

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

What's it like for a bathroom professional to design his own shower room? Joe Mühl of Ocean Bathrooms describes what he's learnt from the experience

Words **Amelia Thorpe** Photos **Colin Poole**

As design and project sales manager for leading Dorset retailer, Ocean Bathrooms, Joe Mühl knows a thing or two about luxury shower rooms. So how did he go about designing his own? "It was a great opportunity to do something individual," he says. "I always get asked by my customers what I would choose. But even when I show them and they say they like bolder colours and more interesting designs, when it comes down to it, they usually play safe. For our own shower room, I was determined not to go for beige tiles and white gloss units – it had to be a little bit different."

The story begins when Joe and partner Hannah Thomas – who is the sales and marketing developer for Ocean Bathrooms – bought their first home together. The one-bedroom apartment sits at the top of a large house, which dates back well over 100 years and fronts the harbour near Bridport.



Joe Mühl in his new shower room

A Radox Quartz Exclusive glass-fronted radiator in Claret, left, is teamed with a Duravit Ketho wall-hung vanity unit in Garnet Red Matt and feature wall painted in Farrow & Ball's Eating Room Red



Axor Starck thermostatic modules and hand shower



The Axor Starck X single-lever basin mixer adds a designer touch

The property was converted into flats about seven years ago by a developer, and Joe and Hannah inherited a shower room that was, not to put too fine a point on it, “appalling”, according to Joe. “It had a shower cubicle that really belonged in a caravan, it was so tiny,” he says, “and a basin tucked under the eaves so I couldn’t stand up to shave.” The fact that it was clinical, white, cold and gloomy added to the miserable feel.

to strip the beams and finish them with some coats of water-repellent varnish. Now I’m glad we did, because they add real character to the room.”

Using a tanking system from Impey, Joe created a walk-in shower area, screened with a custom glass panel from Matki, maximising the space under the eaves and with sufficient height for 6ft-tall Joe to stand upright with ease. Thunder tiles on the wall evoke the spa-like sense of a deluge of

with the vanity unit and wall.”

Joe and Hannah chose wall-hung fittings, using Geberit wall frames. “It makes sense to hide as much as possible in the wall for a streamlined look, and it boosts the sense of space to keep as much off the floor as you can,” says Joe, who also chose an infra-red flush plate for its minimalist and hi-tech appeal.

Tucked in the roof space as it is, there are no windows in the room, so Joe

‘IT WAS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO DO SOMETHING INDIVIDUAL FOR OUR OWN SHOWER ROOM, I WAS DETERMINED NOT TO GO FOR BEIGE TILES AND WHITE GLOSS UNITS – IT HAD TO BE A LITTLE BIT DIFFERENT’

Joe Mühl, design and project sales manager, Ocean Bathrooms

After moving into the flat, Joe and Hannah planned to wait a while to save up to renovate the room. “But after one week of showering in there, I called the fitter and asked him how quickly he could start,” laughs Joe. “Our goal was to make it a nice experience to be in the room, and somewhere warm and inviting.”

His first step was to extend the length of the room to make space for a large walk-in shower by knocking down an internal wall and “stealing” one metre from the bedroom next door. “I had a mini heart attack when we discovered the original beams behind the stud wall,” he recalls. “I’m not sure we could have removed them, even if we had the budget to do so. In the end, we decided

water, while iridescent glass mosaics on the floor add sparkle.

When it came to adding interest to the basin area, now situated where the original tiny shower cubicle once was, Joe and Hannah were determined to avoid white gloss at all costs in favour of something with more individuality. They settled on a rich red for its warmth and vibrancy. First came the Duravit Ketho wall-mounted vanity unit in Garnet Red Matt, followed swiftly by a feature wall painted in Farrow & Ball’s Eating Room Red. “We were lucky with the glass-fronted radiator from Radox,” says Joe. “I found the Claret and thought it had been colour-matched just for us, because it goes so perfectly

