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CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

THIRTY UNDER 30: THE NEXT WAVE
ALFRESCO SHOWERS
APPLIANCES / TOWEL WARMERS

WARM UP

Towel warmer usage in the U.S. lags behind Europe, but demand is growing

BY ALICE LIAO



VOLA

Buyers can customize the T39 modular towel warmer system by specifying the number of bars (minimum of three) and the spacing between them. All mechanical components are concealed behind a wall, resulting in a clean, minimalist look. Available in 29 finishes, the system includes a built-in two-hour timer, five temperature settings, and two control knobs. Each bar measures 20¾ inches and uses 10 watts. en.vola.com / **CIRCLE 859**

WESTERN PREMIUM

This Cabinet Towel Warmer is equipped with heated towel bars that reach temperatures of 140 to 160 degrees F in 20 minutes. Two sizes are available: a 24-inch-tall model containing two towel bars and a 42-inch-tall model for warming four large towels. It can be outfitted with a variety of fronts to match cabinetry.

westernpremium.com

CIRCLE 860



A towel warmer is a pleasurable amenity, but if you think it's strictly for the bath, think again. The devices can be just as useful in laundry rooms to dry delicates, and in mudrooms, garages, and kitchens to remove dampness from outerwear. Though Europe is still ahead of the United States in its adoption of towel warmers, demand here is growing, with interest acute in cold-weather regions and strong in warm climates where humidity can leave towels feeling damp. With applications only limited by the imagination, manufacturers are hoping to spread

the warmth with expanded options in controls, aesthetics, and customization.

Of the two types of towel warmers, electric models still dominate the U.S. market. Though hydronic systems are more energy efficient and do not contain any electrical parts, they're also more complicated to install as they keep towels warm by circulating water from a home's closed-loop hot-water heating system. Moreover, hydronic towel warmers function only when the heating system is on. Notes Sarah Jenkinson, of towel warmer manufacturer Sterlingham, "I will

STERLINGHAM

For bathrooms with little or no wall space to spare, the Heated Washstand features two or three built-in heated towel rails. It comes in either a two- or four-leg wall-mounted unit measuring 32 inches wide by 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches tall by 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep. Various finishes and custom sizes also are available. sterlingham.co.uk / **CIRCLE 861**



RUNTAL NORTH AMERICA

The Neptune electric towel warmer can double as a space heater. Available in two sizes, the smaller unit measures 33 $\frac{1}{10}$ inches by 19 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches and uses 300 watts for a heat output of 1,024 BTU per hour. The 45 $\frac{7}{10}$ -inch-by-19 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch unit is rated at 450 watts with a 1,536-BTU-per-hour heat output. Neptune is offered in more than 100 colors as well as chrome.

runtalnorthamerica.com

CIRCLE 862

MRSTEAM

Lexington is an industrial-style collection of electric towel warmers available in five designs. Offered in brushed and polished stainless steel, the 300-watt and 400-watt units range in size from 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches by 41 inches to 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches by 29 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches and come with an in-wall programmable electronic timer. mrsteam.com / **CIRCLE 863**



sell two hydronic units for every 98 electric units.”

Electric towel warmers generate heat in one of two ways. Some contain an oil or glycol-and-water solution that is heated with a filament, while dry-element models use a thick electric cable that runs through the entire appliance. Sterlingham’s electric towel warmers utilize a waterproof electric cable technology that makes them safe for mounting at the foot of a tub or in a wet room or shower.

Dry-element towel warmers preheat quickly—in 10 to 20 minutes—but, unless it’s a bad switch,

can be more difficult to repair. Fred Salati, director of Amba Products, advises choosing a reputable brand, as lesser products are more susceptible to power surges. “If the continuity of the unit is disrupted, you have to replace the whole unit,” he says.

By contrast, repairing a fluid-filled model often entails simply changing out a spent heating element, even after a decade of use, says Salati. Warm-up, however, can take 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the size. Again, opt for an established manufacturer as poor soldering can lead to leaks, notes Jenkinson.

Towel Warmers



WARMUP

Liberty Single Bars can be customized by the number of bars and the spacing between them. Each bar measures 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide and consumes 9 watts. They can be wired to the company's 4iE Wi-Fi thermostat. **warmup.com / CIRCLE 864**



WARMLYOURS

The Metropolitan towel warmer boasts a sleek contemporary look and 10 heated bars, which deliver a heat output of 512 BTUs per hour. The unit uses 150 watts, measures 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches by 41 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and is made of stainless steel in a polished finish. The towel warmer includes an on/off switch but can be wired to any other Wi-Fi-enabled wall switch for wireless control. **warmlyours.com / CIRCLE 865**

Maintaining Control

Some users prefer to keep their electric towel warmers running continuously, which provides added benefits such as towel drying and mold and mildew prevention; manufacturers claim this consumes less energy than a 100-watt light bulb.

For those who don't, digital controls save energy by allowing users to pre-program on/off operation and select temperature preference. All MrSteam electric towel warmers come with a remote-wired in-wall digital timer, while Runtal products offer five power settings digitally operated by a built-in soft-touch push button. Several Amba cabled units now include an integrated digital heat controller with nine temperature settings.

