

Darting at Differentia

In a close conversation, the CEO of Duravit AG, Mr. Franz Kook shares extensively about company's creative approaches, inspirations and explorations with Mr. Kamal Khokhani, Publisher of INSITE.

In the same slice, Mr. Ashutosh Shah Managing Director of Duravit India Pvt. Ltd. talks with Mr. Khokhani about the promotional activities in India, spatial strategies, enormous possibilities and growing popularity of high-quality products in the Indian market.





Mr. Franz Kook, CEO Duravit AG

Mr. Franz Kook is an inspiration to many others for he has been a conveyer of tangible advancements and has witnessed unprecedented growth in Duravit from past 40 years. His inclusiveness and hard work are significant in his innumerable actions triggering the brand name. His comprehensive development plans, daunting product designs and production goals have come to move the company beyond at par and promoted its cosmos of award winning products at global scenario.

Can you throw light on the modest beginning of Duravit and its history of more than nine decades?

Duravit's history began more than 190 years ago when Georg Friedrich Horn set up a small factory in Hornberg/Germany in the Black Forest for the production of earthenware crockery and from the turn of the 20th century, also sanitaryware. Since then, Duravit has been committed exclusively to 'Living Bathrooms' and, today we cover the whole spectrum of bathroom interiors with ceramic sanitaryware, bathroom furniture and the Bathtubs + Wellbeing segment.

As early as 1987, when bathroom design was still the poor cousin of interior design, Duravit started to allow design to take centre stage and in its advertising campaign for the Giamo range, declared that 'design conquers the bathroom'. Today, design expertise has long since become one of the company's unique selling points and Duravit has become a trendsetter for innovative design in the bathroom sector. A recipe for success that thrives on its ingredients, namely the 'right mix' of designers.

How are Duravit products designed and who are the designers behind some of its award-winning products?

We are passionate about design and passionate about designer bathrooms. At Duravit, we believe that bathrooms are living areas and should therefore care for the wellbeing of the occupant. All our thoughts and efforts are directed therefore at creating concepts that help the users to improve their quality of life. Our famous designer partnerships are proof of this. Duravit's design partners include Philippe Starck, Sieger Design, Eeos, Michael Graves, Massimo Iosa Ghini, Phoenix Design, James Irvine, Lord Norman Foster, Prof. Frank Huster, Christian Werner, Matteo Thun and Sergei Tchoban.

In collaboration with the designers, Duravit has set a tremendous development pace: in the last 20 years, Duravit has started over 40 new projects, a performance that has been recognised with numerous national and international design awards.

Which are the international award winning products of Duravit? Are they available in India?

In 2011, Duravit was already winning the iF product design award 2011 for Urinal Architec and the shower-toilet seat SensoWash, the red dot design award 2011 for the floating

bathtub Nahho and the interior innovation award IMM Cologne for Starck K, a ceramic kitchen sink.

In 2010, Duravit received inter alia the Universal Design Award and Universal Consumer Award 2010 for shower tub Duraplan by Frank Huster, the iF Gold Award for the sauna concept Inipi, the Grand Designs Award in the category Best Bathroom Product for the PuraVida bathroom series and the grandesignetic International Award for Inipi.

Of course, the complete product range of Duravit is available in India.

Duravit AG is strongly committed towards environmental stability and sustainability. How much do you owe it to the quality of innovation and kind of technology that saves water?

From development through to the selection of materials and production, Duravit focuses all its attention on environmental sustainability - starting with its designs that boast timelessly modern forms.

Innovations play a key role in all fields, not only with regard to reducing water consumption. In 2008, we invested in a new development centre in Hornberg, which now houses the entire development expertise of the Duravit Group including the application technology. The aim is to attain the same position in the field of innovation and technology that Duravit already occupies in design and so to secure the market position in the long term.

'Duravit Green' is for all praises. How much do you think this sustainable solution in sanitation helps in highlighting the responsible approach of choosing an option of saving water?