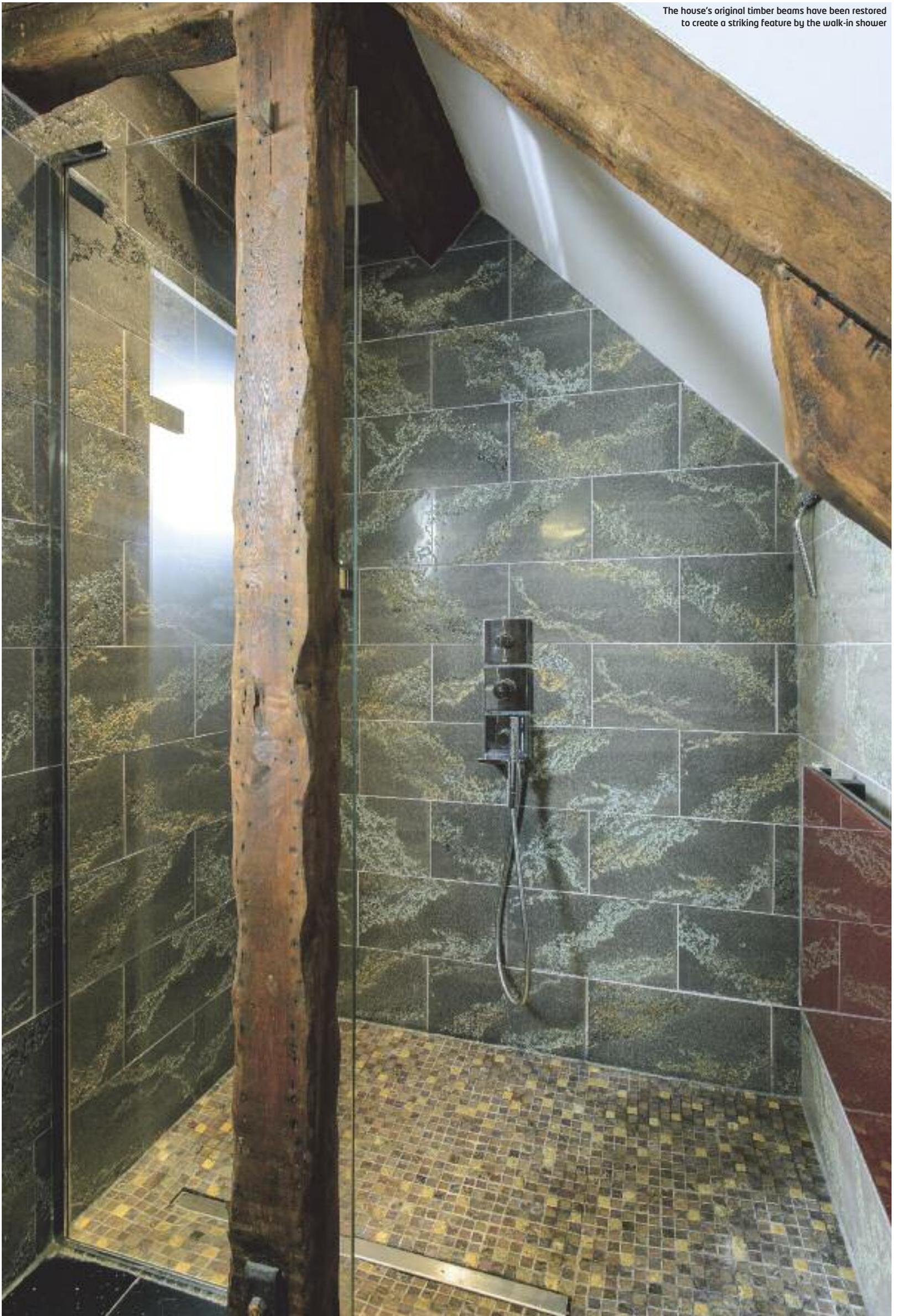
ordered a grey smoked glass door from Majestic to serve as the main entrance. “It allows light into the shower room, but still provides privacy,” he says. It opens both inwards and outwards to increase the flexibility of the space and prevent the shower room feeling cramped.

