

LET'S REMODEL

Bath trends – the private retreat

Q. Do you have any information available on the current trends for remodeling bathroom?

A. Homeowners are always looking to develop kitchens where they can bond as a family, but the bath is where they escape. The biggest trend in bathrooms today is cocooning. "Homeowners want to retreat from the world and their families," says Peter Schor, president, Institute of Bathroom Product Knowledge. "The American attitude toward the bath is changing. We used to look at the room as purely utilitarian. Now, we are approaching the bath as the Europeans do – we are seeing it as a place for personal pampering."

That may explain the rise in steam showers, rain bars, rain domes, double shower heads, body massagers and sprays, saunas, jetted tubs, oversized tubs and in-line heaters. Baths are becoming the one place to submerge problems and get away from life's stress and demands – and that retreat is getting bigger. Schor notes that 75 percent of consumers in a recent poll said they wanted a larger master bath with a separate tub and shower. He also notes that 18 percent of all tubs are jetted, and that number is increasing.

Americans want to relax. Some are even going so far as to put their exercise equipment in the master bath to release their aggressions before climbing into a private sauna or hot bath. But this is one trend Iris Harrell, NARI member and winner of the NARI 195 Contractor of the Year Award for Residential Baths Over \$15,000, doesn't recommend. There may be too much moisture in the bath for the health of the exercise equipment. You may be encouraging rust and other deterioration.

It is better to create a separate but adjoining room for exercising. The trend for larger baths can be a trick when there is limited space to grow. If you have to choose between a bath or shower, the shower is more important. Don't try to combine the two, Harrell warns. The tub-and-shower combination is difficult to get in and out of and looks clumsy in a small space. A larger shower stall with clear glass enclosure will increase the visual line of the space while still maintaining the need for a relaxing water experience.

And an "experience" is what homeowners are seeking. They are looking at their baths as a form of water recreation, be it a long hot bath in a tub that has in-line heaters or in a shower with a rain bar. Whatever the form, the feel of water seems to be relaxing. Steam and heat seem to do the trick, too. Radiant floor heating, towel warmers and steam showers also are emerging and finding a comfortable niche in the bath market.



Magnifying mirrors are on the rise as well. As Baby Boomers are aging and their eyesight declining, the magnification is appreciated. Good lighting is, too.

Lighting is an important element of any room, but particularly in the bath. Here is a room where you must be able to shave, put on makeup, find a fallen contact lens, sort laundry, and still be able to have a soothing soak – all activities that require different lighting techniques. Schor recommends cross-illumination along side of mirrors with an additional top lighting bar. The cross lighting from the sides will eliminate dark shadows (another feature aging Boomers love). Use recessed cans and diffusers for increased mood lighting around the tub. In this area of the bath, atmosphere is everything.

The other type of lighting to remember is natural lighting. Harrell contends that daylight is essential in the bath. "People want to make a visual connection with the outside. It helps them relax and increases the visual size of the room."

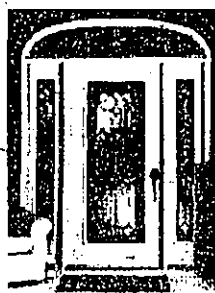
Skylights, picture windows, solar tubes are all added benefits to creating the perfect bath. They increase the light and the view. Homeowners today are having hard days. Most families include two working adults who both need to get ready at the same time in the morning. These homeowners want two lavatories and maneuvering room for two, but they still want to maintain their privacy.

Another quality they are seeking to maintain is safety. Again, the largest market group is aging, and their abilities are declining; in addition, they are settling into homes in which they would most likely want to stay. These homes, and baths, need to incorporate universal design features, such as higher vanities (30-35 inches), curbless showers, wider clearances around the tub and toilet, and easily manipulated faucets and hardware.

Always keep in mind safety, relaxation, expansive spaces and accessibility. But most of all, remember that the bath is a home version of a European spa, where a short visit brings relief and relaxation.

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