THE BEST BATHROOM IDEAS

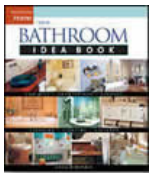
Text and Photos adapted from *Taunton's Home Bathroom Idea Book*

by Andrew Wormer

Bathrooms were once utilitarian rooms not much bigger than closets. Today, a stroll through a bath showroom or a quick look through a home design book or magazine will prove those days are long gone. Forget great rooms and kitchens; bathrooms are the new frontier in home design.

Working couples, traditional, blended and extended families, the young and old and physically disadvantaged– we all have greater expectations for the places in which we live. We want our bathrooms to be beautiful and functional, easy to clean and a refuge from busy lives.

As a result, today's bathrooms are bigger, offer more features and use a wider variety of better materials – requiring many more decisions to plan them wisely. To make the process less daunting, Taunton Press author Andrew Wormer provides background information on many types of products to consider for your bath.



Taunton Press New Bathroom Idea Book

A great design guide for creating your perfect bathroom
by Andrew Wormer

PORCELAIN ENAMEL

This free-standing cast-iron tub has a traditional feel, yet is right at home in a contemporary setting.

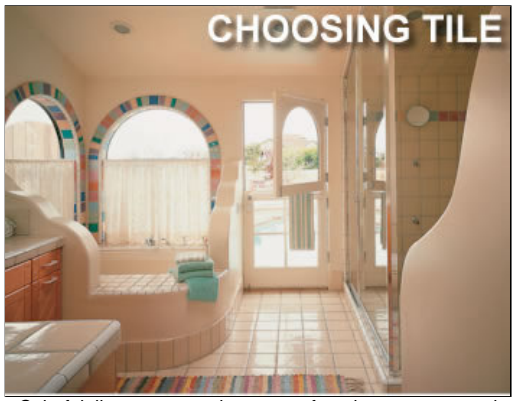
Porcelain-enamel surfaces are durable, sanitary, easy to clean and highly resistant to chemicals and corrosion. For many, there's no replacement for the solid quality of an enameled cast-iron tub, which is why decades-old claw foot tubs that are in good shape are a valuable salvage item.

Porcelain enamel starts out as a mixture of minerals, such as silica, feldspar, and borax, which are heated into a molten state and then drawn out and cooled into a glasslike ribbon. The ribbon is pulverized to form "frit," the particulate sprayed onto the metal surface that is to be enameled. After the frit is sprayed onto the metal surface, it is fired at a high temperature, which fuses it to the underlying metal, creating a durable coating that won't easily chip or peel.

Different types of metals can be coated with porcelain enamel, but cast-iron and steel are the two types you're most likely to encounter in the bathroom. Enameled-steel sinks were once popular because they offered a less-expensive and lightweight alternative to enameled cast-iron sinks. You don't see them much anymore except in junk yards because they proved to be prone to flexing and cracking.

Enameled-steel tubs are still manufactured, but they've been largely replaced in the marketplace by fiberglass and acrylic tubs. For the most part, vintage cast-iron fixtures, unlike old steel fixtures, are worth salvaging because they can be repaired or reglazed.

Ceramic tile's variety, versatility, and durability make it popular bathroom finish material. But how do you whether to choose a generic 4-in. by 4-in. white
costs $1.00/sq. ft. or an almost identical-looking tile that needs to be special ordered at ft.? Which tiles are best for floors? Do you need tile for the shower?
Permeability, or the ability to absorb moisture, is one comparing tile. Vitreous tile has a dense body and negligible amount of moisture. It's better suited or exterior installations than non-vitreous tile, softer and more porous. Because non-vitreous tile a shorter period of time at a lower temperature, expensive to manufacture (and therefore to buy) vitreous tile. In practice, both vitreous and non-



Colorful tile accents and curves soften the geometry and ensure that this bathroom doesn't feel stark or clinical.

vitreous are used interchangeably in the bathroom, since glaze protects it against most moisture.

Texture should be another concern when choosing tile. Although the shiny smooth surface of a polished or glazed material may look great and be easy to can be slippery when wet. It's better to choose a has a textured or matte glaze for floors and save tiles for the walls and countertops.

The best way to choose tile is to know what the tile used for, pick out something you like at a tile store, some samples home, and put them through a few scratching, rubbing, and scuffing tests.

His-and-hers vanities have plenty of storage room, while raising the dramatic glass countertops provides a clear view of the stylish glass sink basins.

When choosing a bathroom sink, consider the type of use it will receive. For example, powder-room sinks that are used only occasionally by careful guests don't need frequent or vigorous cleaning with harsh or abrasive chemicals. Family-bathroom sinks, on the other hand, are under almost constant use and abuse: toothpaste, cosmetics, nail-polish remover, sometimes even the paws and claws of a small dog or cat receiving an involuntary bath.

Vitreous-china pedestal and wall-mounted sinks have been an enduring choice for family baths and powder rooms for years. For one thing, they're virtually impervious to any kind of cleanser that you can throw at them.

