

INTERIOR HYGIENE

Body, Space, Society, Ideals in the Modernist Turkish Context

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ABSTRACT: The focus of this paper is the significance of the modern bathroom in Turkey, its meaning in the modernization of interiors, in terms of hygiene as a precaution for crises, as well as sanitary ware, and Turkish company *VitrA*'s role in continuously emphasizing the modern bathroom and challenging behavioral habits through design competitions, from the 1940s onwards.

Among one of the most important spaces of hygiene, the bathroom was instrumental in bringing Western habits into the modern Turkish house. Hygiene was a matter of modern national identity emphasized in the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the century, even before the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

The Western ideals of comfort and hygiene, bodily practices, and lavatory fixtures all contributed to the understanding of the modernization process of Turkish interiors. Moreover, a bathroom that combined the Western and today's internationally accepted *alla franga* lavatory, a sink and a bath, thus combining these activities became a household application and a reflection of modern life. In the 1950s and 1960s, as the average urban Turkish family life moved to apartments that often housed governmental civil servants, the modern bathroom became a standard household space. Meanwhile, the *alla turca* lavatory, a lavatory on which one has to crouch, and that is still used in certain parts of Turkey and Asia, represented the uncivilized and unhygienic.

With the modernization of the domestic interior, a transformation of wet allocation spaces took place, leading to the questioning of the domestic and public. Moreover, new materials and bathroom equipment were introduced, and bathroom equipment competitions were established, leading to inventions that synthesized habits of the East and the West, reaching a new hygienic standard regarding relevant potential crises. Both the company history of *VitrA* Eczacıbaşı and the competing designs are showcased in the paper, aiming to support an understanding of social and spatial change in the modern Turkish domestic interior that has redefined identity with proactive lessons for the future.

KEYWORDS: Hygiene, crisis, modern interiors, bathrooms, modern Turkish interiors, design competitions

INTRODUCTION: Although the first Western sanitary habits and fixtures in bathrooms were introduced to the Ottoman elite through lifestyle journals at the beginning of the 19th century, followed by houses built by Europeans, a more radical and widespread use took place after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923. The modern aesthetic aroused mixed feelings, with some rejecting modern interiors despite moving into modern homes. During this transformation, some families continued seamlessly with the new spatial language, while others preferred 19th-century decorative interior elements, viewing modern interiors as cold and clinical (Hasirci & Tuna Ultav, 2019; Tuna Ultav et al., 2015).

In the early 1930s and 1940s that followed the foundation of the Republic, interior spaces were cleared of non-functional elements, with less furniture, transmitting an atmosphere of freshness and cleanliness. This approach was aligned with the proactive strategy to prevent disease that had resulted in crises in the past and was prevalent in the domestic bathrooms, signaling a change in sanitary ware. In the early 1940s, pharmacist Dr. Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı realized that ceramics were in short supply and began manufacturing coffee cups and basic kitchenware, leading to the development of the first modern pharmaceutical and first modern ceramic sanitary plant in Kartal, Istanbul (Eczacıbaşı Group, 2021). While this

program had already started influencing sanitary habits, in the 1950s, urbanization and population growth led to the expansion of the plant in Kartal, producing ceramic equipment, sanitary ware, and sanitation infrastructure, as well as other key products for the modern home.

In 1970, the company collaborated with developer OR-AN and opened a competition titled *OR-AN Eczacıbaşı Health Equipment Competition* to create awareness and collect innovative ideas regarding sanitary ware. Several creative products emerged as a result of this competition. One of the winners included Prof. Sadun Ersin's design, which combined the *alla franga* and *alla turca* lavatories in Turkey with different uses. Likewise, Mehmet Asatekin's inclusion of *hammam* (Turkish public bath) features like the *kurna* (marble or stone basin under a tap in which water is collected in Turkish baths and traditional bathrooms), brings new issues to discuss as part of the modern Turkish interior. This paper concentrates on the Turkish *VitrA Eczacıbaşı* company, this particular competition, and its role in the approach to hygiene in modern Turkey.

