

MANSION

ELEMENTS

BIDETS HAVE THEIR DAY

Long a source of bad jokes, the bathroom fixture is catching on in high-end homes

BY SANETTE TANAKA

THE BIDET may finally be having its moment.

A personal cleansing method that traditionally requires a stand-alone, toilet-like fixture, the bidet populates bathrooms all over Asia, parts of South America and Europe—but has mostly been a source of bad jokes in the U.S. In the 18th century, when the bidet was invented by the French, the British dismissed it as immoral and risqué. Early settlers in America adopted that sentiment, and the practice never caught on.

Now there's increased demand spurred by foreigners planting roots

here and Americans experiencing bidets when abroad. Plus new technologies are breaking down the bidet barrier, primarily by incorporating bidet functions into the primary toilet, thus doing away with the need for that unfamiliar second basin. Many of the new hybrids have built-in dryers, eliminating the need for toilet paper, and proponents say the result is more hygienic, effective and eco-friendly.

Last year 20% of new single-family luxury homes in the U.S. included bidets, up from 12% in 2009, according to a survey of builders conducted by Home Innovation Research Labs, a subsidiary of the National Association of Home Builders. Toto, the

world's largest toilet manufacturer with headquarters in Kitakyushu, Japan, reports that U.S. sales of their bidet seats—toilet-shaped seats with bidet plumbing lines and nozzles built into them—have quadrupled in the past 10 years.

Still, bidet sales in the U.S. are dwarfed in comparison to international markets. Duravit, an international maker of bathroom furnishings with headquarters in Hornberg, Germany, sells 60,000 bidet products per year in the U.S., compared with 3 million pieces sold in Japan alone.

Here is a look at some high-end bidet products. Costs don't include installation.



BLISS PREMIER CLASS BIDET SEAT

Manufacturing company Bio Bidet's newest bidet seat has a three-in-one stainless steel nozzle with a vortex water stream, posterior wash and feminine wash. In all of the washes, air bubbles are injected into the water to make the flow gentler. A hybrid heating system allows for immediate warm water on demand, and the nozzle self-cleans by washing water over and through the nozzle to remove debris and mineral deposits. The bidet seat is heated and comes with a wireless remote, in case you don't want to touch the side of the bowl or want to flush it from across the room. There's also a side panel with touch-screen buttons.

Bio Bidet, based in Algonquin, Ill., sells approximately 40,000 to 50,000 bidets in the U.S. per year.

Cost: \$699



TOTO WASHLET S300E AND S350E

To self-clean, the Washlet S300e and S350e use water that's been disinfected by passing a small amount of the home's incoming water supply over electrically charged plates. After the user flushes, these Washlets—Toto's term for bidet seats—mist the bowl with electrolyzed water and continue to spray every eight hours to keep it clean. Flow options include a rear cleanse, front cleanse and rear soft cleanse—and all can be set to either oscillate or pulsate. There are five settings for water pressure and temperature. The Washlet also boasts an automatic air deodorizer and heated seat. A touch-pad control allows users to program up to two personalized settings.

Cost: \$1,590 for the S300e and \$1,700 for the S350e



STARCK 2 FLOORSTANDING BIDET

Designed by French designer Philippe Starck, this traditional bidet has a faucet and handle so the user can adjust the water temperature. The bidet measures just over 15-inches tall. This product appeals to people who have grown up with similar cleansing methods, says Tim Schroeder, president of Duravit USA. "A traditional bidet is really for someone who was potty-trained with bidets," he adds. Duravit also offers several Philippe Starck-designed bidet/toilet combinations with heated seats, multiple wash options, dryers and self-cleaning functionalities. Duravit offers five bidet seats and 40 floor-mounted bidet products in total.

Cost: \$1,400-\$1,500, including faucet

THE NUMI

Introduced in 2011, the Numi remains the only toilet with integrated bidet functionality that has been launched in the past two years in the U.S. by Kohler. This toilet/bidet combo has frosted glass side panels, a vitreous china elongated bowl and a rectangular seat. The toilet's auto flush adjusts depending on how long



the user sits on the seat; it also senses the user's presence and opens and closes its lid automatically. "We like to think we're saving marriages with the seat coming back down," says Brian Hedlund, senior product manager for toilets and bidets at Wisconsin-based Kohler. The seat is also heated, and a foot heater warms the floors within a few square feet. Bluetooth-delivered music can play through two rear speakers, and

illuminated panels on the toilet's sides display eight colors, including white. "You can have Numi randomly and slowly transition from one color to another; you can program a color for each day of the week or you can set it to a random color," Mr. Hedlund says. Users can control the position of the spray, water temperature and water flow, as well as dryer temperature and air pressure.

Cost: \$6,653



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