

# Making a splash with sound design

Getting what you need means being clear on what you want



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**D**ream and reality. One floats up there in the sky, glinting and unreachable. The other is down here, streaked with salt and mud, squatting. More and more, people these days truck in “hold fast to dreams” sentiment. That may be fine in personal manifestos, but your home demands practicality. As the great interior designer Mick Jagger knew, you can’t always get what you want. But if you try, you’ll find you get what you need.

But what does that look like in the bathroom, one of the most complicated rooms of your home? With the many fixtures you must consider – each with specific technical, functional, and aesthetic demands – getting what you need means being clear on what you want.

The first step is quieting the noise of the market and its dizzying multiplicity of choice. By way of helping, I’ve collected my favourite bathroom fixtures. While some are realistic – and others fanciful – sound design is what connects them all.

## The sink

When I lie back and daydream about beautiful sinks, my mind always returns to the vessel sink. Recently, it’s one in particular – the Be, from the Canadian manufacturer Wetstyle. It sits delicately on the counter, with a structural softness that pairs elegantly with a crisp stone counter and vanity. What prevents my using it more is simply cost – at \$950, it’s a tough sell to clients.

The sink we use most is a white porcelain undermount that Kohler, the maker, calls its “vertical rectangular sink.” Undermount sinks have their edges concealed by the countertop, and the rectilinear shape of this one makes it a fresh alternative to round or ovoid sinks.

## The faucet

The beauty of a faucet is the same as the beauty of a bicycle – it is what it does. What I love about a good fixture – at the risk of sounding like a BMW commercial – is the wedding of form and function.

Speaking of marriage, the whole office is in love with the Tara (from Dornbracht), perhaps



the most beautiful gooseneck faucet ever designed. In a room of hard surfaces and straight edges, Tara exudes an effortless femininity. Trouble is, not many people look seriously at a faucet worth as much as a flight to Hong Kong. None of our clients has yet said yes to sweet Tara, but we’ll keep trying.

Two more accessible favourites are the Purist (from Kohler) and the Atrio (from Grohe). Both are elegantly clean and tubular, and complement many lighting and door-hardware styles. I’m also a fan of American Standard’s Serin series, whose restrained chrome detailing fits nicely in the updated traditional home so popular in Canada. (It’s a great price, too.)

## The toilet

Just because it’s a toilet doesn’t mean it has to be ugly. If, like me, you’re pleased by clean and con-

temporary simplicity, you can’t do better than the Aquia Dual-Flush, by Toto. It’s modern without being severe, and looks completely at home in transitional interiors.

Toilets are one area where dreams and reality don’t plot easily on the price spectrum. At the top end of the market, designers are trying hard to make statement pieces. But I think the toilets look goofy. The charm of the Toto is that, for around \$600, you get a beautiful fixture positioned perfectly at the intersection of beauty and function.

## The shower

Showers are like AV equipment – talk to the wrong expert and you’ll come home with a system that exceeds your needs. Better to keep it simple and buy quality, and for that I love Hansgrohe. Their showers use a patented system to infuse the water with air,

which softens it while reducing your water usage. It’s a shower that pleases the body as much as the eye.

Hansgrohe showers chart a middle course between dream and reality. They’re certainly expensive – around \$2,800 for a full system – but they get nowhere near the \$15,000 you can spend at the very top end of the market.

There, clients fixate on luxuries like jet systems and large, ceiling-mounted rain heads. I’m not fond of either. They’re wonderful in a spa, but impractical day to day. Most women find it difficult to wash their hair or shave their legs under a huge rain head, and jet systems require showers large enough that you can stand back from the jets, otherwise you feel trapped in a car wash.

## The tub

A tub may be the most beautiful object you ever put in your

## ONLINE

### See some of Kelly’s faves

Dröol-worthy bathroom fixtures: A photo gallery of Kelly Deck’s picks can be seen at [tgam.ca/homeandgarden](http://tgam.ca/homeandgarden)

**Above, one of Kelly’s recent bathroom renos. Below left, Atrio faucet; right Aquia toilet by Toto.**

BARRY CALHOUN AND SATOSHI KOBAYASHI

home. And if I’m ignoring price – and even CSA approval – without a doubt I’m taking the Ottocento, by Agape. A pared-down interpretation of a traditional cast-iron tub, the vessel is elegant and whimsical.

It’s also 10 grand, and not terribly functional (it has no jets), strikes that do nothing to dull my ardour.

A more realistic favourite is the Thalassa, by Bain Ultra. An undermount, it’s framed in a box that’s then clad in wood, tile or stone.

I love the Thalassa for the feeling of restrained luxury it gives a room. It’s possible that the interior styling is overcooked, but you’ll find it extremely comfortable.

With the tub jets gurgling and a glass of Malbec at your elbow, you may discover that the bathroom as good a place as any to ponder the paradoxes of dreams and reality.

