

# COLLEGE

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## THE NECESSARY ROOM

FROM BASIC TO LUXURY, SPARKLING TO YUCKY, ADVANCED TO OLD SCHOOL, COLLEGE RESTROOMS RUN THE GAMUT. WHAT'S NEW AND TRENDING IN RESTROOM DESIGN?

BY AMY NILSSTEIN



BY NOW IT'S COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT colleges are upping their dorm room game. Accommodations have become more homelike, more luxurious and more attractive in the race to attract and retain students. And that sales pitch leans heavily on restrooms. Take organizations like TriMark Properties, which serves students from the University of Florida, as example. They boast about their “shared or private bathrooms” right on their homepage.

The move makes sense. “Higher education, in particular, has shifted from bland institutional washrooms designs to higher-end designs,” says Will Haas, product manager, Bradley Corporation. “Recruitment is the main driving factor in elevating public restroom design in colleges and universities. Administrators want their restrooms to look top-notch and reflect innovation and forward-thinking design — not dated-looking styles.”

But college restrooms are about more than luxury. Hot-button issues include durability, ease of maintenance and water conservation opportunities. Here’s a look at what’s trending in restroom design.

### WATER WORKS

Low-flow bathroom fixtures have been the trend for a long time and for good reason. Less water use means lower water bills and a better chance of meeting LEED requirements. It’s also good public relations. “Universities promote sustainability as a means of attracting prospective students,” says Mike Gipson, product line manager, Sloan.

Gipson points to a “variety of new and retrofit products available to help achieve water conservation goals.” He notes that manual flushometers (the metal water diverter that uses an inline handle

to flush toilets or urinals) may be retrofitted with dual-flush handles, “allowing the user to choose between full or reduced flush options.”

There are also sensor-activated dual-flush flushometers available as new or retrofit products. These provided “automatic reduced flush based on the amount of time the user is in range,” according to Gipson. He notes that there is definitely a trend towards lower gallons per flush. “1.28 gallons per flush for toilets and 0.125 gallons per flush for urinals are among the fastest-growing segments.”

Haas, from Bradley Corporation, offers a caveat. “While the low-flow trend has been around for quite some time now, we’re seeing that some facilities are moving away from it largely because, at times, it can wreak havoc on older plumbing systems, especially with all the soap residue buildup in the pipes.”

Along with LEED, colleges and universities are “also beginning to take note of product transparency reports including Life Cycle Assessments (LCA), Environmental Declarations (EPD) and Health Product Declarations (HPD) which are designed to provide information about the full environmental impact of a product,” according to Gipson.

### BOTTLED UP

Each day in the U.S. more than 60 million plastic water bottles are thrown away, according to the Container Recycling Institute. Most end up in landfills or incinerators while millions litter America’s streets, parks and waterways. Of course, the best way to keep water bottles out of the waste stream is to not use them at all.

That’s the idea behind durable, reusable water bottles. Schools will often give these logo-emblazoned bottles away to students who are more than happy to

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fill and refill them. And that's the problem. Refilling tall water bottles on the go can be a hassle. In answer, many schools are adding bottle filling stations to their drinking fountains. "It's not much work to change out the water station," reports Ellen Sajdak, senior product manager, drinking water products, Elkay, noting that the job can be done in as little as half an hour.

The installation will take longer in buildings with older, non-ADA-compliant vitreous china water fountains. "That's a bit more involved," says Sajdak, noting that new framing will need to be added.

Far from set-it-and-forget-it, the unit comes with a \$125 filter that must be changed out for every 3,000 gallons of water flow. "That's about 22,000 16-ounce bottles worth of water," says Sajdak. "But not everyone needs a filter. Some cities have great water."

### AIR DRY OR SCARE DRY

Automatic hand dryers have been around for decades and users have a love/hate relationship

with them. From a maintenance and facilities standpoint, this technology has a lot going for it. A white paper from World Dryer estimates that the average person uses 2.5 paper towel sheets every time they dry their hands. At two cents per sheet, costs add up fast, even before factoring in the labor it takes to restock dispensers and clean up the inevitable mess of towels left behind.

Manufacturers have addressed other complaints about the technology. Over the years, automatic hand dryers have become faster, more powerful and quieter. "At Dyson we spend \$6.6 million a week on research and development," says Dyson Design Engineer Anthony Hall. "A good portion of that is concerned with making our existing products even better." The company has even come up with an all-in-one tap/hand dryer to eliminate water that often accumulates on the floor under air dryers.

So why are people still reaching for paper towels? Some are concerned that the air coming from automatic hand dryers is dirty. Manufacturers have addressed this with HEPA filters and antimicrobial technology that inhibits the growth of

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bacteria, mold and fungus. “When the machine is in use, as well as drying hands it’s effectively acting as an air purifier, capturing airborne contaminants in its filters,” insists Hall.

But all of the advanced technology will not remove the “ick” factor in public restrooms. People don’t want to touch anything: toilet flushers, sink taps or — heaven forbid — the exit door. Dan Storto, president of World Dryer, suggests installing a complimentary paper towel dispenser by the exit door. “You would still see a significant reduction in overall paper towel use,” he says. But mostly he shakes his head at the notion. “We touch our cell phones all the time and they’re quite dirty.”

Dyson’s Hall agrees. “I think that fixating on the door handle is a bit of a distraction. As soon as you enter a public washroom you’ll likely be inhaling quite a few airborne particles and... we generally live to see another day.”

### HEALTHY CLEAN

After taking on the Nervous Nellies who are afraid to touch any surface in a public restroom,

it’s time to admit that public restroom surfaces can, in fact, be dangerous. MRSA, Hepatitis, E. coli, flu and more lurk in restrooms and other places around campus.

Proper cleaning will protect students, faculty and staff from pathogens in restrooms. Robert Richey, custodial supervisor, San Juan College in Farmington, NM, explains in a testimonial from Kaivac. “One of our goals is to break the ‘circle of infection’ and protect community health by continuously working with and training staff in better methods using the right equipment to foster hygienic outcomes.”

This cleaning for health versus cleaning for appearance mentality means focusing on “common touch points.” In a restroom those touch points include all parts of the toilet and urinals, sink basin and handles, soap and towel dispensers and, yes, door handles and push plates.

Cleaning these areas regularly will ensure that your college restrooms look good because they are good. ■

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