

want perfection." Nor is there anything country about the gleaming copper baths surrounded by Corian that feature in Dornbracht's new Elemental Spa concept (pictured on previous pages; AY Architects will supply a similar look); or about shower splashbacks of Corten, a material often called "weathering steel" as it takes on an uneven patina with the flow of time and water; or about Stone Age's newest bathroom installations that feature floor-to-ceiling white marble, honed rather than polished to avoid associations with what Stone Age's director Gary Walters calls marble's "cheesy" past. Rather, these are all graphic, architectural looks, inspired by a new appreciation of the beauty of a great big hunk of natural material.

Walters, who has recently worked with the architects Eva Jiricna at the V&A Galleries and Julian Powell Tuck on the installation of a 3.8m-long, half-tonne Piedra Plana Extra stone worktop in a London home (which needed 10 men and a crane to install it), confirms that the trend is largely architect-dictated. "Architects are specifying pieces as big as they think they can get away with – for wall cladding, bathrooms and kitchens. The only thing that inhibits how big you can go is the logistics – we like to put in pieces as big as we physically can without breaking them or their surroundings."

Suppliers are adapting to these new demands. While Stone Age's standard tiles are a maximum 60cm x 60cm, customers are increasingly asking for individual slabs of stone that are the actual width or height of the wall itself as shower splashbacks, counter tops with integrated carved



refurbishment of a private home set on the mountain, accessible via a James Bond "Blofeldt"-style tunnel. The rock theme continues inside with a stone-lined entrance and marble slabs instead of tiles in the bathrooms.

Bernerd also insists on wooden floorboards "as wide as we can get them", and favours huge slabby metal furniture from London design team Based Upon, which creates raw but delicately decorated metal-sprayed dining tables and furniture for private homes around the world (a 3m table costs from £20,000). However, Bernerd says it's not just about scale. The overall effect should be one of blanket coverage, so that areas look like continuous "big expanses" of marble or stone (or if you're wedded to mosaic, the only way to do it now is across a large area). "It's not about using these materials as a gesture, it's about using them as a damn huge statement."

For Christopher Prain of Christopher Chanond Interior Design, big, and in particular natu-

ral and big, is the only way forward in large homes today. He has recently completed a turnkey project in Surrey using bespoke 1m x 1m limestone floor tiles in the living areas, huge walnut wall panels in the study complete with ebony shadow gaps, polished plaster walls made to resemble large chunks of stone and decorative slabs – as well as a bathroom with cantilevered slabs of stone made into basin counter tops and secret storage. Says Prain, "Proportionally, a large house requires larger slabs of material and, as these require working with the very best craftsmen, the end result is bespoke, unique and luxurious."

Certainly, Kelly Hoppen loves to use big materials in open, cavernous spaces such as her own converted school science laboratory in London that totals 4,700ft: an impressive, high-ceilinged home in which she's made a big impact with a slabby Boffi kitchen of stainless steel worktops and block-style wenge stained oak cabinets (pictured above), and a bathroom with a hunk of black oak decking in the centre paired with white marble flooring from the Limestone Gallery. "In a large space it can be very difficult to add a feeling of warmth," she says. "Using materials and objects of a big scale helps to fill the space and create that warm feeling by adding wonderful new textures."

As for the materials themselves, says Jay Osgerby of Barber Osgerby, the current trend of marble, stone, hunks of oak or onyx and rosewood (the last two are favoured by Prain) is "a reaction to the frippery of plastic – the mass-produced". Regarding his own choice of white marble,

## "There's something quite stunning about a large chunk of stone. There's a radiance to the incredibly dense material with its beautiful finish."

basins or single-piece kitchen worktops (particularly on kitchen islands), where seamless, tough materials are preferable for cooking and washing practicalities as well as aesthetics. But if clients can't get pieces large enough into their houses, they will match up the vein patterns on fitting, so surfaces still look like a single excavated chunk.

Such seamlessness of materials is the big draw for Target Living's designer Tara Bernerd, a self-confessed "hunks, chunks and slabs girl" whose addiction to larger-than-average slugs of materials extends to the outside of her newest project, the Marco restaurant – Marco Pierre White's new collaboration with Roman Abramovich at Stamford Bridge, Chelsea. In a radical departure from the original building – a fish and chip restaurant – she's clad the outside in "really strong and very handsome" giant chunks

of black African granite. These will not only withstand the thousands of football fans walking by it every week on match days, and obliterate the memory of what was there before, but will also mark it as a real destination restaurant. "You can't interpret the building as anything other than something that has 'arrived'," she says of the "indulgent" take on "chunky" influences.

Elsewhere, Bernerd is using a rocky outcrop of the Swiss Alps near Gstaad as inspiration for the



Top: Kelly Hoppen's kitchen. Left: Bathroom International's Papillon bath in black granite, from £27,000.