

Bathrooms

BEAUTIFUL BATHROOMS

Bathrooms should be designed for blissful relaxation and practical functionality. But a lot can go wrong if you don't combine good design with smart construction methods. Here's how you can achieve the best results.



BATHROOMS MAY BE ONE OF THE most renovated rooms in the house, but they may not be the simplest. First-rate design, the right plumbing and smart construction all play a part in a successful bathroom renovation.

Melonie Bayl-Smith of Liquid Architecture estimates she's seen the inside of hundreds of bathrooms during her 10 years as a practising architect. "People definitely get excited about a new bathroom, especially if they've been living with an old one that looks decades out of style," she says.

But it's not just looks we're interested in. Low maintenance and sustainability are also high on the agenda. "New bathrooms are infinitely easier to clean," says Bayl-Smith. "Also, people are more water conscious nowadays and they know a new bathroom can be more environmentally sustainable."

THE TRENDS

SEPARATE POWDER ROOMS

According to Bayl-Smith, the first thing most renovators ask for is a separate bathroom and powder room. In architect-speak, a powder room refers to the toilet. "A powder room is a must for many home owners," says Bayl-Smith, who indicates that 50% of renovation projects now include powder rooms. Home owners who already have a separate powder room typically want to upgrade it. "We're seeing people redo their [separate toilet] to include a shower, giving it a lot more functionality for not much more cost."

VANITIES

Inside the main bathroom, Bayl-Smith says there is a firm move away from traditional vanities. It seems all-in-one units with a recessed basin on top and storage cupboards underneath may have had their day. "We're seeing a lot of hung vanities, where instead of an all-in-one there may be a long stone shelf," she says. "There's still storage, but it's kept separately and may even be mobile."

BYE TO BASIC BASINS

Bayl-Smith says it's not just the all-in-one vanity that's going out of style, but the semi-recessed basin itself. "It's particularly evident in powder rooms where we are starting to move towards flatter

surfaces, with the water falling onto an area without a plug. It's a bit like something you might see in a restaurant."

David Hallett, General Manager of Archicentre (Victoria), agrees that today's bathroom basins are far from traditional. "Some of the newest basin designs have the bowl mounted on top of the counter as though it were a large bowl on a table," says Hallett. "Another slick design is a large square porcelain basin, nearly the size of a laundry tub, supported by thin steel legs."

But regardless of their style, basins are so in vogue in main bathrooms and full-sized ensuites that we often want two. Archicentre's latest research shows 54.8% of renovators choose to add double basins to their new bathroom, with his-and-hers basins appearing at opposite ends of a long counter top.

It's a trend Bayl-Smith believes will continue. "We first saw double basins a few years ago, and our busy morning routines mean they are now increasing in popularity," she says. "People might have two basins if they get ready for work at the same time. If they have children, they have two basins in the kids' bathroom to help speed them up in the morning." ⇒

Some of the newest basin designs have the bowl mounted on top of the counter as though it were a large bowl on a table.





TYPICAL BATHROOM COSTS

Archicentre's 2008 research shows typical bathroom renovations now cost anywhere from \$9,200 to \$24,000.

Architect Melonie Bayl-Smith agrees: "You may be able to do an ensuite for about \$10,000 if you keep on top of everything, but a full sized bathroom can run up to \$30,000 or more. It really depends on the quality of fittings, tiles and extent of the work."

The good news is that when it comes to the right substrates for your wet areas, the best materials for the job are not necessarily more expensive. According to a study in *The Smarter Construction Book cost comparisons** show that Villaboard® lining, with its superior tile-adhesive qualities and tensile strength, costs only about \$3 per metre more to supply and install than water-resistant plasterboard, while Scyon™ Secura™ wet area flooring is actually about \$3 per metre cheaper to supply and install than less effective particleboard.

*The study analysed costs involved in building parts of a typical double-storey home, and were prepared by estimators currently working in a NSW-based production building company. While costs have been prepared on a conservative basis, actual costs depend on many factors, including individual designs, locations and a building firm's supply agreements.

While two basins can be practical, they are also cost-effective, says Bayl-Smith: "It doesn't cost a lot more to do, so it makes a lot of sense."

BATHS NOT BUBBLES

While 30% of bathroom renovations now incorporate a freestanding bath, Bayl-Smith says this is one item where cost should be considered. "The cost of freestanding baths often limits people, as they start at \$1,500 to \$2,000, compared to \$700 to \$800 for a drop-in bath. You also need a reasonable amount of space to do it," she says.

If you love baths, it pays to think through your personal needs. "One recent client made sure she had a shelf above her bath for her glass of champagne and candle," says Bayl-Smith.

Still, today it is definitely baths, not spas, that we fantasise about sinking into. "Hot tubs and spas are definitely out!" she laughs, a statement supported by Archicentre's latest research, which shows just 13% of renovators are choosing spas. "People actually take them out if they have trouble with the motor, or they just find they aren't using them often enough."

For those who shun baths, double showers remain popular, with over a third of new bathrooms containing non-traditional showers. "We get requests for one traditional rain shower head with an additional hand-held shower," says Bayl-Smith. "We also get a lot of requests for double-width showers."

