Restrooms in public spaces are utilitarian in nature—they’re there to serve a purpose...but it doesn’t have to be that way. While some public restrooms fade into the background, employing design meant to be muted, many hotels are creating more in-your-face moments in public restrooms through art, through color and design—or even just by taking advantage of the view.

“All public-area spaces, including bathrooms, are of equal importance,” said Chris McDonough, principal of The Gettys Group. “Guests will have a memory of their total experience of a property, so each detail deserves attention. We work hard to create a strong concept and story for the interior design of a space, and that story should be carried through all aspects of the design, providing a seamless experience.”

“These spaces are critically important and also a great opportunity to surprise and delight through rich color, dramatic lighting and lots of sex appeal,” said Michael Booth, principal, BAMO.

Pamela Babey, a fellow principal with BAMO, added, “Everyone stops in there—guests of the hotel, restaurant visitors and conference attendees. Commercial restrooms, especially in a hospitality environment, must be elegant, enjoyable and look clean.”

—Nicole Carlino

1. Renaissance Chicago Downtown Hotel offers a restroom that is an extension of the art gallery concept in the pre-function areas. McDonough said, “This extends into the restrooms with moody walls and floor that contrast with photographic murals that serve as the dramatic backdrop to the space. The vibrant green works evoke a modern trompe l’oeil feel, and connect the guest to a natural outdoor setting within an urban context.”

2. Located on the top floor of Delano Las Vegas, the restrooms at Skyfall Lounge take advantage of its views of The Strip—including private stalls with floor-to-ceiling windows in the women’s restroom.

3. The InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown features a Marie Antoinette-themed women’s room and a men’s room fit for a cowboy (shown). The hotel even has a glass waterfall urinal.

4. Babey noted that for restrooms like the one in the executive lounge at Han Yue Lou Hotel Nanjing, a Solis Managed Hotel, you can up the ambience with varied lighting, and the best way to impress is to think of a place for everything—from towels and soap to hooks and ledges for bags and iPads.