

## Interview

### The bathroom is becoming green, smart and multifunctional

**Frankfurt am Main, 4 March 2021. What is the mainspring of the industry in this situation, characterised by contradictions as it is? Economic collapse on the one hand, a surge in renovation on the other; social deprivation versus increasing media culture; spruce houses or apartments in which, apart from video visitors, no guests are expected. What does this all mean for the bathroom? Lawyer Jens J. Wischmann, Managing Director of the Association of the German Sanitary Industry (VDS) and joint founder of the trend platform Pop up my Bathroom, sets out the three most important trends in bathroom design, discusses the coming surge in renovation for private bathrooms, and what he hopes ISH digital 2021 will bring.**



Jens J. Wischmann, Managing Director, Association of the German Sanitary Industry (VDS)  
Source: Association of the German Sanitary Industry / Karsten Jipp

#### **Mr. Wischmann, how do you view the current economic situation in the sanitary industry?**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* For self-evident reasons, the home is now the focal point of our lives. Even if living and where we live formed a major topic before the pandemic, now it has gained in importance again: people are investing in their homes, renovating them, working at do-it-yourself, creating a fine living space. The popularity of the subject means that the bathroom is becoming an increasing object of attraction. More and more, it is seen as a fully recreational room – with all associated expectations by way of aesthetic design and

convenient fittings and furnishings. The major importance of the living environment for quality of life in the private sphere is certainly a driving force for the good to very good economic state of the sanitary industry in Germany. The bathroom is becoming a pleasant retreat within one's own four walls and is enjoying an enormous upgrade through higher-quality furnishings.

**On the other hand, the industry still needs to counterbalance restrictions, too – is that not the case?**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* Given the excellent conditions in the market, the challenges faced by the trade come principally from the thin nature of the workforce, with hardly any reserves, not least because for years we have had a problem when it comes to recruiting new entrants to the industry. Of course those of our member businesses which are strongly export-focused have also been hit quite directly by the global consequences of the pandemic for the economy – so far, however, with a manageable fall in sales. So, as a leading trade fair, ISH would have been just right in its timing and would have provided new incentives in this stage of the pandemic. But I firmly expect to see these incentives to come equally from the purely digital ISH digital 2021 – even if certainly not to the same extent.

**You use Pop up my Bathroom at ISH to pick on the relevant bathroom trends. So has a lot happened over the last two years?**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* Of course we want to reflect current trends in style and to promote new developments, but our priority aim has always been to identify and spotlight longer-term developments early on. And yes, a lot *has* happened over the last two years. These are exciting times and sanitary businesses need to respond to social changes and general conditions – for instance in the form of new products and concepts. Through Pop up my Bathroom we are attempting to launch incentives and to shift the focus onto major developments in the bathroom. In this process a number of trends are intertwined. One result of this, for instance, is the private spa – a major trend, which we analysed, designated and communicated twelve years ago at ISH 2009.

**In Pop up my Bathroom how do you estimate current trends, and what messages do you have for the industry and for the general public?**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* At the moment we are seeing three dominant bathroom trends and two trend drivers. .Green Bathroom, .Smart Bathroom and .Living Bathroom describe the developments determining the design and equipment of the bathroom of the future, because in the first place consumers want to invest in an environmentally-aware and value-oriented way, secondly smart technology is setting new standards in hygiene, convenience and the nature of the bathroom experience, and thirdly people have higher quality expectations which a bathroom must fulfil as a place to spend time in and higher expectations of its potential uses, as a relaxing private spa and healthcare zone. While the trend towards the .Living Bathroom is becoming more important again through the general experience of the pandemic and the increasing regard paid to house and home which has resulted, I would point to two drivers – the growing awareness of hygiene and the backlog of renovation needed by private bathrooms and (semi-public) sanitary facilities – which are industry-specific and are likely to impact on market shares to the benefit of the respective product segments. Loads of old bathrooms are waiting to be given a new life. And of course the pandemic is also closely involved in the subject of bathrooms and is making people more aware of questions of hygiene.

**At the last ISH the trend forum Pop up my Bathroom attempted to win the industry over to the rising topic of a more daring coloration – and was very successful in doing so. What motto have you taken as your prime statement this year?**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* We are taking up a development which is attractive both to the trade and to consumers – especially to clients who want renovation. Actually this development is not new, but rather in the last few years it has been working unobtrusively in the background and is now having a major impact on the layout of bathrooms and on product design: Increasingly, "front of wall" products are undergoing a symbiosis with "rear of wall" products – we call it "inside | outside." Using this motto we shall also be showcasing the three bathroom trends at ISH digital 2021. For this subject is not only becoming more and more important for the development of the industry, but it also shows how closely design and trade businesses, lifestyle and technology go hand in hand.

**Renovation seems to be a major topic in the German-speaking countries – you have even spoken of a surge in renovation.**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* Over the next few years the real-estate market will be seeing a prolonged surge in renovations. In Germany renovation of bathrooms comes at the very top of these planned renovation works. Our survey has shown that 16.7 million Germans intend to invest in their bathrooms before long. 6.2 million Germans are even planning a general overhaul. Moreover the pandemic is operating as a catalyst. The home is becoming ever more important. Given this backdrop, the industry's leading international trade fair, ISH digital 2021 in Frankfurt, will be of particular importance. I think we shall also see a number of new developments which will contribute to simplifying bathroom renovation.