With sustainability at the forefront of

many renovators' minds, Bayl-Smith says today's products allow clients to get the fittings they want, complete with a modern look. Nowadays, there's no trade-off between sustainability and style. "There are no longer limitations on people's choice from an aesthetic point of view," she says. "Even the top suppliers now provide water-efficient showerheads that look stylish."

CREATING COLOUR

While most bathrooms are still white, typically with a feature tile for a splash of colour, Bayl-Smith says the trend towards embracing colour is gaining momentum. "We still have a lot of white walls, but people are more willing to move away from beige and white walls and choose something stronger," she says. "Reds, blues and aquamarines are all colours that work well with the more textured floors that are now becoming popular."

The terracotta floor tiles that were everywhere five years ago are on their way out, says Bayl-Smith. "Today we're seeing stone instead of tiles – limestone is a popular choice, although we still like a sandy or grey appearance on the floor," she says.

If you do choose a strong colour for the floor, Bayl-Smith's trade secret is to consider the bigger picture. "Think about how it will contrast with the room next door – how does it look if you leave the door open? If it's done well you can get away with a lot, but it has to be done purposefully."

TOP BATHROOM DESIGN TIPS

With bathroom renovations often running to five-figure sums, good design and planning are essential to create a final result you are happy with.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

For Bayl-Smith, any effort spent simplifying the design will pay off. “Start creating simplicity by controlling the different lines in the room,” she suggests. “If you think about a bathroom there are lots of different sized objects, like baths, toilets, vanities and mirrors. You can tie the different designs of all these things together by simplifying the overall design.

Bayl-Smith suggests you being the planning process by considering your line of sight when opening the bathroom door. “Don’t put the toilet right in front of the door – I see it all the time,” she laughs. “It’s so important to think about what you see when you first walk in. Many people never think about it, unless of course they already hate this aspect of their existing bathroom.”

NOT TOO MUCH, NOT TOO LITTLE

For Bayl-Smith, good bathroom design is about balance. “Some people become so scared about putting too much in there that it becomes very bland, but you can do something interesting without being over the top,” she says.

The key lies in making your special features work hard. “I recently had a client who put a line of mosaic tiles up the wall where she could see them while in the bath, but they were also seen reflected in the mirror. In essence, she was getting twice as much enjoyment out of that single design element.”

GET REAL

Being realistic about how you use the space is also important when considering your new bathroom design. “Good planning makes for a functional bathroom that suits your needs,” says Bayl-Smith.

“Be honest about how much you like cleaning. It’s all very well to want floor to ceiling mosaic tiles, but if you put them in the shower, you’re asking for a lot more cleaning, as you will have an enormous amount of grout on the surface.

“For some clients practicality is the ⇒

With bathroom renovations often running to five-figure sums, good design and planning are essential to create a final result you are happy with.

RECOMMENDED PRODUCTS

Use Scyon™ Secura™ wet area flooring with Villaboard® lining. Both these products are resistant to damage from moisture. This means that even if material does get wet, it won't deform or lose its structural integrity. Secura wet area flooring is also so water-resistant that it doesn't need any waterproofing outside the enclosed shower areas and at the junctions of the walls and floor.

The benefit of this in a wet area like a bathroom is obvious. But it's also a plus during the construction process. Builders can install the bathroom floor before the roof has to go on; if it rains, the product won't need replacing.

Rectification specialists Master Menders uses a solid fibre cement wall lining like James Hardie's Villaboard lining and HardiPanel® compressed sheets or Secura wet area flooring for the floor, when rectifying or building bathrooms.

For more information on Scyon™ Secura™ wet area flooring and Villaboard lining, visit: www.scyon.com.au and www.jameshardie.com.au.



Bathroom essentials: Scyon™ Secura™ wet area flooring with Villaboard® lining.



Smart bathroom storage can be stylish and functional.

WHAT'S HOT

- 1 Bowl-style basins sitting on benches or semi-recessed basins
- 2 Freestanding baths or double showers
- 3 Stone floors
- 4 Strong use of colour on walls and floors
- 5 Sustainable style
- 6 Scyon™ Secura wet area flooring

WHAT'S NOT

- 1 All-in-one vanities
- 2 Spa baths
- 3 Terracotta tiles
- 4 Subtle colour
- 5 Design statements
- 6 Water-resistant particleboard

overriding factor, so for them it really comes down to how easy the bathroom can be to maintain. For others, their new bathroom is about creating a 'wow' factor, or somewhere that is atmospheric for relaxing in the bath. You need to consider your needs as an individual."

CHEAPER IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER

As maintenance of the finished space will be important in every bathroom, Bayl-Smith says sometimes it's worth spending more up-front on selected items that offer long term dividends, such as heated floors. "At around \$1,200 to \$1,500 for an ensuite, it's not a cheap add-on, but it will certainly preserve the longevity of the finishes, because it doesn't allow the water to sit on the floor or surfaces," she says. "Heated flooring also has the added benefit of drying towels and providing a nice environment."

