

1

BIG IS BEST

The new Tiles & Baths Direct showroom in north London is grand in scale and designed to reflect 35 years of experience and knowledge, says senior manager *Gary Parker*

Words *Amelia Thorpe* Photos *Paul Craig*



2



3

It must be one of the biggest mid-to-high-end bathroom and tile showrooms in the country. At 30,000sq ft, TBK is a monolithic structure a stone's throw from London's North Circular Road and formally opened in November 2019 by Tiles & Baths Direct in the year the company celebrated its 35th anniversary. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to put all those years of experience and knowledge of the industry into one place," says senior manager Gary Parker.

"It's not the typical English showroom," says Parker, 51. "Most of our products come from Italy and we've chosen a luxury-boutique style of the sort you might find in Milan and in small, central London showrooms, but we've done it on a much larger scale." There are more than 30 settings, many with bespoke furniture and all fully tiled, on the first and mezzanine floors devoted to TBK Design (mid-level, starting from £5,000 rising to £10,000 for a

bathroom) and TBK Bespoke (tailor-made luxury, starting from £10,000 to the world is your oyster). The TBK Tiles Factory Outlet ground floor is devoted to affordable products, including competitively priced tiles and bathrooms from £1,000.

Having moved from a site around the corner that's now being redeveloped, the new showroom represents an investment of more than £1million, and about nine months of time spent on designing and fitting the first floor alone. "It's important to give people a vision of what can be done," says Parker, who has worked for Tiles & Baths Direct for 32 years. "Years ago, bathrooms were considered a necessity, but now our industry has become fashion-led – people have more bathrooms in their houses and they want them to be beautiful and reflect the standard of other parts of their homes." He also points to the need to showcase a large variety of products and styles. "Ideas and expectations are so different these days," he adds. ▶



4



6



5

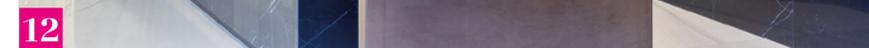
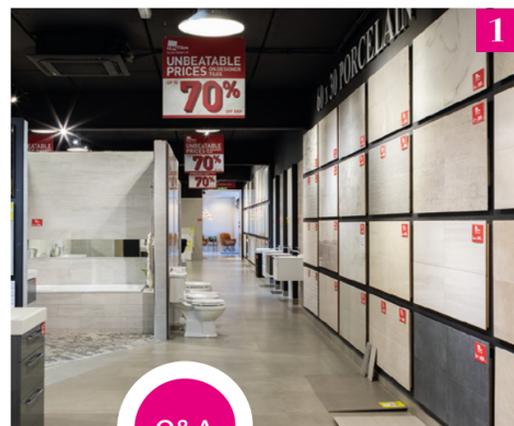
1 Senior manager Gary Parker
2 Looking across the first-floor TBK Design showroom area
3 Axor brassware and vanity units, including Duravit L-Cube, right

4 & 5 & 6 The TBK Bespoke showroom displays inspiring roomsets featuring luxurious-looking custom pieces to cater for the top end of the market

► During the COVID-19 lockdown, the showroom has been closed and most of the staff furloughed. For Parker himself, the lockdown experience has been challenging and thought-provoking. "It's made many of us look at our businesses in different ways," he says. "We've been given time to consider how to streamline the company and make it more efficient, plus enhance and improve our service – down to thinking about how easy it is for customers in the future to walk in the door and buy their bathrooms and tiles."

Kitchen and bedroom displays were due to be installed in the empty top floor of the showroom in May, but plans have been put on hold because of lockdown. "It has made us re-think our approach and consider how we might best use that space," he says.

For now, Parker is focused on making the most of the new bathroom and tile displays for when the showroom can be re-opened. "They show that we know what we're doing," he says. "It's more important than ever now that, when customers give us deposits, they know they're in safe hands." ■



Q&A

What is your greatest challenge?

"Creating the impossible. But when you put your mind to it, it's amazing what can be achieved"

What is your greatest opportunity?

"Life! If you're happy and successful in what you do, life will be rewarding"

Strange but true

"I've been working in this industry for 32 years. It's strange that every day still presents new challenges and hurdles to be overcome"

1 & 3 Inside the ground floor TBK Tiles Factory Outlet

2 Axor mixers, thermostatic valves and shower heads on display

4 TBK Design, left, and TBK Bespoke showroom areas

5 Brassware by Gessi, Dornbracht, Lefroy Books, Zucchetti and Cifal on display, with wash bowls by Glass Design in the foreground

6 Tiles on display in TBK Design showroom

7 L to R, Glass Design Tommy column basin, Glass Design Elle Plus washstand and Cielo Catino Tondo washstand

8 Glass Design Tommy Metropole Vetro basin

9 Onyx and marble slabs on display in the TBK Bespoke area

10 TBK Bespoke showroom with custom pieces on display

11 Balteco Halo bath and Artelinea Dama vanity

12 The reception desk on the ground floor, with TBK Tiles Factory Outlet on the left

2

1

11

12

3

4

5

6

10

9

8

7



1



2



PROFILE

Tiles & Baths Direct

Who are we?

Gary Parker, senior manager

Where are we?

Elite House, West Hendon Broadway, London, NW9 7BW

Tel: 02082 022 223

www.tilesandbathsdirect.co.uk

What we do...

Bathroom and tile retailer

Business history

It was founded 36 years ago as a tile showroom. Bathrooms and kitchens were added to the mix 27 years ago, followed by bedrooms about seven years ago. The business is privately owned by Stephen Joel

Bathroom products include those by: Hansgrohe, Duravit, Zuchetti, Kos, Gessi, Dornbracht, Majestic, Matki, Milldue, Novello, Karol, Artelinea, SSI, Bette, Kaldewei, Victoria + Albert Baths, Vola, Lefroy Brooks, Grohe and Glass Design. Bathroom prices start from £1,000; average £5,000 to £10,000; most expensive to date, £165,000. Services are design and supply only. The company imports its own ranges of tiles. Kitchens and bedroom suppliers are currently under review

Sales stats

"Given that much of 2019 was spent moving and renovating the new showroom, our aim last year was to maintain what we had done the year before, which we did"

Gary Parker

Staffing levels

33



3



4



5

1 Novello Quari vanity unit and shelf, with Glass Design Mode Lux countertop basin

2 Pelle vanity against a backdrop of Intouch Blanco Gris Natural wall tiles

3 Looking along the length of the first floor TBK Design showroom area

4 Novello Calix vanity unit with Ashton & Bentley Xinia freestanding bath

5 Novello Quari vanity unit and Novello mirrors with a Breeze freestanding bath by Waters Baths of Ashbourne

6 Tesi vanity and Victoria & Albert Baths Vetralla tub with Tombolo bath rack



6