Over the years, there has been a great change in the way in which people in industrial countries use water. Rising water and sewage costs are also a factor in the economical use of this resource. Duravit responds to this changing use of water with innovative technology. In the 1980s, Duravit was a pioneer in reducing the amount of water used by toilets to 6 litres and for some models even to 4.5 litres. Urinals only need up to 1 litre, whilst the Urinal McDry operates without any water whatsoever. Duravit bathtubs offer a comfortable interior and economical water consumption.



However, we not only offer our customers environmental-friendly solutions but we also use as little water as possible in our own work processes. For example, all Duravit manufacturing plants incorporate comprehensive facilities, which ensure that the water needed in production processes can be recycled. It is possible to re-use circa 75 per cent of the water throughout the process.

What are the other products or technical solutions offered by Duravit, which can be categorised under 'Blue Responsibility'?

At the product level, we keep on expanding our 'Blue Responsibility' range, which today includes the McDry urinal, D-Code and Starck water-saving bathtubs, WonderGliss surface that minimises water consumption for cleaning the sanitaryware and 4.8 litres high efficiency toilets.

But, we also practise sustainability in design. Given that the bathroom places the highest demands in longevity, we have been 100 per cent committed to the motto 'modern but not modish' since the start of our design strategy in 1987. The most fashionable series that we ever had was the Lavillette series, which was influenced by deconstructivism. And even this series lasted for 15 years. The high performance of the ceramic material further underlines this approach in design. Ceramics can be fired at a temperature of approximately 1280 °C. This in turn results in extremely solid products.

In the recently held world's leading trade fair at Frankfurt, I complement you for the showcase of Duravit's array of design-oriented bathroom concepts including three new design lines. What idea did work behind the first and new opulent bathroom range?

In collaboration with the German-Russian architect, Sergei Tchoban, Duravit developed the first opulent bathroom range: 'Esplanade' reinterprets opulence as the golden ratio between purism and so-called free forms and in the internalisation of both modern architectural trends. This modern form of opulence is no longer 'lavish' or 'excessive' but 'generous' and 'pleasurable'. Luxury is important but it is no longer expressed by means of clichéd golden taps, rather by a new, freer use of forms, surfaces and space. Or, as Sergei Tchoban once said, "Contemporary opulence is about allowing that little bit more yet keeping one's feet firmly on the ground"!

Again, to the new promising feature of 'hygiene, cleanliness and freshness' of shower-toilet seats, how does Duravit manage to inspire for blending design and showering comfort in equal means?

'SensoWash Starck', the shower-toilet seat designed by Philippe Starck, premieres outstanding design showering

comfort in equal measure. Externally, Philippe Starck's design is all about maximum discretion. The shower-toilet seat boasts of an unusually flat and slimline design that curves gently up into the wall and that finishes in an elegant silver-coloured panel. To ensure the continuous flow of the clear lines, the technical components have been miniaturised so the entire technology fits between the ceramic body and the seat. It's only when the toilet is open that the bidet feature is revealed: a stainless steel spray arm. There are three different types of shower to choose from: the Rearwash leaves you feeling clean and fresh. The Comfortwash offers a more attentive wash that cleanses both with the forward and backward movement of the spray arm or also with a pulsating water jet. The water jet of the Ladywash is specially tailored to female needs, offering particularly gentle cleansing. Water temperature, water volume and nozzle position can all be individually adjusted and, once saved, are easy to select again. Feeling clean and fresh, the next stage is the warm and drying air. The spray arm and nozzles are cleaned automatically before and after each use. As a preventative measure, both the stainless-steel spray arm and the toilet seat have an antimicrobial coating. The entire unit can be easily removed for cleaning. The wireless, intuitive remote control can be used to operate all functions.

Duravit designs its most works to respond to the spirit of nature and elegance. What efforts are put-in by Duravit for patronising its designers worldwide and undertaking to support and train them?

Designer co-operations demand great design creativity but also independence and the willingness to take risks with the entrepreneurial orientation. In the collaboration with our designers we are emancipated partners.