Enameled cast iron sinks are still a popular choice, but don't confuse them with enameled stainless steel sinks. Cast iron is quieter, tougher, and less apt to chip or crack. Brushed or polished stainless-steel sinks are not all that common in the bathroom, but their track record in the kitchen should make them good candidates if you don't mind their rather industrial look.


Water splashes into this glass bowl sink from a minimalist wall-mounted single-control faucet, which is available with different length spouts.


Highly reflective surfaces – a stainless-steel self-rimmed sink, polished chrome plumbing, a corner-mounted glass countertop, and floor-to-ceiling mirrors – create a kaleidoscopic effect.

Other metals sometimes used for powder-room sinks include pewter and even silver, but these metals are softer and require considerable care to keep them from scratching.

Cultured-stone sinks that mimic the look of marble or granite have been around for years. Some cultured-stone sinks are gel-coated to give the sink its color and texture. Inexpensive gel-coated sinks can crack and blister around the drain hole, while newer cast-polymer sinks have a higher percentage of harder materials like quartz and aren't gel-coated, making them more durable (and more expensive). And, of course, the stone-like qualities and workability of solid-surface materials make products like Corian an excellent and popular choice for sinks and combination sink/countertops.

Polished chrome has a long track record as a durable faucet finish that won't scratch or corrode. No matter how grimy chrome bathroom fixtures become, they clean up easily with water, a sponge, and some abrasive cleanser. In fact, chrome offers such great protection that most faucets – even those with a brass finish– have an underlying layer of chrome, which is electrochemically deposited over a nickel plating.

Many people prefer the look of polished brass to chrome, but unprotected brass oxidizes when it comes in contact with air. Clear protective lacquer and epoxy

coatings help control tarnishing, but they don't stand up well to abrasive cleansers. However, a new technology called physical vapor deposition (PVD) offers a shiny brass finish that has virtually the same durability as chrome. Different manufacturers call their PVD brass finishes by different names, but most of them offer lifetime warranties on the finish, which will likely replace other brass finishes currently available.

Colored-epoxy finishes are also popular, particularly in white. These finishes are baked on, durable, and easy to clean, though not as scratch-resistant as either chrome or brass. Abrasive cleansers should also be avoided with this type of finish.

Although they may look identical in the showroom, acrylic shower units are far more durable – and expensive.

Most molded-plastic tubs and showers sold today are referred to as either fiberglass or acrylic. While acrylic units are manufactured of essentially the same materials and look identical to fiberglass units on the showroom floor, the difference is in the surface that you can see when the tub or shower is installed.

Fiberglass units start out on a mold that is first sprayed with a thin (1/64-in.) layer of pigmented polyester resin, called a gel-coat. Layers of fiberglass – a mixture of resins and chopped or woven glass fibers – are then added to the initial layer of gel-coat. until it is about 1/8-in. thick. Before the unit is taken off the mold, various reinforcing "inclusions" – foam, wood, even corrugated cardboard – are added for structural rigidity.

Acrylic units start out a bit differently. First, a 1/8-in. thick sheet of acrylic is heated, stretched over a tub or shower mold, then sucked into shape with vacuum pressure. After the acrylic shell cools, the fiberglass reinforcing and inclusions are added to give it strength and rigidity.

Besides cost – acrylic tubs are at least twice as much as comparable fiberglass models – you can usually distinguish acrylic units from fiberglass ones by their ceilings. Because they are vacuum molded, acrylic shells need to be closed on all sides during the manufacturing process (though some manufacturers later remove the ceiling on some models). An acrylic tub or shower is more durable and harder to scratch than a comparable gel-coated fiberglass tub. Slight scratches in acrylic tubs can be sanded and buffed out; darker and brighter colors are less likely to fade.

Let's face it: The bar has been raised on our bathroom expectations. Where simple tubs and showers were once enough, now we need whirlpools, hydro-massage, and steam. So it's little wonder that we now expect more from our toilets than a simple flush.

At the same time that manufacturers are wrestling with the performance of their low-flush toilets, they've also come up with some interesting innovations. For example, electrically heated toilet seats are relatively common now, a feature that many will appreciate on a cold morning. Some specialty toilets have hydraulically operated seats that lift and lower automatically, a useful feature for elderly and disabled users who have difficulty getting up from a seated position. Another new feature is a soft-closing seat system that prevents toilet seats from slamming down onto the toilet accidentally.

Now, if they could only come up with a system that would clean the toilet automatically. Actually, the new personal hygiene systems are automatic cleaning systems, but they clean the body instead of the toilet. Basically an alternative to a bidet, personal hygiene systems come in different configurations ranging from add-on toilet seats to self-contained toilets with shower/bathing functions. They work by directing a warm stream of water through a handheld wand or an automatically retracting nozzle toward the pelvic region. Some also provide an automatic air-drying function.

This Ornately sculpted two-piece toilet has Victorian charm while a personal hygiene system features two elctonically controlled self-cleaning bidet nozzles and a warm air dryer.