutral backdrop and echoes the grey veining in the elegant marble flooring.



Placed under the window, the roll-top bath in this bathroom at Coworth Park hotel, Ascot, enjoys lovely views without being overlooked. A pair of towel radiators makes the most of the space to the sides.

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS
On layout



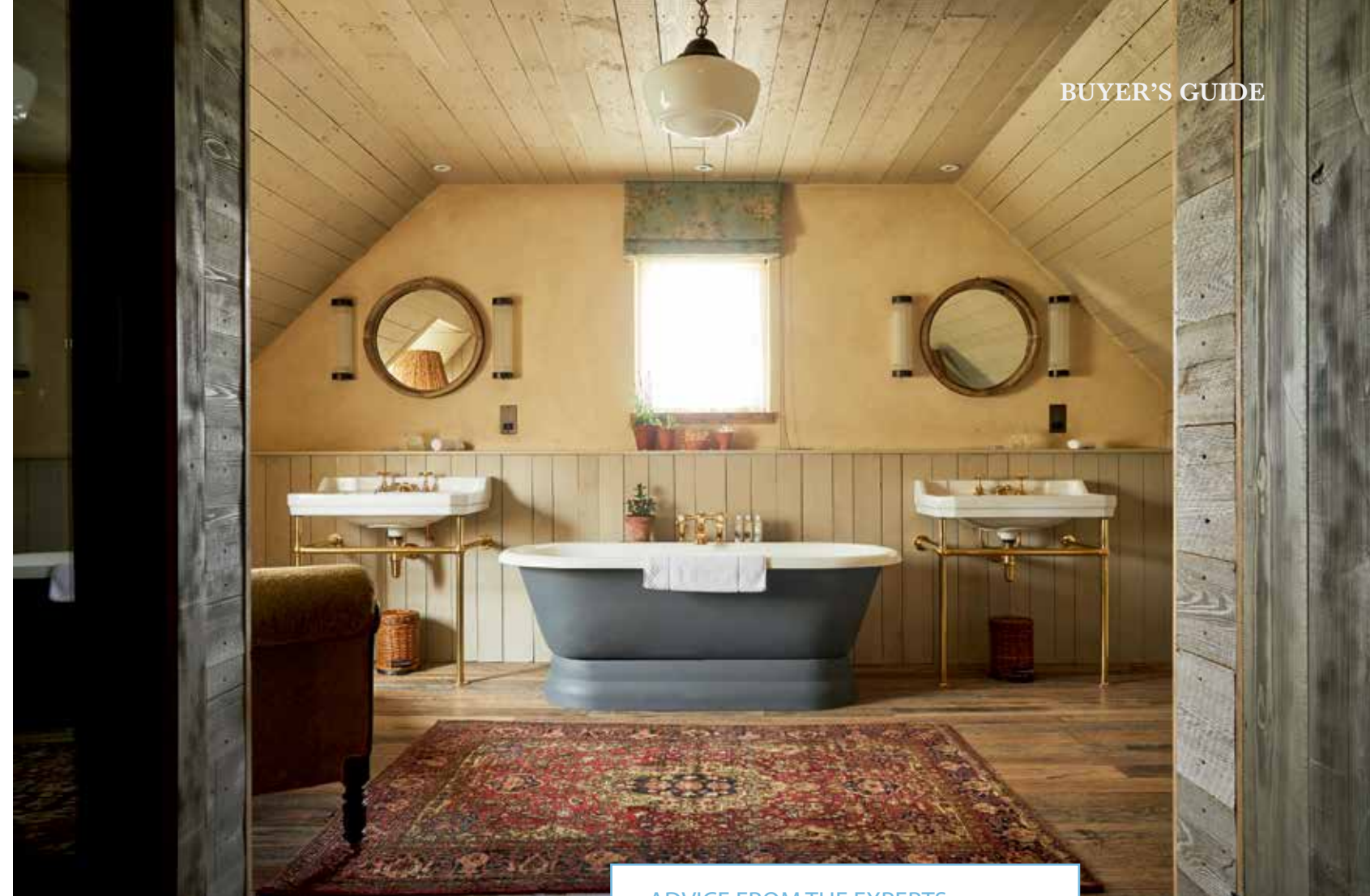
"Incorporating a seating area, be it an armchair or chaise longue in a large room, or simply a stool and side table in a more compact space, can make a bathroom feel more like a living space, adding softness and warmth, inviting the user to spend more relaxation time in their own sanctuary." *Yousef Mansuri, director of design, CP Hart*