We love being inspired by external partners. About 80 per cent of our new developments are the work of external designers. This multitude of successful co-operations is, however, not simply a matter of course. Collaboration with designers is more than merely a tug of war. With most designers, it's a delicate balancing act and a development can come close to being abandoned more than once. However, the challenge is to manage this situation.

The strength of the Duravit design co-operations is the very personal type of collaboration. For me, one of the most important requirements is thus the 'right chemistry between partners'. This personal interaction is the only way of generating the necessary ideas and stimuli on both sides in order to sow the seeds for productive development. It's possible to go down either the traditional route of a design contract with detailed briefing or to take a different approach where the designer presents one's ideas without a specific contract.

Duravit's bath products are designed with a difference, and are greatly eulogised even by the other service providers of the same industry. How would you define the finesse of your collection, especially at the time when baths are considered 'cosy and seamless'?

"Bathroom design from jeans to dinner jacket" - this mission statement describes our ambition to meet the highest demands in every price segment when it comes to sanitaryware design and innovation. We should also like to emphasise that we offer comfort for every phase of life, whether for single person, young families or the much talked about '50 plus generation'.

Duravit's particular strength lies in the middle market just like the series 2nd floor, Starck 2 and Happy D. When we speak of jeans, we don't mean the cheap 'n' cheerful variety from the bargain basement; we mean brand name jeans from a quality fashion store. What we are saying is that the quality of Duravit products is always consistently high, in other words, from the basics through to the top-of-the-range.

We want to stand out from the competition. In reality, this means that we always have to be one step ahead of the others. The differentiation strategy applies predominantly to the entire product development with products that are different and that offer additional functions or features. We've clearly seen how this can work with our Bathtubs and Wellness product segment, which was only established in 2002. The basis for the success story is a well thought-out differentiation concept. When we launched it in 2002, no one had expected the appearance of another manufacturer of bathtubs. With a rapid pace of development, we have created distinctive products whose striking design stands out visibly from the crowd in this inundated market.

The bathroom has the potential to become the well-being zone within the home. The search for personal balance affects the design of our own four walls. People want to turn their home into an oasis, somewhere that offers temporary respite from everyday life, a refuge in which to wind down and recuperate without stress. And this also transforms the status of the bathroom. The most important element for wellness is water, and the bathroom is the most water-orientated room in the home. This is what we always keep in mind while developing new bathroom products.

Tell us something about the international poster competition 'Water is Life', launched in collaboration with Zentralverband Sanitär, Heizung, Klima (ZVSHK)?

The competition and the resulting exhibition "Water is Life" are a joint project organised by the University of the Arts/Berlin and the Nanjing Arts Institute/Nanjing, the Normal University/Hangzhou and the German Central Sanitary, Heating and Air-conditioning Association (ZVSHK). Duravit is the main sponsor of this amazing project.

Students and young artists from all over the world were encouraged to look at the problem of the global water shortage and to turn their ideas into a poster. The result surpassed all expectations: more than 5,000 artists from 83 countries adopted their own creative approaches using a wide variety of different motifs to present their take on the message "Water is Life". The competition aims to exhibit these works of art world-wide in order to bring the topic "Water is Life" to a wide public and to encourage greater awareness when using water.

An international jury selected the best work. The prize-giving and the premiere of the "Water is Life" exhibition showcasing the most outstanding exhibit took place on March 15, 2011 in the international context of the world's leading trade fair for sanitaryware, heating and air-conditioning technology in Frankfurt, Germany; both were held at the Duravit stand.

On March 22, 2011, the works of art were included in the United Nations' official programme of events to mark World Water Day in Cape Town, South Africa. The Chinese city of Nanjing also presented the posters as part of Nanjing Water Day 2011. For the moment, the exhibition "Water is Life" can be seen in the Duravit Design Centre in Germany up to September 10, 2011.

Finally, as one of the leading voices of the industry, what are your views about the *INSITE* magazine?

Interior Design is an important issue for Duravit and also for the Indian market. There is a growing group of people with a higher medium income in India who is increasingly interested in investing in affordable lifestyle, design and high-quality branded products.

