

## Testing the Waters

*Kohler's first store lets you get a feel for its latest bath and kitchen products.*



IN OPENING ITS first store, the Kohler Co. has created an environment where consumers can get their hands, if not their feet, wet. The 133-year-old kitchen and bath products manufacturer headquartered in Kohler, Wis., has built a 7,000-square-foot space in Chicago's Merchandise Mart where you can try out the company's latest wares, some replete with running water, before deciding whether to purchase them.

"If you look at the proliferation of home improvement magazines, TV shows, and home centers, there's a lot more information out there," says Jim Lewis, Kohler's director of market development. "Our customers want to experience brands more than ever." To design the store, which opened last November, Kohler hired Janson Goldstein, the New York architecture firm that created Manhattan's Ferragamo and Armani flagships. The store—topped by 24-foot-high ceilings and decorated with life-size black-and-white photographs of lean, muscular bodies glistening with water droplets—provides what Lewis deems "a level of experience that typically isn't found in a public showroom."

Consider the Performance Room, where, should you be so inclined, you can compare the varied flushing

sounds of seven different functioning toilets. On the upper mezzanine, you can test the pulsating spray of the Water-Tile system within a full-size shower, and on the main level, you can plunge your hands into the suds overflowing tub and extrapolate how reclining among the bubbles that emanate from its 11 jets might feel. In similar fashion, the store offers opportunities to test some 30 products and view 300 from the company's Kohler, Kallista, and Roborn brands.

The staff's seven project consultants can assist you in selecting a new basin and faucet or help you devise an entire kitchen or bathroom. For the latter service, the store recently debuted its Designer Series, a program through which you can review room plans created by contributing interior designers such as Laura Bohn, Clodagh, Christopher Coleman, and Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz. Each includes a watercolor rendering and product information, among other details. You can work with a consultant to adapt one of the designer's concepts for your home or hire the designer directly. —LIZ GROSSMAN

*The Kohler Store, 312.755.2510, [www.thekohlerstore.com](http://www.thekohlerstore.com)*

*The recently opened Chicago emporium features several hundred items, 30 of which employ running water.*