As hygiene was a representation of progress and emphasized by the new republic, the bathroom became one of the most expressive interior spaces and represented modernity in Turkish domestic interiors. This shift had a significant effect on the interior, with the domestic domain now including a space of hygiene. Not only did the location of the bathroom change from the garden to inside the home, and then to a combined space between bedrooms, but the act of washing was now combined with the lavatory, all in the privacy of the home. Moreover, modernization required a behavioral change, due directly to the sanitary ware that was used. The combination of the most private and simultaneously public functions within the modern bathroom functionally and compactly was an adjustment for the modern Turkish citizen, perhaps a greater change than to European counterparts. *VitrA*, established in 1942 as part of the *Eczacıbaşı* company, was influential regarding modernity in Turkish bathrooms. The sanitary ware inside the bathroom was also in a process of continuous change. The means by which the lavatory and the bidet were appropriated into the modern Turkish interior, reflecting on behavior, is intriguing, opening up discussions on a design response to a social need still present today. The lavatory and bidet that were often sold as a set between the 1950s and 1970s could not be included fully in daily life, because a small integral faucet attached to the rim of the lavatory bowl that continues to exist in toilets in Turkey, sufficiently covered the function of the bidet. Today, most Turkish bathrooms do not include them, mainly since the function of the bidet was appropriated into the lavatory in 1980 by the *VitrA Eczacıbaşı* company by integrating this additional water

connection to the lavatories sold in Turkey (*Eczacıbaşı Group*, 2021; *VitrA*, 2023). Another interesting aspect of the hygienic interior, the traditional *hammam* and how it fits into modern living, deserves attention. The bathrooms thus became spaces that reflected luxury, comfort, and high standards, signifying higher socio-economic status and shaping national and individual identity. Therefore, the aim of this research is to look into the development of modern Turkish bathrooms towards modernity and the role of the competition in this development.

DENOTATIONS OF MODERN HYGIENE

With a focus on modern living and cleanliness as its extension, a transformation of wet allocation spaces took place, leading to the revisiting of the domestic and the public, and the Westernization of the residential bathroom. Moreover, new materials and bathroom equipment were introduced that were easily cleaned compared to the traditional ones. Bathroom equipment competitions led to inventions that combined the habits of the East and the West. The idea of being modern, rational, and healthy was reflected in the early homes of the Republic: the individual house with a garden and the apartment building. The 'cubic' house was for the single family, with closeness to daylight, nature, and healthy life, all messages of the 1930s modernist approach. Cheap, healthy, and standard wet spaces in the modern interior can be discussed within the rapid urbanization context (Bozdoğan, 2001; Cengizkan, 2002).

During this time, the location and use of the bathroom within the interior plan changed extensively, as well as its meaning. The *gusülhane* (a washing space), a common space in the traditional Turkish home, was connected to the bedrooms, while the lavatories were often reachable from the main hallways. The bathroom first moved from outside of the house to the interior, then to an easily accessible position in a way that combined the lavatory and bath fixtures. With the Turkish culture being quite social, with many visits from family and neighbors, bathrooms became spaces of prestige (Geçili, 2019).

The Florya Atatürk mansion is a noteworthy example of significant cases, as bathroom spaces owned by Atatürk were made known and exemplary to the whole nation as a vision to follow. The design and selection of materials, equipment, and fittings in this space are thought to be purchased from abroad. Modern bathrooms were always important for Atatürk's residential and official interiors, as exemplified by Dolmabahçe Palace and his train wagon (Tuna Ultav et al., 2015) [FIGURE 01, FIGURE 02, FIGURE 03].



01 Florya Atatürk marine mansion bathroom in one of the modern iconic buildings in Turkey. Architect Seyfi Arkan and Fazıl Aysu, 1935. © DATUMM archive, datumm.org, 2023.



02 The bathroom included an imported scale, which was replicated in modern bathrooms in Turkey. © DATUMM archive, datumm.org, 2023.