INSITE magazine meets the demands of interior designers, architects and consultants who are keen on international architecture design ideas. Personally I like the magazine very much because of its high quality and wide variety.



Mr. Asutosh Shah
Managing Director, Duravit India Pvt. Ltd.

Abriding the ways for Duravit's exclusive product line in India, Mr. Ashutosh Shah is distinctly working in a concrete way towards its endorsements. According to Mr. Shah, Duravit having a global presence worldwide, its customers are incredible individuals everywhere. This sets a wider chance to connect with and integrating the future enhancements and goals of the company in the country.



Duravit has been a leading supplier of sanitaryware, bathroom furniture, accessories and wellness ideas. Considering the hospitality industry's emerging focus on wellness, what inspires Duravit to cater hugely to the Living Bathrooms?

We promote the lifestyle vision of "Living Bathrooms". This topic is fuelled by the idea that, today people expect the bathroom to be more than just a place to take a bath, wash, clean their teeth or take a shower. Bathrooms are currently in a period of transition, becoming living spaces that offer a refuge from the complex world in which we live. However, the bathroom only becomes a refuge when considered as an overall concept. A pleasant and harmonious atmosphere is of the essence with the right mix of elegant designer products, select materials, light, colour and diverse functions. As such, the scope of requirements for today's bathrooms is no less complex than applies throughout the rest of the home. That's why, we offer complete bathroom solutions with ceramic sanitaryware, bathroom furniture and the Bathtubs + Wellbeing product segment.

Keeping in view the sustainable solutions, what are the enormous possibilities in the Indian market, Duravit is ready to harness in terms of customised solutions regarding hotels, for there is growing tourism?

Hotel rooms and hotel bathrooms are increasingly becoming a business' calling card. Many guests form an opinion about a hotel or restaurant after just a cursory glance at the sanitary facilities. Consequently, sanitary facilities should always be in an immaculate condition and make a hygienic impression on the user. Duravit offers a range of interesting products that meet the high hygiene requirements in the hotel and gastronomy sector and that enhance the sanitary facilities in every respect. In all our developments, we set great store by ensuring that equal importance is attached to design, innovative technology, great functionality and high-quality, durable materials. We can only achieve reliable quality with the interaction of all properties. At the same time, as the bathroom has to offer long-term enjoyment, our products have prescribed to the motto, "modern but not fashionable", since the start of the design strategy in 1987. Water-saving products reduce water consumption, both in the private bathroom and in the hotel bathroom. For example, the toilets in Duravit's Starck 3, Duraplus and Vero series only require 4.5 litres of water and thus comply with European standard EN997. The dual-flush push button helps to save

valuable water. Duravit toilets with the baked-in Wondergliss coating render aggressive cleaning agents superfluous. Not only toilets but also urinals make a very important contribution to the economical use of water. Designer and architect Frank Huster designed the Architec urinal for Duravit. Its electronic control combines innovative sensor technology with intelligent flushing technology. The sensor was specially developed for Architec and recognises use, not the user.

With a huge manufacturing capacity created at Tarapur in Gujarat, what are the plans of Duravit in India?

Indian sanitary ware industry is growing in such a way that, in the next few years, India is going to be the sanitary ware hub. Looking to the present market growth, now India has emerged as a major bath and sanitary ware market in the Asia-Pacific region Duravit India has a very strong network in India. There are several showrooms in India within our network of customers, and we deliver wide additional information on our products on our website, in brochures or at international trade shows. Duravit's field representatives in all the major cities are well equipped to provide unstained Sales support and act as a bridge between the Customer and the Headquarters at Ahmedabad. In collaboration with more than 300 Business Partners and distributors spread across the country, facilitating easy access of Duravit's range to the Customers and furthering the message of the brand to all corners of the country. Apart from the Indian market, presently Duravit is catering to the countries like, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan & Nepal.

India is an emerging market and yet, the number of High Networth Individuals (HNIs) in India is a small number. Does Duravit plan to cater to this high-end segment only?