“It was a challenging room, because it is such a narrow space with a sloping ceiling,” says Joe. “It meant I had to be very focused, which was a good lesson. Because I work in the industry, I am aware of how many products are out there and how overwhelming that can seem to clients. It reminded me of just how important it is to be selective and to offer the best choices, so that customers have the option to create a room that is as individual as they want it to be.”

product specification

- Brassware** Axor Starck X single-lever basin mixer
- Shower** Matki EauZone Plus 600 wetroom panel; Impey tanking system with LinearFlo drainage; Axor Starck overhead shower; Axor hand-shower module; Axor Starck thermostatic valves
- Basin** Duravit Vero basin
- Sanitaryware** Duravit Vero wall-mounted WC, soft-close seat and cover; Geberit Duofix WC frame with cistern; Geberit Sigma 80 infra-red dual flushplate in black glass
- Furniture** Duravit Ketho wall-mounted vanity unit in Garnet Red Matt; Schneider Capeline FL mirror cabinet with light
- Radiator** Radox Quartz Exclusive radiator in Claret
- Accessories** Dornbracht toilet-brush set; Smedbo Sideline shower squeegee and hook; and Smedbo Sideline corner soap basket
- Tiles** Gateway Thunder Black porcelain wall tiles [in shower area]; Gateway Thunder Grey porcelain wall tiles; Original Style Elite Collection Mellow Therapy glass mosaics [on floor in shower area]; New Image black granite floor tiles; all Ocean Bathrooms. See retailer profile for details
- Wall** Painted in Eating Room Red, Farrow & Ball

The house's original timber beams have been restored to create a striking feature by the walk-in shower



essential retailer case study Ocean Bathrooms

Inside the 4,000sq ft showroom



MD Robert, left, and son and design and project sales manager, Joe Mühl, outside the Ocean Bathrooms showroom in Bridport

company profile

Ocean Bathrooms

Who are we? Robert Mühl, MD, and Joe Mühl, design and project sales manager

Where are we? St Michaels Lane, Bridport, Dorset DT6 3RR. Tel: 0207 096 4255. www.oceanbathrooms.com

What we do Luxury bathroom retailer

Business history Founded in 1993 by husband-and-wife team, Robert and Sharon Mühl, Ocean Bathrooms is now a truly family affair: sons Joe, 26, and Alex, 22, both work in the business. Robert says he was inspired to set up the company after working in the bathroom industry since leaving school, including time spent as regional sales manager for Mira. "I wanted to create a customer-friendly showroom with lots of working products," he recalls. That remains a cornerstone of the business strategy today: of the 40 displays, at least 10 of them are full working sets, including showers, lighting effects, whirlpool systems, digital controls, and wetroom systems. "Some customers drive for hours to visit us, including from London, because they can't find the level of service we offer anywhere else," says Robert, now 57. Ocean Bathrooms has always been based in the Bridport area, and for the last 15 years, in this former snooker club. Developing sales to architects, interior designers, and boutique hotel designers.

"I try to respond to requests for quotes, specifications and pictures of products the

same day, usually within a couple of hours." Products by Hansgrohe, Vola, Dornbracht, Duravit, Thomas Crapper, Matki, Majestic, Bette, William Holland, StoneKast, Catalano, Crosswater, Mereway, Smedbo, Schneider, Impey, Original Style, Radox, Bisque, Mermaid, Alape, Omnitub

Sales stats "Turnover is in excess of £1.5m per annum," says Robert. Sales are split about 75% retail, 25% contract, including boutique hotels. Bathroom prices from £1,000 for a basic suite; average £4,000 to £5,000 excluding fitting; most expensive to date, about £45,000

Staffing levels 10 including Robert, wife and director Sharon, son and design and project manager Joe, son and logistics manager Alex, Joe's partner and sales and marketing developer Hannah Thomas, plus two sales designers, one in accounts, one in customer service and one receptionist. There are some 12-15 self-employed fitters based locally and in London

Favourite aspect of job "Working on interesting and different projects," says Joe

Least favourite aspect of job "When you walk to the end of the earth for someone and don't get any thanks," he says

Strange but true "Someone phoned from Australia for a £200 radiator. Even though the freight ended up being about £300, he still went ahead and bought it," says Joe

'SOME CUSTOMERS **DRIVE** FOR HOURS TO VISIT US, INCLUDING FROM **LONDON**, BECAUSE THEY **CAN'T FIND** THE LEVEL OF **SERVICE** WE OFFER **ANYWHERE ELSE**'

Robert Mühl, MD, Ocean Bathrooms



A working Hansgrohe RainBrain shower control centre electronically operates overhead, hand and side showers, temperature, light and music



Vola HV1 basin mixer in orange with an Alape bespoke orange glass-top basin and bespoke black gloss vanity unit



Products inside the showroom include a host of baths, sanitaryware and showers from brands including Geberit StoneKast and Radox

essential retailer case study Ocean Bathrooms