03 Atatürk's modern train wagon bathroom, 1920-38. © Hanri Benazus and DATUMM Archives, datumm.org, 2023.

A DESIGN COMPETITION ON HYGIENE

In the early 1940s, pharmacist Dr. Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı, who was producing insulin, realized the cessation of imports such as coffee cups and basic kitchenware and began manufacturing them, leading to the development of the first modern pharmaceutical and first modern ceramic sanitary plant in Kartal, Istanbul (Eczacıbaşı Group, 2021). Due to urbanization and population growth in the 1950s, what began with kitchenware, led to the expansion of the plant in Kartal producing ceramic equipment, sanitary ware, and sanitation infrastructure, as well as other key products for the modern house. Eczacıbaşı began marketing its products under the *VitrA* brand. Realizing the close connection between health, medicine, ceramic sanitary ware, and sports, the company founded the Eczacıbaşı Sports Club in 1966. Although the Turkish population is fairly young and healthy, the missing element in reaching international competition levels was stated to be the lack of infrastructure and opportunities in sports, influencing sanitary progress (Ulueren, 2005).

Furthermore, drawing a holistic framework on modern hygiene and influencing sanitary behavioral change, in 1970, the company built the first modern tissue paper plant in Karamürsel, Yalova, named *İpek Kağıt* tissue paper (Eczacıbaşı Group, 2021). In 1970, the company collaborated with developers *OR-AN* and opened a competition named *OR-AN Eczacıbaşı Health Equipment Competition* to create awareness and collect innovative ideas regarding sanitary ware. Several creative products emerged as a result of this competition. This competition was followed by the opening of the international standard plant in Bozüyük in 1977, producing *Artema* faucets and fittings and exporting them to Germany in 1983. Today, the company continues to operate at the international level, also supporting several research and development projects and sports and cultural events (Eczacıbaşı Group, 2021).

FIRST MODERN BATHROOMS IN TURKEY

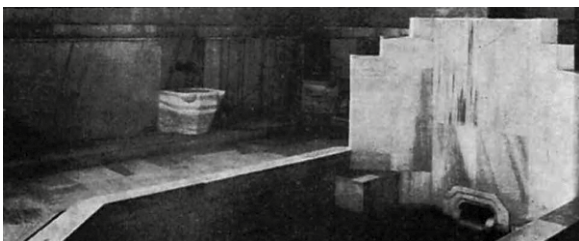
Traditionally, houses did not have a combined space for lavatory and bathing functions: the former was often located outside the house in a courtyard or a garden, and the user crouched over a basin with a hole rather than sitting on a bowl. For the bathing function, Turkish baths, the *hammams*, were being used. Those public spaces not only served for bathing but also for socializing (Aytaç & Ögüt, 2015). The *yunmalık* can be defined as a small unit inside cabinets for ablution or bathing. It may be a zinc or tile-covered washing department in the form of a closet located in traditional Anatolian-Turkish houses, sometimes placed in a corner, next to the fireplace for ready access to hot water (Bektaş, 1996).

Even though water systems were integrated into interiors, for a long time, they were only used for kitchens and *yunmalık* functions in traditional Turkish houses. The reason

behind this is that the type of waste generated was similar, including cleaning products, so these functions were accepted in the interior space. However, lavatory waste was not welcomed inside living interiors. The lavatory function was mostly placed as far as possible from living interiors in order to keep it out of sight, and to prevent disease and contamination. This space was moved to the far corner of the courtyard or garden or to the basement or ground floor, next to the barn. Gürel has highlighted this point as such: "History of modern bathrooms in Turkey is representative of the ambiguity of modernity by giving up what is familiar and traditional: acknowledging the unfamiliar but the new one" (Gürel, 2008).

As a representation of modernization in Turkey, the bathroom plays a significant role, as it affects the daily lifestyle. In the first years of the Turkish Republic, fewer foreign bathrooms were proposed in Turkish homes. Alongside the toilet bowl and bathtub, there were also the *alla turca* squat toilets. However, in the second half of the 20th century, the *alla turca* bathrooms became associated with being traditional and underdeveloped (Aytaç & Ögüt, 2015). In the 1950s, sanitary ware became more commonplace with regular advertisements. At the beginning of the 1960s, there were mostly an imported water closet, an *alla turca* toilet, a faucet for a sink, and a faucet for bathing in Turkish domestic bathroom spaces. The bathing space was not properly defined. The *kurna* defines the bathing space in *hammams* [FIGURE 04], but it was not present in bathrooms (Cengizkan, 2019). During this time, terrazzo tiles were utilized, and ceramic tiles were mostly imported: *Villeroy & Boch* and *HOB* were prevalent brands.

