



Splash out: Saphyr bath with massage system and lighting, far left, from £15,519, and Belgravia oval bath, left, £2,794, with Anneau de Saturn basin mixer taps, £855, all from Bathrooms International

PREMIERSHIP FIXTURES

Footballers have simple tastes in bathrooms, says Mary Gold. They like the best

THAT Sol Campbell is in deep water, I see. And it's all down to a woman again. Only this time there's no scandal — well, that makes a change. The old scallywag can relax because his long-term girlfriend, the South African interiors hot-shot Kelly Hoppen, has designed a bathroom for him, a place to rest those weary muscles after a match or hide from a blonde clutching the results of a DNA test.

The 29-year-old England defender, who has been dating the millionairess designer since Christmas, asked her to commission a bathroom for his new house where he can watch telly, listen to classical music (Plácido Domingo, if you please) and get away from it all — no telephones, no solicitors. Footballers, it appears, like the same type of bathroom and their tastes are simple: they like the best. They want a big bath, preferably with room for two or more people (over, missus) and plenty of space to walk around with their kit off in a temperature of 21C, a plasma TV set in the wall and a music system with waterproof speakers. They also like steam rooms (from £1,000, and so good for the complexion — think lucrative contracts with Gillette).

They all want bathrooms like their mates have, according to Laurence Pidgeon, boss of Alternative Plans, which supplies top-jolly bathrooms to the great, the good, and... er, the filthy rich. He says: "After the match the players all sit together in those great big baths and talk about what they have bought recently — cars, holidays in exclusive resorts, and home improve-

ments. If one bloke has just fitted a spa or a steam room, then they all want one. It's sweet really."

Pidgeon's company has provided bathrooms (and kitchens) for several footballers, including Mario Melchiot, formerly of Chelsea, Matt Oakley, of Southampton, and the former Chelsea midfielder Roberto Di Matteo. "Italians have

Pop stars push the boat out even further than footballers do

the best taste because Italian bathrooms are really tip-top — twin sinks, marble, mosaic — the lot. They also like unusual washbasins of the birdbath, beaten-silver variety."

So whatever happened to that Footballers' Wives image of a young man with more money than he deserves, who goes for the gold key pattern around the washbasin and the double-horrid mosaic in the bath?

That, says Laurence Pidgeon, is a cliché and it's unfair. "Thirty years ago footballers didn't go abroad very much. Now, especially the guys in the Premiership, they go to incredible hotels all over the world. They see a superb bathroom and they think 'I like this'. The Di Matteos of this world influence their colleagues. Why else would a bloke from Southampton come in here with his own bathroom designer? If a guy is

earning £100,000 a week, he's hardly likely to go down to B&Q, is he?"

Max Pike, who has been in business for 25 years and is known as the "Godfather of bathrooms", admits he is "snooty" about how a bathroom should look. "I leave ordinary bathrooms to other people," he says, and although he won't tell you which footballer or pop star has been in that afternoon he will tell you the kind of bathroom different people go for.

"Footballers tend to have new money, so they go for very trendy stuff. Pop stars are often that bit older and want something that will last for years to come."

Any names? "No I'm sorry, I can't say, but because of music copyright laws pop stars know there will be money coming in for a long time, so they push the boat out even more than footballers."

Pike, a former Army officer (the Kenya Regiment), strikes me as a brisk, straightforward, no-nonsense bloke. So what's his bathroom like? "It's very straightforward — no nonsense," he says briskly.

Bathroom experts can often tell by looking at the room what kind of person lives there: dustbin-lid showers and a steam room says sportsman; a stone bath with Jo Malone toiletries and candles littered about means pop star. The French like blue-glass Baccarat taps (£3,000 a pair). Russians go for opulence — Max Pike does a bathroom, at about £30,000, that wouldn't look out of place in the Winter Palace. Even in London there is a great bath-

room divide: Wapping lofts mean Japanese minimalist — a stand-alone white bath on decking, preferably in the living room; Fulham and Chelsea means restrained country-house style; Wandsworth and Battersea are littered with wet rooms, which are very popular with gays (just don't ask, OK?)

Arabs like white, white and more white. Surprising that, when you think they would like taps of the gold dolphin variety.

"Never, never presume what people would like," says Laurence Pidgeon. "Once I was asked to do a bathroom for some Bahrainis who lived in a little West London enclave. I thought I knew what they wanted, so I got out gold and silver taps studded with rhinestones."

"When they arrived the whole family looked at each other as if to say 'What the blinking flip is this?' It taught me a lesson."

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