

# Power Showers

Why good ideas flow under water.



Whether you've just woken up or are about to go to bed, are sweaty from a run or need to warm up after a cold walk home, showers are a rejuvenating joy. They can also be a great place to think. According to a 2016 study by cognitive scientist Scott Barry Kaufman, 72 percent of people have their best ideas in the shower. If Reddit is anything to go by, they have weird ideas as well as good ones. The online forum's "showerthoughts" community is home to 16.3 million people sharing their "miniature epiphanies." Posts on the thread range from the existential: "You have existed since the beginning of the universe, but only realized it when you gained consciousness," to the very silly: "The trees cut down to make Jenga blocks are repeatedly forced to relive their own death." Or, as Snoop Dogg once informed his Twitter followers: "I just sat in the shower for an hour thinking about how Mercedes has 3 E's all pronounced differently."

Why is the shower such a good place for innovative, meaningful or just downright absurd thoughts? Could it be the meditative flow of water? Or perhaps the upright stance inspires an active mind (unlike a bath, where your hori-

zontal position encourages slothfulness in mind and body). Perhaps it is both. And since certain aromas are thought to promote memory and alertness, using a shampoo that smells of rosemary, say, can't hurt either. Kaufman, speaking at a summit on "peak work performance" has another explanation: "The relaxing, solitary and non-judgmental shower environment may afford creative thinking by allowing the mind to wander freely," opening people up to their inner consciousness. Other scientists have credited dopamine—the "happy hormone." Often present when we have our best ideas, it can apparently be triggered by warm showers.

A shower is a total shift of pace and tone from whatever has gone before and, even if you have to make it snappy, you can usually switch to autopilot so that you're not thinking about the act of washing while doing it. It's one time of the day when checking your phone is challenging, as are other distractions like TV, radio and conversation. Short or long, your shower is an opportunity for your mind to meander. Got some thinking to do? Perhaps it's time to turn on the taps.



## SOAP ON THE ROPES by Harriet Fitch Little

The soap industry is all in a lather: Between 2010 and 2015, sales of bar soap declined by 5 percent in the US. The shift is partly due to the explosion of high-end, aggressively marketed liquid soap alternatives. (Remember, it was only a decade ago that the advertising industry realized that it could market shower gel to men as well as women.) It seems the use of bar soap is also falling, ironically, due to our obsession with being clean: Soap bars are now considered unhygienic, despite there being little evidence that bacteria on their surface can transfer from one wash to the next. Perhaps salvation will come in the form of our growing environmental consciousness; unlike gel, solid soap requires no packaging. (Top: Nail Brush by D R Harris. Center: Superfin Mexican Tubero-se Soap by Buly 1803. Bottom: Geranium Leaf Body Scrub by Aesop.)

Left Photograph: Flora Maclean. Right Photography: Courtesy of Mr. Porter and Aesop.

Photograph: Aaron Tilley. Set Design: Niklas Hansen, Ice Styling: Tara Garnell

The cool history of a hot commodity.

KATIE CALAUTTI

# Object Matters: Ice

Ice as a natural element has been a fixture on earth for about 2.4 billion years. Ice as a commodity is a more recent phenomenon.

For centuries, ice was a luxury reserved for rich estate owners and used for food preservation rather than refreshment. That all changed in 1805, when a young Frederic Tudor was enjoying ice cream and cold drinks at his well-to-do Boston family's summer party and began musing about how colonizing forces in the West Indies would envy his refreshments.

Tudor became fixated on the idea of making ice into a commodity. His initial scheme was brilliant in theory, but it proved disastrous in execution: He decided to transport ice from the pond of his family's country estate to a place where people had never seen it—the Caribbean. Packed in straw for insulation, 130 tons of ice made the journey to Martinique in February of 1806—only to promptly melt when there proved no adequate storage facility.

But Tudor pressed on. He prevented meltage by tightly packing his ice with sawdust and working with locals to build ice houses near his ports. He also went on

the road, practicing the infamous "first one is free" sales technique: offering guests chilled beverages at dinners, convincing bartenders that consumers preferred cold drinks and giving ice cream-making lessons to chefs.

Eventually, Tudor achieved the sort of paradigm shift that all entrepreneurs aspire to: He single-handedly transformed ice from a slippery byproduct of winter to a lucrative year-round necessity. He brought on foreman Nathaniel Wyeth, who revolutionized treacherous ice harvesting with horse-drawn grid plowing and tripled their production. A network of ice houses cropped up in the southern United States. Soon, Americans in cities couldn't live without ice during the sweltering summer.

By the 1840s, ice was being shipped all over the world and others were mimicking Tudor's methods. His enterprising idea ushered in the advent of refrigerators, freezers and at-the-ready cubes. It turns out that his methods proved prescient: Market something as indispensable, package it, and people will pay. Bottled water, anyone?