Around the 1960s, bathtubs became quite commonplace in Turkish bathrooms. Cengizkan (2019) argues that even though most people take a shower in a standing position, Turkish people still preferred bathtubs in their bathrooms as an indicator of their wealth, social status, and the level of modernization. Changes in production techniques brought along changes in industrial sanitary ware elements. Besides the size and the layout of the bathroom interiors, there was also a change in the bathroom products. Even though white was the indicator of hygiene, colored sanitary ware began to appear as early as the 1930s. In addition to hygiene, aesthetics and decoration became prominent features in bathroom interiors.



04 Kurna shown on the wall of Yenice Hammam, 1943. In Alâaddin Özaktas, Sami Arsev, © ARKİTEKT, No: 1943-01-02 (133-134), p. 24.

MODERN BATHROOMS AND SOCIAL BEHAVIORS IN TURKEY: ECZACIBAŞI, A LEADING COMPANY IN TURKEY

Through extensive archival research, including personal archives of the competition entrants, literature, public documents, and advertisements in popular journals, as well as communications with the winners of the *OR-AN Eczacıbaşı Health Equipment Competition*, it was possible to highlight the significance of this interdisciplinary design competition that has shaped modern sanitary ware design, modern bathroom interiors, as well as being an example for several design competitions that followed. Moreover, the interviews with competition entrants gave insight into the thought process behind the designs and emphasized the social factors that shaped the designs.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

The *Eczacıbaşı* company originated as a facility producing medicines on a small scale on the one hand, and, on the other hand, ceramic tableware and decorations in the 1940s. In the years that followed, giving importance to the health sector, the company transformed into a medicine factory in 1952 and into a ceramic factory in 1958, at a much larger scale (Eczacıbaşı, n.d.). In 1966, the ceramic factory was rebranded and registered under the name *VitrA*, and in 1968, the first export of sanitary ware was made to Jordan with trucks filled with straw, as experimental transport material. The advertisements by the *VitrA* and *Eczacıbaşı* company were instrumental in publicizing the bathroom interior that had always been private and hidden.

For the first local ceramic sanitary ware in Turkey, Italian designs were used as the inspiration for the exterior form. In terms of functionality, sample ceramic health products were imported from the German ceramic company *Keramag (Geberit)* and examined. The set included a water closet, a bidet, and a wash basin. It was named the *Akdeniz* (Mediterranean) bathroom set to reference the land of the company's roots. Using Turkish regions and cities as inspiration still continues in *VitrA*. Inspired by international counterparts, the set was unique at the time, providing a complete bathroom instantaneously, becoming the leading product in the market for the next twenty years. *Eczacıbaşı*, with great enthusiasm, joined the Izmir International Fair in 1964, exhibiting their tableware and this first sanitary ware set *Akdeniz*, and continued to participate every year until the 1980s (Güven & Karakuş, 2016).

OR-AN ECZACIBAŞI HEALTH EQUIPMENT COMPETITION

The *OR-AN Eczacıbaşı Health Equipment Competition*, launched in 1970, is significant in terms of highlighting a vision of modern bathrooms in interiors in Turkey. In a letter written in 2010 to the *Eczacıbaşı* headquarters by the second winning designer, Mehmet Asatekin, conveys a further significance of the competition, stating that this was a first in Turkey's industrial design history and, therefore, plays an important role in the country's industrial design history in general, not only in terms of sanitary facilities (Asatekin, 2021). The number of participants is unknown; however, the winners range from experienced designers to the new generation. While, at one end, there are Selçuk Milar and Sadun Ersin, who represent the experts and experienced generation, the younger generation of artists and designers such as Mehmet Asatekin, Tuncay Çavdar, Erkal Güngören or Önder Küçükerman are well-known educators and practitioners today. After the competition, OR-AN shared the results with the public through the journal *Yapı Endüstrisi Dergisi* (Construction Industry Journal of the OR-AN company). Today, there appear to be no other documents, even in the archives of *Eczacıbaşı*. Projects that have received degrees and honorable mentions have not been returned to the owners and have disappeared. Therefore, part of the research involved searching for the participants and their design entries (Mehmet Asatekin personal archive and DATUMM archive, 2023).

