

# 7 Smart Strategies for Bathroom Remodeling

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Ideas to help you get the bathroom remodel of your dreams while keeping costs under control.

Most homeowners dream about getting a bathroom that's high on comfort and personal style but are concerned about making the right decisions on materials, fixtures, and amenities that will have lasting value. Fortunately, there's good news.

A bathroom remodel is a solid investment, according to Remodeling Magazine's annual Cost vs. Value Report (<http://www.remodeling.hw.net/2008/costvsvalue/national.aspx>). A \$15,000 bath remodel will recoup almost 75% of those costs when it's time to sell your home, and a more extensive \$50,000 job returns 70%. In addition, you can maximize the value of your investment by using smart strategies to help you to get the bathroom of your dreams while keeping costs under control.

## 1. Create a plan, and stick to it

"The biggest issue in a bathroom remodel is adequate planning, no question," says Jeani Lee, a certified kitchen and bath designer and president of the Iowa chapter of the National Kitchen and Bath Association (<http://www.nkba.org>) (NKBA). "You need to thoroughly evaluate how you plan to use the space, what kinds of materials and fixtures you want, and how much you're willing to spend. Don't begin your project until have answers to every aspect of your plan."

In fact, the NKBA recommends spending up to six months evaluating and planning before beginning the actual work. That way, you can be confident of your priorities and won't make decisions under duress. Once work has begun—a process that averages 2-3 months—refrain from changing your mind. Work stoppages and alterations add costs. Some contractors include clauses in their contracts that specify premium prices for changes to

original plans.

If planning isn't your strong suit, consider hiring a designer. In addition to helping establish style and effective use of space, a professional designer makes sure all aspects of a project are harmonious so that contractors and installers are sequenced in an orderly fashion. A pro charges \$100 to \$200 per hour, and spends 10 to 30 hours on a bathroom project.

## **2. Keep the same footprint**

No matter the size and scope of your planned bathroom, you can save major expense by not rearranging walls, and by locating any new plumbing fixtures near existing plumbing pipes. You'll not only save on the demolition and reconstruction that moving walls and pipes require, you'll greatly reduce the amount of dust and debris your project generates.

## **3. Make lighting a priority**

When it comes to adding creature comforts, your first thoughts might be multiple shower heads and radiant-heat floors. But few items make a bathroom more satisfying than lighting designed for everyday grooming. You can install lighting for a fraction of the cost of pricier amenities.

Well-designed bathroom task lighting surrounds vanity mirrors and serves to eliminate shadows on faces. The scheme includes two ceiling- or soffit-mounted fixtures with 60-75 watts each, and side-fixtures or sconces providing at least 150 watts each distributed vertically across 24 inches (to account for people of various heights). Four-bulb lighting fixtures work well for side lighting.

## **4. Clear the air**

Because bathroom ventilation systems are basically hidden, they usually don't appear on a must-have list. Nevertheless, bathroom ventilation is essential for removing excess humidity that fogs mirrors, makes bathroom floors slippery, and contributes to the growth of mildew and mold.

Controlling mold and humidity is especially important for maintaining healthy indoor air quality and protecting the value of your home—mold remediation is expensive, and excess humidity can damage cabinets and

painted finishes.

A bathroom vent should exhaust air to the outside-not simply to the space between ceiling joists. Better models have whisper-quiet exhaust fans and humidity-controlled switches that activate when a sensor detects excess humidity.

## **5. Think storage**

"Adding storage to the bath is a challenge, and should be a top consideration in the planning stages," says Linda Eggerss, editor of Kitchen and Bath Ideas magazine (<http://www.kitchenbathideas.com>). To add storage:

- \* Think vertically. Often, upper wall space in a bathroom is underused. Freestanding, multi-tiered shelf units designed to fit over toilet tanks turn unused wall area into storage. Spaces between wall studs can be used to create niches for holding soaps and toiletries. Install shelves over towel bars to use blank wall space.

- \* Think moveable. Inexpensive woven baskets set on the floor are stylish ways to hold towels. A floor-stand coat rack can be used to hang drying towels, bath robes, or clothes.

- \* Think utility. Adding a slide-out tray to vanity cabinet compartments gives you full access to stored items and prevents lesser-used items from being lost or forgotten.

## **6. Contribute a little sweat equity**

You can shave labor costs by doing some of the work yourself. Again, discuss this with your contractor; the agreement you both sign should specify what projects you'll assume responsibility for. Some easy DIY projects:

- \* Install window & baseboard trim; save \$250
- \* Paint walls and trim, 200 s.f.; save \$200
- \* Install toilet; save \$150
- \* Install towel bars and shelves; save \$20 each

## **7. Use low-cost design for high visual impact**

If you'd like to add visual zest to your bathroom but are concerned about going too far or creating a one-of-a-kind look that might put off a future buyer, try a soft scheme. A soft scheme employs neutral colors for permanent fixtures and surfaces, then adds pizzazz in items that are easily changed, such as shower curtains, window treatments, towels, throw rugs, and wall colors. These relatively low-cost decorative touches provide tons of personality but are easy to redo whenever you want.

With good planning and budget-savvy strategies, your new bathroom will provide years of satisfaction.

John Riha has written six books on home improvement and hundreds of articles on home-related topics. He's been a residential builder, the editorial director of the Black & Decker Home Improvement Library, and the executive editor of Better Homes and Gardens magazine. His standard 1968 suburban house has been an ongoing source of maintenance experience.