

Specifying for high performance

Vernon Charles of Prospec offers a route through the specification minefield for washroom surface materials and storage

Wowing visitors with bespoke design and elaborate finishes in washrooms can boost brand identity and cement a business' reputation. But while manufacturers are ready to offer a wide range of solutions and design enhancements, it's crucial for specifiers to make the right choice regarding materials for the specific operating environment.

Materials choice is the main element that will ultimately determine the products performance and style. There are a wide range of panel materials offering different finishes and levels of performance, with laminated and single toughened glass and compact grade laminate the most often specified materials for cubicles and lockers in sports and leisure.

Unlocking the options

Glass has wide application and is particularly suitable for high-end facilities and finishes. It can be used for cubicles, lockers, IPS and wall panels, and even vanities; a popular choice for wet or dry areas in exclusive leisure centres, hotels, spas, golf clubs and offices.

Single sheet glass, often referred to as 'back painted' glass, has coloured ceramic paint applied to one side. The painted side would then be bonded to a substrate (e.g for IPS panels) with the opposite face being the final finish – hence the name 'back painted'.

Toughened and laminated glass is usually two sheets of glass bonded together with an ethylene vinyl acetate interlayer, which is coloured by bonding single ceramic painted glass sheets together. This process also allows the incorporation of hidden fixings, creates overlaps for a flush-fronted cubicle appearance and can provide a different colour for either side (achieved by bonding two different coloured sheets together).

Laminated glass is more durable in service and in the unlikely event of a critical impact one side it will often remain intact by 'holding' the damaged sheet safely in place.

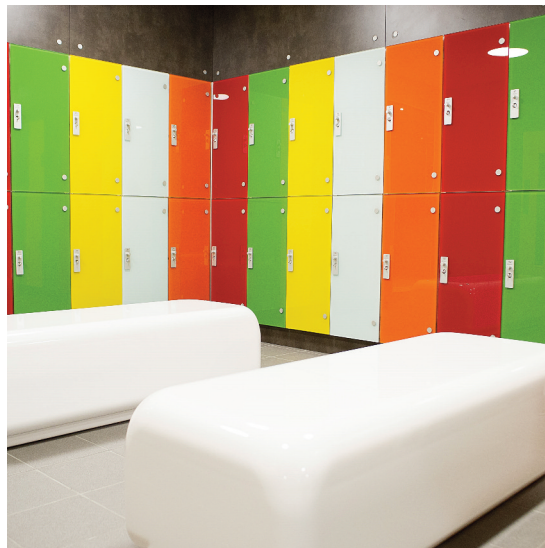
If white or lighter colours are required,



it is important to specify low iron opti-white glass that has a purer and easier to match colour. Standard float includes iron contamination that produces a green tinge, which can be difficult to match. Almost any RAL colour finish can be produced on glass, including patterns such as metallic and large format high-resolution bespoke prints. Glass panels must be finished with a radius or bevelled edge to eliminate sharp, square edges. All holes and cut outs must be predetermined before manufacturing, and it is vital that this is done before the 'toughening' process as glass cannot be reworked once toughened.

When faced with the task to fit out high-usage facilities such as leisure centres, sports stadiums, prisons, hospitals or schools, specifiers can choose solid grade laminate (SGL). Also known as compact grade laminate, this material is extremely durable, vandal-resistant and impervious to water.

SGL is made of compressed sheets of kraft paper, impregnated and polymerised



within a thermosetting phenolic resin. The boards are available in a wide range of colours, sizes and finishes, and can be produced with decorative facings. While SGL has solid performance characteristics, its appearance has one key drawback – its resin core edge is always visible.

Stability

Within leisure, specifying a fully framed cubicle system is imperative. With the panels fully recessed into the framework, the panels do not support the system – instead, all of the weight is transferred through the frame to the floor, ensuring strength, rigidity and fewer visible fixings.

For example, this allows a bench to be safely cantilevered from the cubicle. Moreover, a fully framed system does not require any anchor walls or floor to ceiling posts to support it, making it perfect for island and back to back changing configurations. Specifiers can even reduce the number of foot fixings with a suspended cubicle system, which is suitable where underfloor heating or waterproof membranes are a concern, or where ease of cleaning is a priority.

Locking considerations

Wet lockers (aluminium carcass) are ideal for all environments and can be used with glass, laminate or real wood veneer doors.

Ventilation and natural drainage are important to ensure wet items which are being stored are allowed to drain, and a good quality two-part sprung hinge is also essential as this will ensure that locker doors open to a controlled aperture, and

close safely and securely.

There are many lock options available; by far the most commonly specified within a leisure environment is the coin return lock which lends itself perfectly for multiple users. This year, a new £1 coin is being introduced, so it is critical that all coin locks in current use are checked to ensure they can accept the new coin. RFID (Radio Frequency Interference Device) locks can support both personalised and public use lockers, and can be activated with most building access cards, chips, or wristbands.

Accessibility

When specifying tier configuration, it is important to give consideration to the end user. A single tier and an unequal two tier allow for storage of prosthetic limbs and should be used in combination with wall mounted lockers to meet equality guidelines. Benches can be integrated with the locker either underneath or to the front of a ‘welled’ system. A concrete plinth is by far the most common solution for a wet public area; however, aluminium plinths are a popular alternative allowing for adjustable heights and can be faced with a matching laminate to ensure no dirt or dust traps are created.

Sustainable materials are also penetrating the market, with specifiers increasingly looking at eco-friendly choices for lockers and cubicles and taking interest into our FSC-accredited range and the related chain of custody documents.

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