The competition was announced in the same journal in 1970. Although it was an industrial publication, the intellectual, theoretical, and design-focused discussions in it were exemplary at a time when there were limited specialized resources. The journal later evolved into the *Yapı* (Construction) journal, which is still active today. The competition was announced as a design competition (*dizayn*) titled "Construction Materials Industry and Ceramics Equipment Design Competition." The jury was composed of well-known artists, designers, and architects Şevki Vanlı (architect), Faruk İşman (ceramics engineer), led by Hakkı İzzet (ceramics artist), director's assistant Doğan Hasol (architect), and the members Nuri İyem (painter), Sadi Diren (ceramics artist), Zühtü Müridoğlu (sculptor), Melike Kurtiç (ceramics artist), Doruk Pamir (architect), and the reporters Barlas Doğu (architect) and Filiz Bilkur (interior architect) (OR-AN Construction Industry Journal, 1970). The interdisciplinary composition of the jury and the competition being open to all designers is indicative of its holistic approach to the design process in terms of being inclusive, interdisciplinary, visionary, and modern. The competition was instrumental in defining sanitary habits and highlighting the challenges of transferring design into

the industry and the developments in the Western counterparts. Doruk Pamir expressed that the competition was both an end product and a strong means of communication, communicating how to live with fixed and mobile interior elements (OR-AN Construction Industry Journal, 1970) [FIGURE 05].

Quality, design, and affordability were noted among the features of the popular design competition. Quality was defined as endurance and success in achieving the required form in terms of function and aesthetics. Design was defined in the modernist framework as the synthesis that brings together the best response to the needs defined by the brief, brings freshness and taste to the relationship between human beings and belongings/products, produced with ease, using less material, in harmony with the forms that are characteristic of the culture of the country (OR-AN Construction Industry Journal, 1970).

Well-known architect Şevki Vanlı emphasizes the significance of competitions for OR-AN as a company focusing on residential development, therefore considering health devices not as a producer but as an integral part of the home and in defining the home. He states that the significance of these interior spaces comes from the precision of use. The wish to connect these functions to architecture is to search for perfection in health equipment through this competition. İşman states it is critical that bathroom spaces are planned for more than functional needs because the bathroom is a place the user sees the most. These discussions

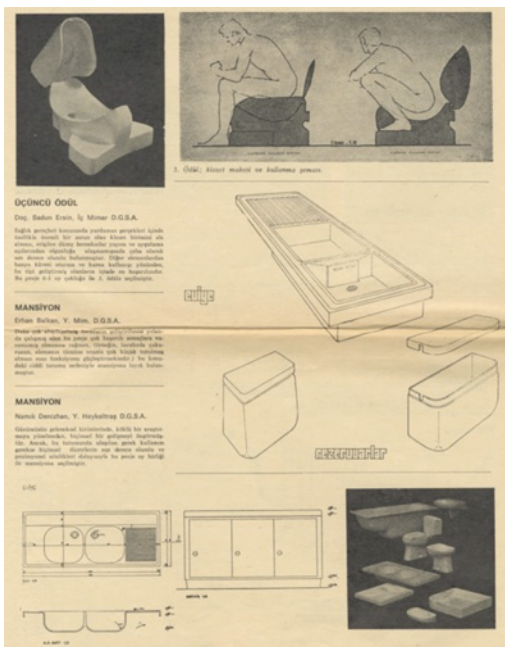


05 The competition announcement featuring an interdisciplinary jury and high prizes (OR-AN Construction Industry Journal, 1970. © DATUMM Archive, datumm.org, 2023.

