



Traditional brassware was specified from Bathrooms International throughout The Grove hotel, Hertfordshire

report: Sophie Baylis

Seven-star service

Specifier to the stars and some of the most prestigious hotels worldwide, the Middle East market is particularly impressed by Bathrooms International. Creative director

Cheryl Gurner explains why



Cheryl Gurner tells it like it is. "We're basically the best. Not that I want to sound big headed or anything but you can say I said so!"

Gurner doesn't need column inches to endorse the success of Bathrooms International, its reputation speaks volumes. "The Burj Al Arab in Dubai, The Emirates Palace hotel in Abu Dhabi, The Bellagio in Las Vegas", Gurner reels off a list of former clients from her bulging contacts book, which reads like a Who's Who to the hotel industry. The Connaught Hotel, London, (check), The Hyatt Regency, Dubai (check), The Grove

hotel, Hertfordshire, (check). "These are excellent examples of how our products can be used in different setting," says Gurner. "The Emirates Palace was all about glitz and glamour whereas The Grove was more contemporary – both look great."

Business is booming at Bathrooms International. "We are regularly approached by developers, architects and even boutique-hotel owners. Our work has basically become legendary. Virtually every hotel seems to be approaching us for one reason or another."

'Us' is Cheryl herself, a former interior designer turned creative director of

Bathrooms International, and her partner Peter, whose professional roots lie in architecture. The business is three-fold; split between a retail showroom in London, private residential work that runs to palaces, yachts and even the homes of major celebrities (Cheryl is unwilling to name drop), and a contract division, operating from offices in Hendon.

In each case, the products sold or specified graduate towards the luxurious end of the market and although projects are not dictated by size, "no project is too big, no project is too small, it's all about opening doors for the future," Guerner says, they are bound by a common desire for the best –

the best service, the best products, and the best finished result.

"We have an in-depth understanding of the design process because of our individual backgrounds," she says. "This, coupled with the fact that we represent exclusive brands rather than general brands, means that our product knowledge is one hundred percent."

Guerner's confidence is well founded and clearly she is known and trusted by the best in the business. When specifying for the 7-star Burj Al Arab in 1998 – instantly recognisable by its sail-shaped structure and lavish interior design – Bathrooms International teamed up with renowned architectural practise Khuan Chew & Associates. Six years later when supplying the 7-star Emirates hotel, rated among one of the most impressive in the world, it joined creative forces with KY Chik Associates of Singapore to roll out bathroom products across the entire hotel. More recently, Bathrooms International has supplied the Atlantis Hotel on Dubai's iconic Palm Island.

"Although we merely provide products, in 80 percent of our contract work we are invited to participate in the design concept," Gurner explains. "I am personally invited to be involved in all discussions relating to the products that are specified, as well as the various options available, plus we always advise on the position of the products so that they not only function properly but are user-friendly."

Indeed, the name Bathrooms International is almost as recognisable among the design cognoscenti of the Middle East as the hotels that play host to its products. By the early 1970s, Peter Gurner had already established a reputation as the leading provider of

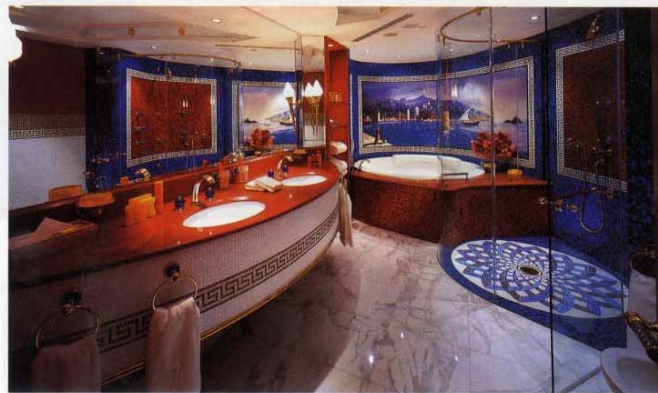


"Fortunately I am very designer and specifier-friendly because I was one"

left: A bathroom setting showing the For Him basins, exclusively designed for Bathrooms International and available from its Calista collection

right: The Burj Al Arab, Dubai, is instantly recognisable for its sail-shaped structure and lavish interior design

below: The Burj Al Arab hotel, Dubai features Bathroom International products



exclusive bathroom products to the well-heeled homes of Belgravia, Knightsbridge, Chelsea, Kensington and Mayfair. Pioneering a style synonymous with luxury, by the mid 1970s he was working with a number of property developers, beginning his quick ascent into the Middle East market where he was overwhelmed with commissions. His first came from the Royal families of Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait and Oman in 1975-6.

Since then, a staunch belief that 'expert knowledge' would distinguish the business from that of others has bolstered Bathroom International's day-to-day dealings and subsequent successes. "We know every product that we represent. We know its ins and outs, its failings, if any, and its benefits," says Gurner. "We have complete and utter understanding of every piece of kit." This same level of dedication is poured into the design of its own products, sold under the brand names of Bathrooms International or Max Pike, and in Guerner's words, "the Bentley" of the bathroom industry. "We cast in our own foundry, we plate in our own plating works and we carry a master goldsmith certificate." We are talking about the best quality here."

So what is to be expected when working with Bathrooms International? Dedication and a understanding of the entire design process.

"You can't spend hours on the phone to a designer," explains Gurner. "From my point of view I am working on the bathroom but from their point of view they organising everything from furniture to fabric. Fortunately I am very designer and specifier-friendly because I was one. I know what they are looking for, the service they desire and the respect they require."