

Chapter 1

Reinventing Your Bathroom with a Splash

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering the popularity of bathroom remodeling
 - ▶ Quantifying the financial payback of a new and improved bathroom
 - ▶ Developing a plan for your bathroom makeover
 - ▶ Taking your time to make it perfect
-

On emotional, practical, spiritual, and financial levels, a remodeled bathroom can be a very good thing. Maybe you're thinking that colorful new wall tiles will lift your spirits when you walk in there each morning or after a hard day at the office. Perhaps that shiny, new shower will recharge you, or a relaxing whirlpool bath in the new tub will wash away the day's problems. And the improvements are sure to enhance the value of your house. You'll probably appreciate your brand-new bathroom for years to come. You have to spend time there anyway, so you may as well surround yourself in beauty and luxury.

If that idea appeals to you, welcome to the world of bathroom remodeling. We hold your hand, nudge you along, and help you make good choices as you rethink and design your new bathroom. At first, you spend a lot of time just noodling, or thinking about how to reinvent an old bathroom to create a new and improved one. But all that brainpower won't go to waste. You'll receive an immediate payback every time you use the new accoutrements in your bathroom and a long-term payback when you sell your house. You can't ask for more than that.

10 Part I: Bathroom Spaces: Ahhh, the Possibilities

Everybody's Doing It in the Bathroom

Everybody's doing it. Remodeling their bathroom, that is. Really, there's never been a hotter market for the bathroom remodeling industry. Empty nesters are gutting their kid's bedroom to create their ultimate bathroom spa, and parents in need of pampering are remaking their master bath as an in-house oasis, strictly off limits to the kids. The family bathroom is being redesigned and updated with functional shared spaces for kids of all ages. Even the powder room is getting a makeover with showoff fixtures and fittings.

Homeowners of all ages want to make their bathroom more user-friendly and accessible. In years past, universal design concepts that encouraged wider door openings and low thresholds for a wheelchair were a tough sell. Today, however, with aging baby boomers and transgenerational households on the rise, high-style fixtures and fittings that are easy and convenient to operate have universal appeal. People of all ages are realizing that wider doorways and continuous floor surfaces make spaces feel larger and more open, and they're using universal design concepts to create functional and aesthetically pleasing bathrooms.

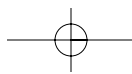
Whatever you have in mind for your bathroom, — a simple spruce up or a total redesign — you're not alone. The 2003 Kitchen and Bathroom Industry trade show attracted record-breaking numbers of exhibitors and attendance. Bathrooms are hot. Just look in any magazine or watch any home improvement show. Bathrooms are being face-lifted, made over, and completely rebuilt from the bottom up.

And because of the interest in bathrooms, remodeling has never been easier. If you're ready to attack your bathroom, you have an army of services and suppliers at your disposal. And if you want to do it yourself, you have an array of products and materials designed for you to install.

Receiving Your Just Reward

While you will most definitely enjoy using your new bathroom, you'll also reap a financial reward. If you're looking for a way to rationalize the investment, consider this: Real estate professionals predict you will earn back almost 100 percent of your investment.

Every year, Remodeling Online does a cost versus value report that compares the estimated cost of professionally installed renovations with the value it is likely to add to the home a year later. The value numbers are based on the opinions of 200-plus real estate agents and appraisers located in the 35 metro markets.



Chapter 1: Reinventing Your Bathroom with a Splash

11

The 2002 report says that adding a bathroom costing \$15,058 to a house with one or one and a half baths recoups 94 percent of that investment. This particular project is an addition of a full 6-by-8-foot bath within the existing footprint of the home near the bedrooms.

To update an existing bathroom with new fixtures, flooring, and everything else at a cost of \$9,720 recoups 88 percent of the investment. Not a bad return on your money either.

If you're still having a hard time rationalizing the initial expense, turn to Chapter 6 to find out how to estimate your budget and find the money you need for your project. You'll also get advice about financing the project with everything from traditional home equity loans and lines of credit to the latest trend of using a credit card with reward points. It's a new twist on double dipping.