Layout

Since many country bathroom windows are not overlooked, soaking in a bath by the window while enjoying the view can be the ultimate luxury. When drawing up a floorplan, this is not a bad start – though it is always important to consider the positioning of the WC, doors and other architectural features, too. Where possible, locating a freestanding bath under the window makes great sense, says Yousef Mansuri, director of design at CP Hart. "Some properties may have extra architectural details which are crying out to be put in the spotlight, such as archways, niches, or blocked windows," he adds. "Utilising what is already there can really make the room unique."

Mirrors always make a space feel larger, and bounce light around. "For a country or classical bathroom, adding decorative wall lights either side of a mirror helps to dress up a vanity area," says Mansuri. "Placing lights either side of a mirror also makes an even wash of light across the face, as opposed to ceiling lights, which create shadows."

RIGHT Shelves with books and plants make this washstand niche feel cosy and more like a living space. The Cielo freestanding Catino Ovale basin, £3,270 with Samuel Heath Landmark Pure basin mixer in Urban Brass, £1,824, both from CP Hart, add to the relaxed mood.



ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS
On scale



"It is important to match the size of the fittings to the size of the room. In a small bathroom, a short bath can be the perfect solution. You can bathe in a 1200mm-long bath in complete comfort." *Phil Etherden, managing director, Albion Bath Company*

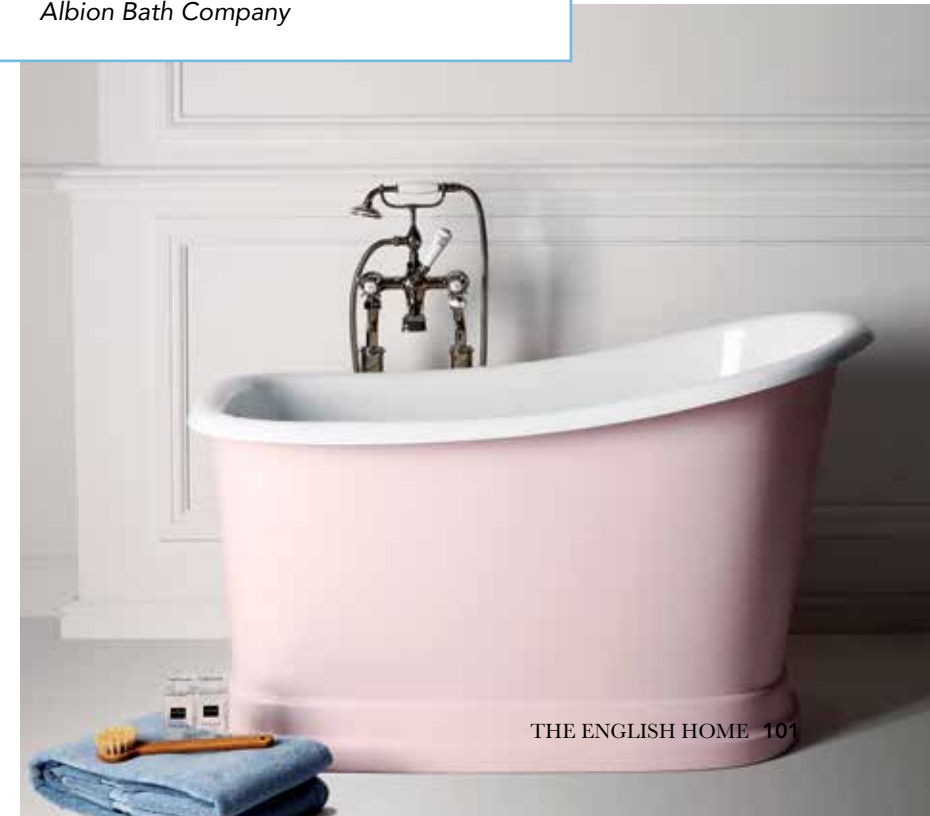
BELOW A small bath, such as Albion's Tubby Torre bath, from £2,541, if deep enough, is comfortable to bathe in and perfect for compact spaces.