**What motivation do apartment or house owners have in renovating their bathrooms?**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* Builders' clients who for nearly 20 years have scarcely invested any capital in their own bathrooms are benefiting now from the enormous technological development in sanitary products which has taken place over the last few years. In such a renovation process these properties will therefore not only come to participate in the modern standard of a lifestyle-based bathroom architecture; they will also be able to enjoy innovative bathroom products – such as shower WCs, or a spacious, floor-level shower. The concrete added value which this work brings can certainly contribute to an increase in the property's value.

**The VDS is calling for a new approach to severely outmoded bathrooms on the part of the decision makers, housing associations and landlords. What do you mean by that?**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* In rented properties bathroom renovations frequently cover only what is absolutely necessary. Often the landlords are put off by the capital-investment costs or potential loss of rents. Yet a bathroom renovation represents financial input to the maintenance of a property's value like no other modernisation measure.

**But it is not just in private bathrooms that renovation would need to come. Parents of schoolchildren will be glad to see that the VDS is also calling for the modernisation of toilets in educational institutions.**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* Going to the toilet, and then washing your hands, is a basic human need, which we in our highly developed industrial country must also recognise. Some of the conditions in German schools, kindergartens and universities are dreadful. A change of course on the part of those responsible is absolutely necessary.

### **What is your assessment of the coming ISH digital 2021?**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* Digital formats cannot replace physical experience in the long run. After a year or more, with no actual exhibitor presence at trade fairs, we can see that already. I think it is important, despite the pandemic, to stick to this year's fair date – after all, ISH is not only a national event; it is a leading international trade fair. Here, for more than 60 years, a whole industry meets to do business, to provide mutual inspiration, to fix benchmarks, and to supply further training. A trade fair's digital platform will certainly not be able to reproduce completely all functions, but in the history of ISH we shall be quite definitely experiencing the evolutionary launch of a new generation of trade fair. Both Messe Frankfurt and the industry will benefit from this experience, and over the next few years ISH will undergo a transformation, becoming an innovative hybrid leading international trade fair: wholly to the advantage of visitors and exhibitors.

### **Are you satisfied with the level of registrations by your partners from the bathroom-experience world for ISH digital 2021?**

*Jens J. Wischmann:* No, there could certainly be more. Some market players will not be there, unfortunately. Even if the economic situation for many German sanitary brands is positive due to an increased demand in the home market, a commitment as an exhibitor to ISH digital 2021 is linked with numerous benefits. Moreover ISH digital 2021 is a clear investment in confirming ISH as a leading international trade fair. German sanitary brands benefit from the location and the reputation of ISH over the whole world. Without ISH as a shop window, many German companies would not be where they are now: ISH as a trade fair, and a presence there even if it is "only" being held digitally, is thus also an expression of the leading role performed by a whole industry. But I can also understand that individual reasons are involved in rejecting attendance. Shortly however we shall be seeing that the level of registrations is increasing from day to day – the opportunity to visit at short notice is definitely one of the advantages of the digital format.

#### **Press releases & images:**

[www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/press](http://www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/press)

#### **Social media:**

[www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/facebook](http://www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/facebook)

[www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/twitter](http://www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/twitter)

[www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/youtube](http://www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/youtube)

[www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/linkedin](http://www.ish.messefrankfurt.com/linkedin)

[www.instagram.com/building.technologies.messeffm](http://www.instagram.com/building.technologies.messeffm)

**Contact:**

Aleksandra Götz

Tel.: +49 69 75 75-6144

Aleksandra.Goetz@messefrankfurt.com

Messe Frankfurt Exhibition GmbH

Ludwig-Erhard-Anlage 1

60327 Frankfurt am Main

[www.messefrankfurt.com](http://www.messefrankfurt.com)

**Background information on Messe Frankfurt**

Messe Frankfurt is the world's largest trade fair, congress and event organiser with its own exhibition grounds. The Messe Frankfurt Group employs around 2,500\* people in a total of 30 subsidiaries. The company generated annual sales of approximately €250\* million in 2020. Even in difficult times caused by the coronavirus pandemic, we are globally networked with our industry sectors. We have close ties with our industry sectors and serve our customers' business interests efficiently within the framework of our Fairs & Events, Locations and Services business fields. One of the Group's key USPs is its closely knit global sales network, which extends throughout the world. Our comprehensive range of services – both onsite and online – ensures that customers worldwide enjoy consistently high quality and flexibility when planning, organising and running their events. We are expanding our digital expertise with new business models. The wide range of services includes renting exhibition grounds, trade fair construction and marketing, personnel and food services. Headquartered in Frankfurt am Main, the company is owned by the City of Frankfurt (60 percent) and the State of Hesse (40 percent).

For more information, please visit our website at: [www.messefrankfurt.com](http://www.messefrankfurt.com)

\* preliminary figures 2020