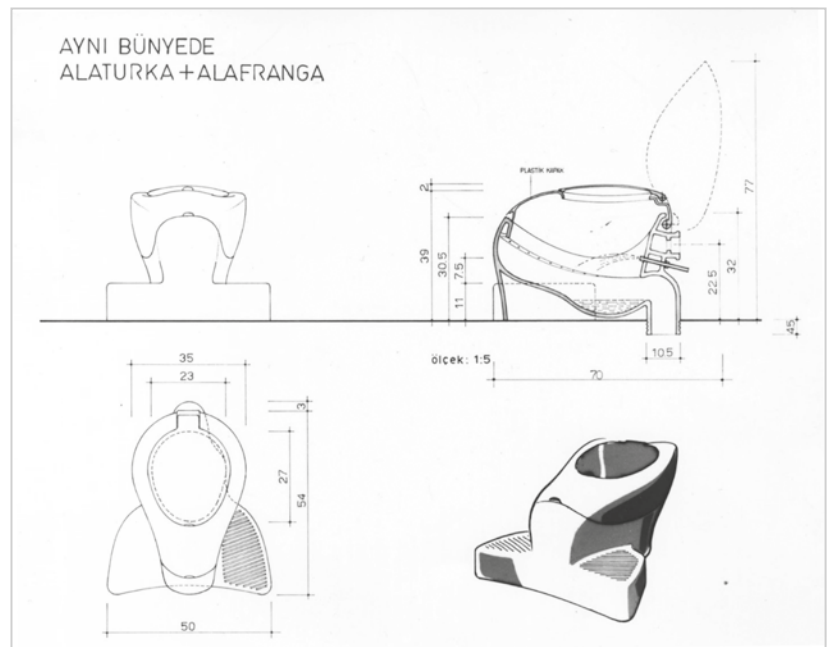
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The interdisciplinary competition publicized modern bathrooms and evoked discussions on what it means to own and take comfort in a modern bathroom as a user and client, but also as a modern citizen. Asatekin (1996) states that the global modernization process had brought several changes to the Turkish bathroom. However, several discrepancies continued to exist. For example, the *kurna* did not fit in the modern bathroom, and the bathtub was against Turkish tradition in the sense that the water was still. Thus, the path to reaching the correctly designed, ideal bathroom was through examining user studies in terms of ergonomics, function, and aesthetics, and in terms of adapting from traditional needs to the building of a nation and the role of the bathroom in this process. The designs that resulted from this competition shaped others that followed. The combination water closet project [FIGURE 06], *kurna*, and shower tray [FIGURE 07], by the first prize winner, industrial designer Mehmet Asatekin, reflected quality design solutions to adjust traditional hygiene habits.

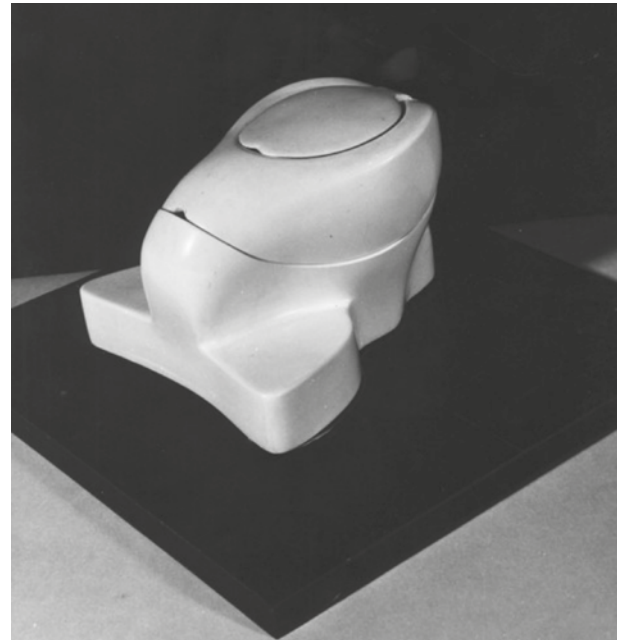
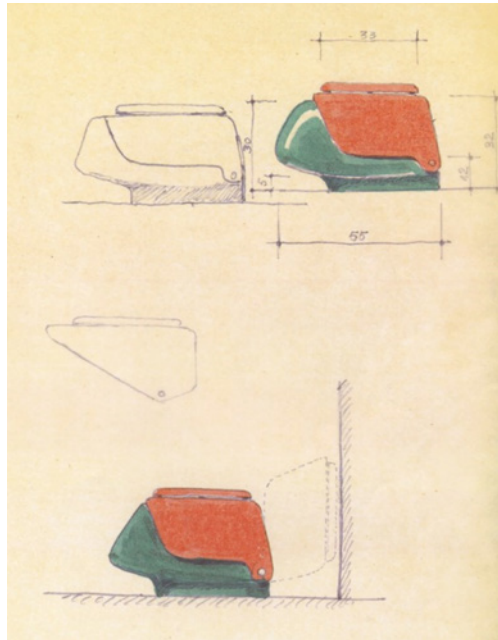




