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Powder rooms are making their fated comeback

It may be compact but the humble powder room is getting a surprisingly outsized, even opulent, makeover.

By CARLI PHILIPS

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Michelle Rago x Bryan O'Sullivan | Decus Interiors.

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Don't underestimate the powder room. While modest in size, it has the power to make a big impression. As it's unlikely to be in everyday use, designers say that it's a space where even the most risk averse can feel comfortable experimenting.

"They are wonderful spaces to be expressive because they're experienced in short moments," says Philippa Rae of Philippa Rae Interiors in the UK, who renovated a four-storey Georgian townhouse for her clients in London with a heavily decorated guest bathroom.

"It may be a small room, but it has a strong sense of personality that leaves an impression rather than playing it safe."

It's an opportunity for conservative homeowners to pursue ideas they may not consider elsewhere, says Alexandra Donohoe Church, founder and creative director of Sydney-based Decus. "Because the footprint is contained, clients often feel more confident leaning into richer materials and making bolder decisions without it feeling overwhelming."

Decorative tiles, vivid stone, custom basins and unique sconces are just some of the imaginative design details elevating the half-bathroom from bland to brilliant.



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Philippa Rae Interiors.

For a guest bathroom that they designed in Sydney's Bondi Junction, designers Alexander &CO experimented with lining boards, green walls and traditional fixtures, creating a small space inspired by the classic garden potting shed.

"The timber wall cladding and floor tiles are deliberately of an external feel," explains marketing director Tess Glasson. And where a mirror would usually be a painting has been hung.

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"It's not typically a place for artwork, but it adds a point of interest and a moment of reflection in a space that's usually transitional. It's textured and full of unusual surprises, not like a bathroom at all."

Basins are also an opportunity to introduce character, with freestanding, integrated, wall-mounted, vessel and pedestal versions gaining popularity. Classic tapware with two faucets rather than just a single mixer is also making a comeback.

For a house they designed in Killcare, on the NSW Central Coast, Decus drenched the bathroom in tone-on-tone colour, anchoring the area with a chunky vanity made from veined Breccia Nera stone.



Alexander &Co.



The cover for the April issue of Mansion magazine.

With Porter's Paints' Obsidian on the walls and decorative blue tiles on the floor, the effect is moody and enveloping.

Rae says that her London powder room was designed to be unexpected: "There's a move from calmer, more layered spaces into something richer and more atmospheric."

The idea was to create a moment of delight, somewhere that feels transportive.

"Because it's a room that guests experience briefly, the clients felt free to be bolder. It carries a stronger decorative statement without overwhelming the house, almost like a hidden gem within the home, says Rae, who wrapped the room in large-scale forest-printed wallpaper from Cole & Son.

Far beyond wallpaper, designers are also pushing the boundaries of colour, texture and finish in wall treatments. Working in collaboration with homeowner Michelle Rago, designer Bryan O'Sullivan approached the powder room in their project as a "point of intrigue", layering the space with a hand-painted mural that has a faux tortoiseshell effect and a watercolour artwork.

"The powder room can often be overlooked but there's so much opportunity," says Rago.

This story is from the April issue of Mansion magazine.

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