Archicentre's David Hallett agrees that cold bathrooms are a turn-off, and suggests using central heating or other efficient heating to create a welcoming environment. "Also, if it's possible, locate the bathroom on an outside wall so you can achieve lots of natural light," says Hallett. "Bright bathrooms always look impressive."

With the move towards bathroom vanities separated from basins, Hallett says owners lucky enough to have a window often choose to put their basin underneath it. "It's worth taking advantage of views and the natural light," he says.

STORE IT

Still, he notes, the issue of storage is vital to the success of any bathroom renovation, and cabinets should not be overlooked. Hallett says: "A lack of storage space is half the reason why many spouses decide on his-and-hers bathrooms."

This is where careful pre-planning comes in. Bayl-Smith says it's vital that renovators decide in advance what they want to store in the bathroom. "Some people want to store their linen in a bathroom – I've had clients specifying a whole linen cupboard in there – while others merely want space to put their make-up," she says.

CONTROL THE SPACE

By the time you find space for the various essentials, it's easy for a bathroom to feel crowded. To create an illusion of extra space, Hallett suggests mirrors. He also suggests that cupboards, if placed correctly, can also help a feeling of spaciousness: "All cupboard spaces should remain at eye level, which adds to the feeling of openness," he says.

When it comes to awkward spaces, Bayl-Smith's trade secret is to make clever choices with tiles. She suggests: "Tiles are very useful for controlling the space. Placing 600mm by 300mm tiles on a wall vertically definitely makes a small space seem taller, while using 200mm by 50mm tiles horizontally will make a short space look longer and more streamlined."

DISASTER-PROOF YOUR BATHROOM

IS YOUR BATHROOM REALLY WATERPROOF?

One of the most common defects builders and insurers are called on to rectify are wet areas. According to rectification expert Steve Peluso from Master Menders, problems come from a combination of poor workmanship and poor materials – or at least, not using the best materials for the job. Peluso's top problem area is water based. "It's always the waterproofing, or

Moisture build-up in the bathroom causes capillaration, which causes tiles to crack, lift, bulge and pop.

rather, the lack of waterproofing, behind the tiles,” says Peluso. “[Some] people just use normal plasterboard in their shower and recess areas, and once moisture gets in, the tiles fall off.”

The result of a failed bathroom renovation can be dramatic, if not dangerous. Peluso says he’s seen dozens of examples of people who have actually fallen through their own floor when the waterproofing has failed. “Just recently I saw a three-year-old bathroom that had been leaking for so long that one day the owner stepped out of the shower and put his foot through the sub-floor onto the dirt below.”

He also says it’s common for the front

of the shower to be the first place to go. “That’s where people usually put their bathmat,” says Peluso. “So you don’t notice the water building up beneath it, moving through the tiles into the chipboard.”

Moisture build-up in the bathroom causes capillaration, which causes tiles to crack, lift, bulge and pop. “If you held two pieces of flat glass together and dipped them into a bucket of water, you would notice the water climbing up.” Peluso says this is exactly what happens in badly waterproofed wet areas, “The water starts building up until it eventually escapes, sometimes far from the source of the problem.”

Obviously, prevention is better, and certainly cheaper, than the cure. Fixing a typical bathroom of average size (2.2 metres by 2 metres) costs between \$12,000 and \$15,000. “People are shocked,” says Peluso.

As costly repairs can be avoided by good initial workmanship, it’s important to ensure your builder uses appropriate products to waterproof and line your new bathroom. ■

TRADE SECRET

»» AVOID MOISTURE BUILD-UP

While waterproofing and using the right products are key, David Hallett from Archicentre also suggests other ways to avoid moisture build-up: “Make sure exhaust fans are vented to the outside of the house. Steam will eventually cause damage to wall surfaces and even inside the roof space if steam is vented there.”

Use the right products and your dream bathroom won’t turn into a nightmare.

YOUR BATHROOM construction checklist*

When you create your dream bathroom, Steve Peluso from Master Menders suggests using the following checklist:

- Ensure the area beneath your floors is structurally sound** before you put in new walls or flooring. Engage a professional builder, architect or engineer to do this, as they will recognise unevenness or other issues in the flooring.
- Allow ventilation to flow underneath your new flooring**, either by creating a passage for natural airflow or by using mechanical fans.
- Ensure a licensed tradesperson has modified the electrical wiring and plumbing** to suit new tapware and electrical items like heated towel rails or floor heating.
- Accept only Scyon™ Secura wet area flooring and Villaboard® lining** to all walls
- Consider the thickness of your tiles for the job:** wall tiles are usually quite thin and shouldn’t be used on the floors, where they can’t stand up to the pressure of regular foot traffic.
- When tiling, any natural stone** (and some manufactured products) will require a sealer applied prior to use.
- Upon completion, ask your electrician for an electrical safety certificate**, and your plumber for a ‘compliance plumbing certificate’. This gives you extra buyer’s protection if something goes wrong down the track.

* This is a general checklist and does not replace the installation requirements of individual manufacturers.