Sterlingham recommends a dimmer switch to regulate the temperature of its electric towel warmers, but a digital combination unit could be swapped in if a timer function is desired. Similarly, Vola's T39, which uses a built-in two-hour timer and a knob to adjust heat, could also be wired to a digital wall control unit, says Bob Gifford, director of bath products for Vola distributor Hastings Tile & Bath.

For towel warmers already hardwired to a wall control unit, adding wireless control may not require much more than installing a Wi-Fi switch. Some manufacturers offer their own, but in many cases, an off-the-shelf product could easily do the trick.

Taking a different tack, radiant flooring manufacturer WarmUp has expanded its 4iE Smart Wi-Fi thermostat and dedicated app to include remote programming and operation of its towel warmers. In addition, the company has introduced a voice-assist feature in Europe; a North American launch is still in the works, says Marketing Manager Alice Warnier.

Form and Function

The Internet abounds with fun towel warmer designs, but, ultimately, the more bars a unit has—or the larger the heated surface—the more effective its performance. Choosing a multi-rung towel warmer that can double as a space heater can prove a godsend in bathrooms located at the end of a forced-air heating loop, says Owen Kantor, vice president of marketing and sales for Runtal North America. It also can save energy by encouraging towel reuse in homes where damp towels are regularly thrown into the wash.

Thanks to a widening array of options, performance can be attractive and customized. Minimalist modular products, such as Vola's T39, which conceals mechanical parts behind a wall, allow users to specify the number of bars and the spacing between them, but Gifford advises, "it's better to keep them close" for even heating. Amba offers a variety of standard and custom sizes, including narrower widths that are ideal for apartment dwellers.

What's popular? Streamlined, modern looks in brushed nickel, stainless steel, and chrome are trending, but "now satin brass finishes are coming in," says Martha Orellano, vice president of sales and marketing for MrSteam. "We see that with the steam shower and faucets."

And if wall space is limited, there are other ways to warm a towel. Sterlingham makes a console-style vanity with heated bars, for example, and Western Premium's heated towel cabinet can be integrated into bathroom cabinetry.

As homeowners spend more time in their bathrooms and with towel warmers available for almost any budget, it's easier than ever to come in from the cold. ■



WHIRLPOOL

This smart, all-in-one washer/dryer eliminates the need to transfer clothes between machines. It immediately begins drying clothes after the wash cycle has ended and offers Load & Go Bulk Dispensing, which automatically uses the appropriate amount of detergent for each load. Users can also receive smartphone alerts when loads are done. whirlpool.com / **CIRCLE 866**



DU VERRE HARDWARE CO.

The brand has teamed up with venerable designer Clodagh for three new collections of sustainably produced hardware inspired by nature. Stacked (shown) features tactile rings and comes in oil-rubbed bronze and satin nickel. duverre.com / **CIRCLE 867**



KALLISTA

Part of the company's For Town collection by Michael S. Smith, this new widespread sink faucet has a sweeping arched spout, a flared neck, and a grander deck-to-aerator design. It comes in polished chrome, nickel silver, and brushed nickel living finishes.

kallista.com / **CIRCLE 868**



ICERA

The new Renaissance console lavatory embodies a decidedly classic form. Crafted in vitreous china, it features MicroGlaze anti-microbial coating and 8-inch centerset faucet holes. The stainless steel stand is PVD-coated and available in various finishes.

icerausa.com / **CIRCLE 869**



MTI BATHS

The manufacturer's new collection of pedestal sinks is designed to take up less space in cramped bathrooms. Measuring 36 inches tall, Petra and Halo are made from the brand's SculptureStone, which consists of mostly organic materials that are durable and easy to clean.

mtibaths.com / **CIRCLE 870**

RONBOW

Part of the manufacturer's Signature collection, the Vento ceramic sink by Italian design house Pininfarina was inspired by smooth snowdrifts carved by fast, strong winds, the company says. The sinktop also has a soap dish and a matching drain cover. ronbow.com / **CIRCLE 871**



AMERICAN STANDARD

The VorMax toilet has been expanded to include a transitional two-piece design in two water-saving models—1.28 gallons per flush and 1.0 gallon per flush. Featuring a CleanCurve Rim that omits the rim cavity and holes inside the bowl, it delivers one jet of water that scrubs the entire bowl. americanstandard.com / **CIRCLE 872**



RUVATI USA

The Roma Workstation sink is a 45-inch system offering a variety of built-in and customizable accessories that turn it into a personalized working space. It features two tiers of sliding tracks that can hold cutting boards, drying racks, and colanders. The sink measures 10 inches deep and comes with two African mahogany cutting boards. ruvati.com / **CIRCLE 873**



FRANKE

The Pescara Collection pot filler draws inspiration from Italian tradition and its artisan culture. Offering architecturally precise lines, it features ceramic cartridges and a 180-degree swivel. Various finishes are available. franke.us / **CIRCLE 874**