## CONDOMINIUMS

# A fit place to live

Condo builders looking to set themselves apart are whipping their workout rooms into shape

AMY VERNER

**T**he gym on the second floor of the Hudson is among the better examples of condominium fitness spaces in Toronto. Bathed in natural light, much of the room boasts a double height ceiling and the cardio machines all face out towards the downtown skyline.

But only when lying on an exercise bench looking up does it become obvious that the blinding pot lights were a poor choice. Indirect lighting would have been better. Although there is a defibrillator and a ballet barre, there’s no water cooler. The weight training equipment seems to have been arranged with little rhyme or reason. And does anyone even use that ab thingy?

These are some of the points that Mark Stables is commending and critiquing in order to differentiate his approach to condo gyms. A personal trainer for 15 years, Mr. Stables is now expanding into fitness amenity design, which can include, but is not limited to, conceiving the space pre-construction, determining the most appropriate equipment for each building and providing exercise classes and wellness services once residents move in.

It’s a smart and innovative strategy that caters to body conscious twentysomethings and aging boomers alike. Once an afterthought, the condo gym is no longer a windowless room with a treadmill, rowing machine and a pile of free weights.

Under the name Movement Haus, Mr. Stables envisions a lifestyle brand that will serve as a compelling feature for purchasers much the same way that a big-name interior designer or European kitchen appliances offer cachet.



Mark Stables and site supervisor Eddie Estrela go over plans for the fitness space at L-Tower. KEVIN VAN PAASSEN

Already, he is working with the Cityzen, the developers of L Tower, Backstage and Pier 27, and The St. Thomas, a Minto property. He says Urban Capital (Tableau, Nicholas) and Bazis (Exhibit) are on board. Mr. Stables is also revamping the gym at One St. Thomas and is proposing to do the same at 99 Avenue Road, the Memphis and DNA.

Mr. Stables, who is temporarily living at the Hudson as he awaits the completion of his condo in Corktown, explains that his goal is to offer a turnkey experience that will be customized for each property while also implementing a signature look and feel.

“You have developers and marketing teams calling their gyms five-star, world-class, premium, state of the art, but if I ask them if they can specifically tell me what a state-of-the-art fitness amenity is, they don’t know. They’re buzzwords,” he says. “Now we’re actually benchmarking what those fitness amenities should be for

purchasers buying pre-construction so they know what they’re getting.”

Mr. Stables’ background is kinesiology, not architecture, but he insists that since founding his fitness consulting company Benchmark Group in 1999, he has spent enough time in condo gyms to know what works and what doesn’t.

“It’s sophisticated, functional design,” he says. “When speaking with developers and interior designers, I’m not going to challenge them on wall treatments. That’s their forte. They’re asking me where the mirrors go, what flooring to use.”

To create Movement Haus, he charges an initial fee that ranges between \$3,000-\$5,000. Additionally, he requests an exclusive marketing agreement with the developers. “When people move during interim occupancy, I’m asking the developer to promote Benchmark Group as the preferred service provider and to

hand out welcome packages. And then once condo board elected, it’s up to them. But there’s no cost at this point – it’s value added.”

Indeed, Sam Crignano a partner in Cityzen, the developer of L Tower, agrees that Mr. Stables’ expertise translates into another level of premium positioning in an ultra-competitive market. “Everyone has raised the bar,” he says, noting that building amenities are getting increasingly elaborate but can lack the follow-through. “Mark brings the ongoing programming to the table. A lot of these new condos have spas but they’re unused because no one is there to coordinate [them].”

This is why Ben Myers suggest that some developers have been inclined to forgo fitness facilities altogether, especially when a building is located in an urban area surrounded by gyms. “It keeps the maintenance fees down,” says the editor and executive vice president of Urbanation,

which tracks the condo market. “They can sell the space as another unit and reduce fees instead of it being a fitness room.”

Still, he says that fitness amenities foster a sense of community and the branding component can be incentivizing. “If someone can associate what you have on site with something they know and associate positively with, it will be good for sales.”

Mr. Stables’ initiative is not unprecedented. DNA initially wanted well-known Toronto trainer George Chaker to open an outpost of Diesel gym within the condo in 2003. Ultimately, he ended up taking a consultant role and has done the same more recently with Fly Condos.

“We talked about what it needs – how many people will be using the space and the budget,” says Mr. Chaker, who says he advised on matters such as where to position the treadmills and cardio equipment and the creation of an outdoor area for yoga.

While he does not expect to oversee classes, he has not ruled out a satellite space for Quadspin, the indoor cycling mini-chain where he now devotes most of his time. He says Fly was a “quick and easy fit” but he has no intention of branching out further.

In this way, Mr. Stables is hoping Movement Haus has the early edge over anyone else who sees the potential in fitness amenity design.

“It’s not only what he’s currently doing but what he will do along the way,” says Cityzen’s Mr. Crignano, explaining that condos continue to attract a wider demographic. “It’s how families will live in these buildings. [Mark] will be part of that exercise, designing amenities for kids of various ages.”