Duravit has been active in the Indian market since 2003 and is well established in the luxury sector.

But, we don't plan to cater to the high-end segment only. India now has a growing group of people with a higher medium income. These customers are increasingly interested in investing in affordable lifestyle, design and high-quality branded products. Also, for many years, Duravit has not only been a luxury supplier but it has also been actively offering outstanding bathroom design at very good value for money. Duravit likes to refer to its product range as offering everything from "jeans to dinner jacket". This strength in the medium-priced sector will stand us in good stead in India. The new factory and the

advantages associated with being a local supplier will enable an opening of the Indian market as a whole, as well as of a few export markets.

If Duravit want to reach-out to large cross-section of people, don't you think the cost aspect will be a barrier? How Duravit will address to it?

Today's buyers expect their bathrooms to be living spaces that offer a refuge from the complex world that we live in. This can be achieved only with a holistic concept that includes and brings together all the conceivable aspects of the bathroom. The bathroom has become no less complex than any other room in the home. Despite all avowals to qualitative growth, the consumer will ultimately choose the greatest possible quantity of goods and services. The consequence will be that markets are inundated with products, which are too cheap in themselves, but are nevertheless frequently not worth their price. We are convinced that the senseless accumulation of material goods is not a recipe for lasting happiness. For this reason we are tending to pull out of the competition in places where price is the sole decisive factor. Instead, we aim to create a genuine need by using a range of attractive, high-quality and varied products to furnish complete bathrooms.

Can you elaborate on the product range 'D-Code', which is introduced to address the masses, without any compromise to Duravit hallmark of quality?

Duravit has long made Bathroom design "from jeans to dinner jacket", its mission statement and means with this its ambition to meet the highest demands in every price segment when it comes to design and innovation. With D-Code, Duravit is venturing into the "jeans" segment and is offering a complete design range in a price segment in which so far a confusing array of no-name products has prevailed. The design for this complete range was created by Sieger Design and is geared towards creating a timeless element in our everyday lives.

It contains nothing superfluous or polarising. Straightforward, clear-cut and unfussy like the stripes of a barcode - that is the design language of D-Code. The result is unambiguously practical products that are so universal they represent a piece of everyday culture and meet all conceivable requirements. Since the choice of

ceramics is still the decisive criterion for the whole bathroom, the entire programme centres around the washbasin. The user is the direct point of reference for the form. Distinctive, curved lines creating a large radius effectively put the spotlight on the washbasin.

The designers have coherently and consistently copied these distinctive curves for all other items in the range, with 15 different sizes and versions to choose from for the washbasin alone. These are complemented by 11 toilets, three bidets and a urinal. And of course: a complete range of bathtubs that needs to be seen to be believed: featuring rectangular models in various sizes, a corner version and even a hexagonal version. The tubs can also be equipped with jet whirl systems: six jets in the sides produce a beneficial massage effect.

In a marketplace, which is becoming crowded with almost all the international players, how Duravit will be able to sustain without losing its exclusivity and also, the market share?

The Indian sanitary ware market has never had it better with outstanding, award-winning design. With its oeuvre of signature designs, the Duravit brand has endeared itself to the design connoisseurs and the who's who of the industry. The end-consumer is fast catching up, too. Duravit India brought "good design" home from Germany and carried forward the Duravit brand successfully in India. Understandably, within a span of 8 years, the Duravit brand in India has propelled itself to the position of one of the most loved designer brands in the market.

What are your views about upcoming mega show IIID SHOWCASE 2012 by IIID and AIMEX, scheduled in Mumbai in March 2012? Is Duravit going to participate and exhibit its products in the Show?

It is going to be one of the mega events in India, organised by IIID and AIMEX. India's most prominent architects, designers and builders will get an opportunity to visit the event in Mumbai. I take this opportunity to thank AIM, AIMEX and IIID Mumbai chapter for this initiative and wish them all the success. Unfortunately, Duravit India will not be participating this time, as we are occupied with some other events, which are going to happen in India at that very same time. ☐

