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Planning the Perfect Bathroom... Realistically

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Bathrooms have come a long way since the chamber pot or the half-moon shed. Today's bathrooms, as seen at many trade and home improvement shows, are large, elegant rooms, gleaming with lots of chrome, brass, mirrors, or marble. Jetted and/or sunken tubs, with multiple showerheads, his/her sinks, and dressing tables all add to these personal paradises. However, they do have a drawback or two.

On many of the calls to my customers, I am usually handed sketches or photos of these large dream baths. "This is what I want," is burning in the eyes of the homeowners. The first problem usually is that the photo or sketch is for a 20 ft. x 24 ft. floor area and they have a standard Milwaukee type bath of about 5 ft. x

7 ft. The tub is usually located on an outside wall with a rotting wood window placed over it. It just isn't possible, unless they boot the kids out and eliminate one bedroom.

Bath planning for an existing home is a bit more complicated and costly than planning these dream baths in a new home. In new homes, the bath may be designed around the larger, elegant fixtures, and the walls can be added or the angles or levels needed, after the fixtures are placed.

Working with a confined area with these areas already designated for fixture placement is quite another story. This does not mean that these exiting baths must be changed into clones of their present selves. It merely means, along with the dreams, a bit of common sense must be added to temper both the pre-made physical conditions, and the costs involved.

Many of our bath projects, as pointed out, start with these elaborate photos of dream baths. While working with the client, a more practical design usually evolves, possibly utilizing some of the ideas presented in the dream photos. Reason presents reality.

With today's products, the standard Milwaukee box bath can be transformed into a more lavish but common sense environment, which can meet the needs and desires of both worlds. Corian wall panels, molded shower enclosures, and smaller tubs with jets are just a few of these products available today.

The best way to start planning your bath project will be to sketch out the area. It should include the entire bath area and the adjoining rooms, closets, etc., plug in the dimensions, existing electrical and plumbing locations. Do this on a large sheet of paper and make plenty of copies. You will soon understand why.

Next, have a family planning meeting. Start with a list of ideas from all concerned. Invite them to write down whatever their wish list may be. The list can be refined later. Study the sketch or floor plan. Will

it be possible to expand the size of the bath? This could mean making an adjoining bedroom a bit smaller, or cutting a closet down in size. Will it be possible without causing other problems?

Make sure the plumbing lines are where you wish. If not, can they be moved within a reasonable cost? The same goes for the electrical. Lighting is extremely important. Overhead lighting, as well as make-up lighting about mirrors can be installed to complement each other, instead of adding unwanted glare. Outlets should be placed in convenient areas. They are required to be the grounded-fault type outlets.

Exhaust fans are a must. There are three main types of fans. The fan can come as a single unit, or coupled with a light, or as a fan, light, heater combination. As required by the uniform dwelling code, the fan will be required to exhaust outside the building, not just into the attic where moisture condensation can occur.

Wall coverings are available in a wide range of materials, types, and styles. The Corian panels, ceramic tile, plastic laminated wall board panels with glazed finishes or even pre-finished with wallpaper patterns can be mixed and/or matched to fit any individuality.

If you had a window in the tub area in the past, your only alternative at one time was to convert to glass block. If that look isn't you, today you have other choices. A vinyl replacement window can help retain the double-hung window look, yet help prevent the problems that occur with wood units in the tub area. Obscure or etched glass, high efficiency and insulated glazing, along with decorative art glazings are available options.

Fixture style, color and use is next. Today's tubs and various styles of plumbing fixtures can boggle the mind. You can go from the past, to far into the future, depending on the way you coordinate these items. The same can be said about the toilet, vanity, and/or sink. Toilets can come with high, wall mounted, pull chain tanks, or you can have no visible tank at all. Pedestal sinks, molded sinks, sinks with pistol shaped shelves, all add to your selection options.

Make sure when you coordinate your product and walls that you try to see the actual product, and not merely a small printed brochure, if possible. This will offer you a truer view of color and pattern.

After all items are selected or refined to a working list, you can finally call upon your contractor friend to finalize the project and get from the pre-planning stages to a reality. Planning can be either fun, or a chore. Don't get discouraged. The completed project will make all of your efforts worthwhile.

We hope this information has been helpful to you! If you have any further questions, please visit our website at www.aroundyourhouse.net, or contact Jim at Around Your House.

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