

Lifestyle

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POST-DISPATCH HOME EDITOR

Toilet.

OK, we just wanted to get that out of the way. We're all adults here, so there will be no "porcelain throne" euphemisms. Toilets are serious business, and it's about time we started taking them seriously.

Aside from the obvious water conservation issues, choosing the right toilet is now fraught with more choices than ever before. The bathroom feature once relegated to being unobtrusive and strictly utilitarian now comes in models that are downright luxurious.

A new high-functioning toilet from Toto that includes bidet features sells for \$5,200.

Yes, you could buy dozens — literally dozens — of perfectly acceptable toilets for that same price, but don't scoff just yet.

This particular Toto toilet may be an attractive state-of-the-art unit for the wealthy, toilet connoisseur, but it opens the door for cheaper — which does not mean cheap — options that have almost the same number of features, including an all-mighty remote control.

If your brow is furrowing over the extravagance of a toilet that sells for the price of a respectable used car, consider that it's not merely hedonism. Many of the higher-priced toilets are marketed for families with older adults who need a higher seat and other functions that allow them to use the bathroom without assistance. The sticker price may be a shock, but the multi-function toilet is actually not as odd as it sounds. OK, by American standards it's a little odd, but it is also oddly intriguing.

So what does a \$5,200 toilet do? Almost everything.

The Toto Neorest 600 has a wireless LCD remote with more features and buttons than a

deluxe massage chair from Sharper Image.

The lid opens automatically as you arrive, thanks to a motion sensor, and the seat is pre-warmed to your desired temperature setting. Once you are finished, one of two washing wands with adjustable angles and optional pulsation offers up a cleansing spray of water warmed to the temperature of your choice. Next, a warm-air jet can be used to cut down toilet paper use. The toilet automatically flushes as you rise and then emits a mist of air deodorizer. If both the seat and lid are elevated — signaling a standing male user — the unit is automatically prompted to use a "light flush" feature (that's 1.2 gallons instead of 1.6 gallons). And finally, as you leave, the seat and/or lid closes softly behind you. A smaller profile Neorest 500 is also available.

The sleek, tankless one-piece unit even has a special glazing inside the bowl that actually keeps it cleaner than ordinary

toilets because particles don't stick easily to the surface. A combination of glazing and flushing technology makes the unit less prone to clogging.

The Neorest 600 toilet even has limited deduction capabilities — it can record the times of usage and be programmed to automatically turn off the seat warmer when it's not typically in use. Of course, the warmer automatically engages again if you sit down at an off-peak time.

We think these type of units were the standard on the Starship Enterprise.

However, mere mortals may be more persuaded by the Brondell Swash 600, which sells for about \$600. We are reluctant to say that this is just a toilet seat, because it performs a wide variety of tricks. It can be used to retrofit your existing toilet as long as you have a nearby electrical outlet and fresh water hook-up.

The gentle opening and closing lid moves at a flick of the fin-

ger. A remote control operates the washing wands, water temperature, heated seat and air dryer. There's even an alarm feature in case someone needs assistance (this is intended for elderly or child users, not necessarily someone calling for the latest magazine, but in the privacy of your own home you can do what you want). The unit also has an energy saver mode for the seat warmer and dual flush modes for heavy and lighter jobs.

A Swash 400, with slightly fewer features, is also available for about \$500.

Gina Richter, manager of Design on Tap in Shiloh, Ill., said more and more people are asking about these washlet seats, because they are more budget- and space-friendly than buying a separate bidet. Toto also manufactures a seat like the Swash, but the unit starts at \$700 for one with washing wands, water-pressure control and heated seat and costs up to \$1,200 for a unit with a remote control, warm air dryer, air deodorizer and other functions.

Richter said that the Toto unit is on display on the showroom floor and in a functioning bathroom for people who want to test drive the unit before they consider a purchase.

"When you're asking people to spend \$1,200 on a toilet seat, they need to experience the difference, not just hear about it," Richter said.

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Brondell Swash 600 (\$600), a toilet seat with deluxe remote-controlled bidet features.



Massage, seat warmer, remote control — new high tech toilets have all these and more

As embarrassing as it could be, don't be shy about taking a seat on a few showroom toilets (with your clothing intact), just to test the height and the comfort of the seating options. Just like visiting the mattress store, take your normal sitting position and consider what option provides you the most comfort.

Seats generally range in height from 10 inches for children's models such as the Eljer's Kindergarten (\$305 at Design on Tap) to a towering 17.5 inches for the Great John Toilet Co.'s Great John (\$1,000 for the unit plus \$84 for the seat at Henry Plumbing in Kirkwood). The Great John is designed to accommodate larger-than-average users. The seat surface area is about 150 percent larger than a typical toilet. The higher seat makes rising easier.

Newer toilets are available at chair heights of 15 to 16 inches, but your personal comfort level could be anywhere in between.

Designer toilet

When it comes to toilets, consumers are considering top-dollar models for style and efficiency, not just comfort.

"There's a huge trend toward people looking at toilets for good design," said Stephanie Simons, senior market analyst for Kohler Sanitary in Kohler, Wis., referring to the new Kohler Purist Hatbox toilet (shown on cover). It sells for

about \$2,000 and looks a lot like a petite clothes hamper. By toilet standards, it has a comfort height of 17 inches and is available in six neutral tones. A black model is in the works.

The tankless unit with an electronic flush is being shopped by architects and interior designers who want a conscientious bathroom choice that is also high style. When closed, the sleek unit, which does not sport a handle or any tell-tale signs of its function, is bound to give the uninitiated some pause because it looks unlike any other toilet on the market.

However, if conservation is more of a consideration than innovative style, the Toto Aqua Dual-Flush toilet offers an optional smaller flush of 0.9 gallons as well as the standard 1.6 gallons. It operates with a button that looks a bit like the Chinese yin-yang symbol, except one segment is slightly larger than the other to control the larger flush, and sells for about \$400.

"I tell people, 'Yes, you can buy a toilet for \$150 or even \$90,' but you're going to have to flush it two to three times when you use it, and you're probably going to have to plunge it a lot," Richter said. "The biggest part of our job is education."

She said that better-quality toilets are more expensive for a reason.