

High-tech Bathrooms

It's hard to believe, but nary a hundred years ago, simply having a bathroom, was a luxury that was largely unattainable to the masses. In fact, it wasn't until the late 1910's and early 1920's that a bathroom became standard equipment in all city homes.

The evolution of the modern bathroom has both paralleled and precipitated several changes in modern society. Apart from the obvious health benefits of improved sanitation, fashion, hairstyles, and even career choices, have been influenced by the advent of the indoor john. Where would the miniskirt and halter-top be without the ability to shave in the bathtub?

Consider the bathroom of the 21st Century! Soft, electronically dimmed lighting pleases the eye and flatters even the most unflattering completion. Radiant under-floor heating keeps the toes warm and cozy. Integrated speakers pipe in relaxing music to soothe the ears. Underwater chromatherapy bulbs project an array of invigorating colors through the aromatherapy-scented water, while hydrotherapy jets massage away the stresses of the world. The rain shower and side spray heads in the steam shower enclosure gently scrub the skin and open the pores. Finally, the low flush toilet keeps things clean and fresh with a minimum of water. Not bad for 100 years of human progress!

Not surprisingly, after the kitchen, the bathroom is often at the top of the list when it comes to renovations. When people want to update their spaces, they invariably want more bathrooms as well as bigger, better equipped bathrooms. Fifty years ago, it was perfectly reasonable for a family of four to share one bathroom. Today, the same family is more likely to have 2 ½ or 3 ½ baths and is thinking about adding an extra one for guests.

And just like the myriad of kitchen fixtures that have exploded onto the market in the past few years, the overwhelming array of new bathroom fixtures and accessories that has recently been unveiled is dictating the design direction in today's hottest lavatory renos.

Showers, for instance, have come a long way from those of yesteryear or even last year! Personalized custom shower profiles that memorize your preferred water temperature, body spray jets that look like tiles and LCD screens that let you choose everything from your selection of music to your favorite chromatherapy color are among the innovations. One new trend is to place two showerheads on opposite ends or sides so that two people can shower together.

Bathtubs have also undergone something of a metamorphosis recently. While jetted tubs have been around for decades, many of the new tubs incorporate special hydrotherapy jets to target specific pressure points, soft integrated head and neck rests and aromatherapy reservoirs that let you choose the ideal scent to accompany your bathing experience. As well, new low-flow, high-pressure technology helps keep water consumption and the associated costs to a minimum.

Basins and toilets have also undergone some high-tech tweaking of their own. From the classic, fluted pedestal sink to the standard porcelain commode, design savvy and environmental consciousness are leading the next generation of products.

And who says that water has to be colorless? One space-age new faucet even matches the color of the water to its temperature: red for hot, blue for cold. “It’s actually an LED light in the faucet that gets its power from a water turbine generator in the tap itself.”

The dual flush toilet, which has been in use in Europe and Asia for several years, is now gaining a foothold in North American bathrooms. There is one button for low-flush and another for higher volume flushing. Using only the water required for each flush can save the average household hundreds of liters of water every year.

Once you’ve chosen the ideal fixtures to suit your lifestyle, the other big thing to keep in mind when doing a bathroom renovation is the magic “R” word: RESALE. A well done bathroom renovation can pay for itself and then some when it comes time to sell. The opposite, however, can also be true. A poorly done renovation, or a highly personal choice of materials, features and colors, can cost you dearly.

Often the biggest mistake people make in this regard is choosing materials and colors that are too trendy. Most people over 30 still remember the turquoise, salmon and harvest gold plumbing fixtures that were so popular. Given that the average life cycle of a bathroom, between renovations, is more than 10 years, it doesn’t make sense to choose materials that will look dated in just 24 months.

Glass vessel sinks and gold/green rough-hewn slate tile might be all the rage right now, but if selling your house is in the cards in the next few years, classic white porcelain and black granite will give you a lot more leverage.

As with any renovation, your new bathroom should be a reflection of your own personality and should be conducive to your family’s lifestyle. Perhaps more than in any other room, quality workmanship and proper choice of materials for your bathroom renovation will give you many years of worry-free enjoyment. Choosing a designer that listens to your needs and a contractor that you feel comfortable working with will help ensure you are thrilled with the outcome!