08 Alla turca and alla franga functions combined in the same lavatory by Sadun Ersin, 1970, © DATUMM Archive, datumm.org, 2023.



09 Early sketch (left) and prototype of the alla turca and alla franga functions combined in the same water closet by Sadun Ersin (right), 1970, DATUMM Archive, datumm.org, 2023.



The second prize winner, interior architect Sadun Ersin designed a functional, sustainable, and elegant solution for a lavatory [FIGURE 08], proposing its users practical designs that can be used according to their needs (Ersin, 2017; Hasirci et al., 2022) [FIGURE 09].

CONCLUSIONS

The significance of an intellectual, comprehensive, and inclusive approach that was highlighted in modernity, exemplified through the case of the *OR-AN Eczacıbaşı Health Equipment Competition* and explained in this paper, requires reflection in the fast-paced current environment, as it will help define the closely-knit relationship between how interiors are shaped and how interiors shape their users in return.

Wet interior spaces or bathrooms appear to be a clear reflection of modernity, and the sanitary equipment that helps shape the space provides interpretations of

habits and lifestyles. The traditional Turkish bathroom has changed immensely in the passage to modernity, not only in terms of equipment but also the location of the bathroom within the house and other interior design criteria such as color, texture, and form. Visionary competitions like the one described in this paper guided the masses towards a modern lifestyle, suggesting changes to the most common of habits of using a bathroom. The framing of the competition within an almost philosophical analysis was exemplary, and the responses showed Avant-garde design solutions that were user-centered with both behavioral and ecological concerns. An intelligent questioning of daily habits is exactly what we need today for a more respectful approach to the past as well as providing sustainable steps for the future.

Hygiene continues to be a significant and current issue. There is a potential in discussing cleanliness related to both the actual and the collective sense. The issue of hygiene

necessitates interior design to focus on daily life. The modern language of daily life is one that creates new meanings for each community, each nation (Lefebvre, 2014), as in the case of Turkey. The issue of hygiene has always been a reflection of life in modern Turkey (Aslanoğlu, 2003). Hygienic spaces have transformed the understanding of cleanliness and what it represents the every citizen in the modern era. There has always been great power in interior design shaping ideals and influencing change at a large scale. Interiors are the first to be affected by change and hygienic spaces perhaps even more so. Sanitary ware has traditionally not been worthwhile to protect. What distinguishes the recent COVID-19 pandemic from past disasters is that it has proven to be a significant health issue but more so a political issue. Especially for Turkey, other forms of crises like earthquakes have brought similar problems to the fore, so hygiene is still an ongoing issue. Moreover, around the world, the current wars and new policies have brought back diseases that had been eradicated, threatening communities not least because of the lack of hygiene. The components of modern interiors, especially bathrooms, are still seen as easily replaceable, and it is important to have and spread the wisdom to approach inevitable changes in modern interiors with the utmost knowledge-based care. Once again, it is the power of interiors that will shape how we will live and who we are in the future.

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