

ensuite serenity

With textured finishes, bold black accents, and a pared-back aesthetic, this award-winning bathroom delivers minimalist styling with maximum impact.

Story: Gabrielle Chariton

When pictures of this stunning Scandi bathroom went gangbusters on social media, the team at smarterBATHROOMS+ realised they had an award-winning project on their hands.

'As soon as we started showing it, we got such an amazing response. So we kind of knew from the beginning that it was special,' says Claire Foot, marketing manager at smarterBATHROOMS+. 'I think because it's so sleek and streamlined, minimalistic without being plain, that's why it resonates with people so well.'

Luckily, the master ensuite struck a similar chord with the HIA award judges, who named it HIA Bathroom of the Year in 2016 and a finalist at this year's Australian Housing Awards.

The project was an unusual one for smarterBATHROOMS+ in that it was part of a new home build. 'Our usual

Vanessa Cook, design manager at smarterBATHROOMS+.

business model is renovations, where we strip out an existing bathroom or kitchen and replace it with a new one,' Claire explains. In this instance, the client contracted the business to design and fit all wet areas of the home – master ensuite, main family bathroom, powder room, kitchen and laundry – which the builder left as 'shells' for the team to work their magic in.

The creative force behind the project was design manager, Vanessa Cook. Her first challenge was to ensure that the styling of the wet areas worked in harmony with the rest of the home's interiors, and collaborated closely with Three C Architects and the project builder to achieve this.

The home, located in the bayside Melbourne suburb of Elwood, is characterised throughout by a certain casual elegance, the overwhelmingly neutral palette anchored by earthy textures. While all the wet areas were to reflect this minimalist aesthetic, the clients wanted their master ensuite to be a 'sanctuary from the craziness of everyday family life'. They also asked Vanessa to maximise the natural light and visually reference the home's beachside location.

A simple, uncluttered layout and restrained colour scheme underpin the pared-back, luxe feel of Vanessa's design. Large-format porcelain tiles, the colour of sun-bleached sand, blend seamlessly along the floor and walls. Because the single, east-facing window didn't admit enough light, a series of glass panels were integrated above the shower, and a translucent, frosted glass window was installed adjacent to the bathtub. The result: a space flooded with soft, diffused daylight.

A walk-through shower and floating vanity – crafted from American oak veneer and topped with a crisp, sculptural double basin – create a resort-style ambience while maximising the floorspace.

'The floating vanity really is the focal point of the room,' Vanessa says. 'It ▶





was designed to look as if a piece of timber is just floating from the wall. This meant there was no vanity storage, so the detailed framed mirrors also act as additional above-bench storage – it's functional as well as beautiful.'

Timber is an on-trend way to introduce warmth, and visually echoes the exposed structural beams which feature throughout the home's interiors. Vanessa specified a sandblasted, pre-finished veneer for the vanity and mirror frames to optimise water-resistance and durability.

Matte black accenting is a recurring decorative theme throughout the house, and has been used to great effect in the ensuite. The bold black tapware and bottle-traps, showerhead, window joinery and lights introduce an element of unexpected drama to the low-key palette.

All up, the room is a testament to Vanessa's considerate, collaborative approach and unique ability to listen to her clients and tailor a design that conforms to their needs. It's also the most recent in a long and distinguished line of award-winning projects from this innovative Melbourne-based company, which was established by directors Andrew Crawshaw and Alex Heaton more than 15 years ago.

smarterBATHROOMS+ provides an end-to-end design and construct service,

bathroom and kitchen arms of the business were marketed separately, but late last year saw them brought together with the introduction of the smarterBATHROOMS+ brand. 'The new branding reflects the scope of what we do, which is bathrooms, plus kitchens, plus laundries, plus flooring, plus wardrobes,' Claire explains.


With full in-house design and build capabilities, smarterBATHROOMS+ is a one-stop-shop for its customers. 'We do absolutely everything start to finish,' Claire says. Working on a phenomenal 150–160 homes per year, high-level communication between the designer and building supervisor responsible for each job eliminates unforeseen problems onsite, ensuring all projects run smoothly.

The company's 'big and talented' design team is a significant point of difference for smarterBATHROOMS+: 'While each designer will be assigned to a particular job, they do collaborate with each other quite a lot, nutting out solutions to tricky layouts, getting a fresh perspective on things...with so many experts under the one roof ideas and problem solving are always flying around to ensure the best result is achieved.'

While the ultimate reward is always a happy customer, Claire says smarterBATHROOMS+ 'love the HIA awards'.

'We always enter our best projects for the year, just to see how they go. So many people are involved in making



these projects happen, so winning an award is a good way to congratulate the team. Plus, being able to label ourselves and be known as an award-winning firm, I think that makes a big difference – not only to future clients but also cements our position within the industry.' 

Get the look

This ensuite, which designer Vanessa Cook says was inspired by the work of international interior architect Christian Liaigre, is a great showcase of some current bathroom trends, including the move to textured, matte surfaces, slimline finishes and timber accents. She used the following materials to build the look:

- 1500x750mm Venus Maximum porcelain tiles
- Black tile trim
- Clearwater Formosa bath
- Axa Uno BTW toilet with hideaway cistern
- White glass push plate
- Omvivo Neo 1400mm double basin on 1800mm rough-sawn American Oak floating shelf
- Rough-sawn American Oak mirrored shaver cabinets
- Smarter custom-made SS shower grate
- Astra Walker Matt Black Icon tapware and spouts, bottle traps, and shower
- Starfire shower screen



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