

# Hands free

by [Selin Arkut](#) on Tuesday, 01 July 2008



Oblo, wall mount faucet from Kohler.

**The faucet has come a long way from years past when it was simply a means of delivering water, transforming itself in to a centerpiece of style with water saving sophistication.**

Taking taps an evolutionary step beyond beautiful designs and great finishes, technology is starting to play a role in the world of water delivery. Helping to conserve water, and help our environment, technology in the form of hands-free tap and faucet operation is making its mark in the kitchens and bathrooms of many commercial settings.

Now touch-free faucets are available in a variety of finishes and styles. Technology has advanced so much; these faucets have the ability to function automatically whenever your hands are anywhere near. The sensing zone surrounds the entire spout, ensuring activation every time a user's hands approaches them.

This idea is particularly exemplified through the latest innovations from kitchen and bathroom designers, Kohler and its new Touchless faucet.

Made from solid brass electroplated with chromium, "the infrared technology used in first generation hands-free faucets was easily confused by variations in background lighting, reflections from surfaces, even clothing colours. Sometimes the sensor tripped too easily; sometimes it was difficult to trip at all," said Helga Feghali, marketing manager, Kohler Middle East.

"But the Tripoint technology employed in Kohler Touchless electronic faucets uses technology very similar to that of an autofocus digital camera, measuring distance rather than reflectance, with very few unintended activations. When your hands "ask" for water, it's delivered. When you don't ask, it isn't..

Also, more and more design professionals and consumers have been interested in the versatility of the Oblo collection, and the breadth of range. A geometrically inspired aesthetic and multiple applications fit well in any modern bathroom design," she added.

## Design

As well as the recent touch free trend that has been hitting the bathrooms and kitchens of many commercial interiors, this technology has been incorporated in to some of the most sophisticated minimalist designs. One of the largest European exporters of sanitary wear for kitchens and bathrooms, Grohe in its new Ondus collection, portrays this perfectly.

"The latest product from Grohe is the Ondus, a new digital revolution in taps and faucets. Named after the term 'wave' in Latin, this product is available in four different colours, matching the entire bathroom suite of basins and showers," said Eugene Achkar, regional product trainer, Grohe Middle East.

**"Made of brass and featuring digital thermostats so that the user can monitor how hot or cold the temperature of the water is, the Ondus works through a digital on and off button, never really seen before in existing taps and faucets, and has had its world launch here in Dubai at the ISH Kitchen and Bathroom Middle East exhibition," he added.**



Karbon Bendy from Kohler.

Villeroy & Boch has also introduced some interesting design concepts in tap and faucets for the bathroom environment, including its Square, Cult and Soul ranges.

The Square in its cubic-like form is a new exclusive range of tap fittings with handles made of genuine Strass Swarovski crystal. The Cult range is minimalist, yet modern in its design and includes a single-lever washbasin mixer, and Soul also offers an optional single-lever, but is more curved and classic in its design.

Sanipex Group, supplier of luxury bathroom fittings in the Middle East and India, is currently promoting the Ethos range from Eurobath International.

"Featuring the integration of LED lights into a basin mixer and a shower head, they are powered by an ingenious dynamo system so that no electricity or batteries are required, thus making installation simple," said Karen Cordiero, manager at Sanipex.

"With design in the bathroom industry moving at such a fast pace, our customers are always looking for something different to ensure their design schemes stand out. Ethos certainly provides a 'wow' factor as well as being practical to use and maintain" said Jim Williams, sales director at Eurobath.

In addition, besides its touch free faucet, Kohler also has its own versatile faucet. With its clean lines, the Karbon articulating faucet introduces a new geometry of functionality to the kitchen, engineered to hold any position for hands-free operation.

"The original design impetus of the Karbon kitchen faucet was inspired by lighting and construction equipment with articulated joints. The Kohler design team took this concept and created a product that signals a paradigm shift in the functionality and design of modern kitchen faucets," said Feghali.