Proportions

Having often been converted from former bedrooms, country bathrooms tend to be either grand and spacious or, conversely, tucked into a roof space with sloping ceilings. "In a small bathroom choose a short bath or a bath on feet and either wall-mount the basin or use a basin stand. When you can see a little more floor it makes the room feel larger," says Phil Etherden, managing director of Albion Bath Company. "You can bathe in a 1200mm-long bath in complete comfort if it's deep enough. If there is an area where the ceiling is low, this is the best place to put the bath." Smaller fittings in general are a good idea but, says Etherden, a shower area less than 800mm x 800mm is not advisable.

With the luxury of a large bathroom and higher ceilings, scaling up the fittings, such as a grand bath on a pedestal and either a wider basin or a pair of basins, will better suit the proportions of the space. "If a large room has nothing above about three feet high it can look a little empty and open. Consider adding a high-level cistern and a tall towel rail," says Etherden.

ABOVE Converted agricultural buildings can offer plenty of space but require grand fittings to suit their proportions. This is The Barn bathroom at The Pig at Bridge Place hotel near Canterbury.





Texture

In a room which can be full of hard, white surfaces it is important to include a range of different materials and textures. On the floor, for example, using old timber boards or an Oriental rug can create a lovely softness underfoot, or the more adventurous may opt for pebble tiles in a small area, while polished plaster – which can be highly polished or more rugged – adds wonderful richness.

Features such as wicker storage baskets, tiled splashbacks and upholstered seating all contribute to the textural range, while a bath or basin made from an alternative material can be a dramatic focal point. “For country houses and converted agricultural buildings, using materials such as copper and tin introduces historical integrity but brought right up to the 21st century,” says Joanna Wakelin, head of PR and marketing for William Holland. “It’s taking industrial style but adding a luxurious modern edge. Copper, for example, is so vibrant and aesthetically warm, but it also holds heat well, reflects light around the room and is very, very glamorous.”

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS On materials



“We love to incorporate texture in our country bathroom designs through subtle details in the window treatment. Drawn-thread linen with a hem-stitch row, for example, will enhance the textural palette and, as a bonus, when light passes through the hemstitch it casts beautiful shadows into the room. Similarly, using a cotton sheer provides a beautiful layer of texture to a scheme.”

Katie Glaister, co-founder, K&H Design

ABOVE A polished metal bath, such as William Holland’s handmade Bateau bath in nickel, £6,889.20, makes a dramatic focal point, and creates lovely reflections.

BELOW LEFT In this country bathroom by Pippa Paton Design, bronze plaster has been used for both walls and ceiling to give a seamless transition, complemented by dark bronze fittings.

RIGHT Exposed timber brings warmth and texture to a bathroom, here combined with marble and wicker in Neptune’s Edinburgh undermount open washstand, £1,865.



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Modernity

A determinedly modern scheme can work extremely well in a country bathroom, with a pleasing combination of simple, striking sanitaryware, traditional architecture and glorious views of the natural world outside. “Sleek, contemporary fittings create an uncluttered look that adds to the feeling of serenity and luxury, while also providing the latest technologies and excellent storage space,” says designer Pippa Paton.

“In an older country property, we would expose and enhance the materials of the building itself, perhaps an old stone wall or beautiful beams,” she adds. “Alternatively, simply using natural materials such as a timber floor or a linen-covered stool will soften contemporary shapes.” To create a seamless look, Paton recommends finishes such as resin, polished plaster and very large-scale porcelain or marble tiles, rather than typical bathroom tiling which creates a background of grout lines. ■

ABOVE In this new-build bathroom by Pippa Paton Design, sleek, modern fittings are combined with interesting textures for a feeling of comfort and luxury. The bath has been placed to maximise views of the woodland, and the shape of the vanity shelf and surround reflects the unusual architecture of the window.

LEFT Natascha Dartnall of ND Studios included contemporary and traditional elements in this refreshing bathroom, which focuses on a dramatic free-standing bath, finished in black, which prevents the room feeling sterile. The pea green chair adds a further dash of colour.

ADVICE FROM THE EXPERTS On contemporary style



“To let the individual pieces in a modern country bathroom shine, try to keep the floor and wall finishes in the background, with relatively few materials that are as seamless as possible.”

Pippa Paton, founder, Pippa Paton Design