"Unlike other kitchen faucets, the Karbon faucet will maintain the exact position where a user places it within its allotted reach in or outside the sink, keeping the spray head and water flow exactly where it's desired. Additionally, the faucet offers both spray and aerated water flow options, eliminating the need for a sidespray," she added.

The actual construction of the faucet is a combination of traditional brass and innovative carbon fiber composite tubing. The joints connecting the four sections of the faucet employ a patented technology that provides resistance, to support the spout for handling.

"However, among the most popular choices for Kohler kitchen faucets are collections such as Evoke. The Evoke faucet makes use of the most advanced Kohler capabilities by incorporating ProMotion technology, which ensures the smooth, superior function of the optional side spray. The Evoke spout swivels 360 degrees, making it easier than ever to direct the water flow right where you need it," she continued.

### **Water conservation**

A touch free trend, and fancy models may well be all the rage in contemporary bathroom designs, but the concept of water conservation is growing in importance for designers and manufacturers worldwide. So, not only do designs have to be stylish, they also have to incorporate water saving technologies and applications for both kitchen and bathroom environments.



Evoke faucet from Kohler.

"I think the most important feature of taps and faucets nowadays is water conservation qualities. At Grohe we have been saving water since 1983, when the creation of the one-hand mixer was introduced," said Eugene Achkar at Grohe.

Sanipex, also feels developers across the globe should take into consideration the most efficient, water saving products that help save water. "All of Sanipex's manufacturers carry ISO certification to ISO 14001 for environmental management," said Cordiero. "We have recently introduced the new H2ECO range from Eurobath which incorporates a reduced flow aerator on all wash basins and sink mixers reducing the flow to 5 litres per minute."

Victor Schoone, marketing manager of Roca bathroom furnishing specialists is also passionate about the importance of water conservation, particularly in the Middle East.

With its own cartridge production factory, Roca produces over 1 million water and energy saving cartridges yearly which feature a specific saving mechanism, reducing the consumption of water down to 50%.

"These cartridges can also save energy as the cartridge works through avoiding the boiler to turn on when opening the mixer. Thus, Roca's mixers save water and energy (about 400 kilos of CO<sub>2</sub> per year/person)," said Schoone.

Apart from the washbasin mixers, Roca also has a water saving device known as Flow Regulators, limiting the maximum flow from the tap.

"Flow Restrictors regulate the flow rate in the fittings to between 7.5 and 9 litres, depending on the system pressure. They also feature an anti-return valve for flexible hoses, water saving handshower, time-adjustable electronic mixers, self-closing mixers, and thermostatic mixers - these all save energy and water because it takes less time to reach the desired temperature when waiting in the shower," he added.

This same water saving idea is also integrated into all of Kohler's faucets. "A standard faucet will use 8.3 litres per minute (lpm), but aerators that add air to the stream for a softer feel and reduced splashing can bring that down to 5.68 lpm. Some aerators reduce water flow to as little as 1.89 lpm. Aerators are great for bathroom faucets, but not as practical in the kitchen where faucets are used for filling pots and other containers."

However, despite water saving innovations, according to Felahi at Kohler both technology and design has to keep in mind that some users - children, seniors and those with physical disabilities, need to be considered especially in commercial settings.

"Some people don't have as great a reach or as much strength to turn, say, a faucet. And cognitive abilities are even more varied and relative than physical abilities. Here again, some adults experience cognitive challenges as they age, but young children don't read, do they? So users have to intuitively know how to turn on the water and adjust the temperature," said Felahi.

"Intuitiveness is a simple measure of good design. We all know that red means hot and blue means cold. And we all know how much easier it is to use a single-control faucet to adjust water flow and temperature at the same time than a two-handle faucet. In fact, you could say that design becomes nearly transparent when we can use a product almost unconsciously," she added.

So, where taps and faucets may have been previously viewed as an accessory, in contemporary settings they are a more integrated part of the design.