Planning the Perfect Bathroom

Everyone knows that you need a game plan to take a remodeling project from wish list to completion, but not everyone gives homage to the organizational skills required. In Chapter 2, you can use a handy checklist to rate your present bathroom. It's an easy way to start you thinking about what you like and don't like about it and can help you fine-tune your list of gotta-have features in your next bathroom.



The length of time it takes to remodel your bathroom depends on the scope of the project, but the pleasantness of the process is all in the planning. Whether you envision a magical makeover with new wallpaper and floor or a complete rehab, you can make your bathroom go from bad to beautiful with a plan of attack and strategy to keep the work progress on track.

Obsessing over bathrooms

Bathroom remodeling starts with simple steps — deciding how much you're ready to do and what shape those plans will take — and it quickly moves to near obsession with everything from tile to toilet paper holders.

Start by thinking of your bathroom as a shell of a room with floors, walls, ceiling, and windows. Then focus on the fixtures and fittings. By going from the broad to the specific, you'll define the space and the functions it needs to perform. You may find that you need to take space from an adjacent room to make a new larger bathroom. Losing a hall bedroom closet that backs up to a bathroom is a tactic that remodelers often use.

12 Part I: Bathroom Spaces: Ahhh, the Possibilities

After you get started, it's hard not to fixate on your bathroom. Go into a friend's home and you're immediately drawn to their bathroom. You begin snooping around under their vanity, wondering how it's attached to the wall. For the first time in your life, you become enchanted with towel bars and tissue holders. You begin spouting the recommended CFM (cubic feet per minute of air) requirements for bathroom ventilation at chic cocktail parties, and you know that you're ready to begin planning your bathroom. You are armed with information and ready to go forth and fix.

Remodeling: It's all in the plan, Stan

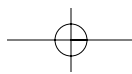
The actual remodeling process uses your plan as a starting point and proceeds through a series of grunts and moans and oh-my-goshes. And of course, there's always the case of the best laid plan that ran amuck when a hidden copper water pipe in a wall gets severed by a saw and springs a leak.

The journey can be a smooth one with careful planning, which we discuss in Chapter 3. From start (tearing the old stuff out) to finish (getting approval from the local building department), the whole process is laid out for your remodeling enjoyment.

No matter whether you hire a contractor or do it yourself, someone has to manage the project and make sure that the flow of work continues in order and on schedule. If the drywall contractor hangs the wallboard before the building inspector looks at the electrical wiring and plumbing work, there's trouble. The wallboard has to come down so the inspector can do his job. One person — a contractor, designer, or homeowner — needs to wear the manager hat to keep tabs of tradespeople showing up, doing their work, doing it correctly, and coordinating all the jobs.

Getting the right person for the job

We're big fans of doing it yourself if you have the time, the talent, and the temperament, but not everyone does. In Chapter 7, we share what we've learned about making the decision. Sometimes a work plan is devised to combine both, which is ideal if you enjoy working with your hands and want to take part in the process. For those projects you know are beyond your capabilities (or patience), we guarantee that someone somewhere has the know-how to get the job done. (See Chapter 7 for a list of specialty contractors.) You just have to know where to look.



Who would have guessed that the Internet would become a good place to find a contractor to remodel your bathroom? Not us, that's for sure. But there are also plenty of traditional sources to find a contractor, designer, or tradesperson. When you make contact, be able to explain your plans for your bathroom, have pictures from magazines or books to illustrate what you want, and know much money you have budgeted for the project.

Most contractors and the growing number of specialty tradespeople work in specific areas or counties and are familiar with the local building codes and requirements. For example, a plumber knows what diameter of copper or plastic pipes will pass code in his area. An electrician knows the specifications for exhaust vents and GFCI (ground-fault circuit interrupters) required in bathrooms. To expand your knowledge of what's required, ask your local building department and contractors as you interview them.

It saves you work in the long run, but hiring a contractor is a job in itself, and a very important one. We offer guidelines for conducting an effective interview in Chapter 7, which also gives advice about drafting a solid contract.

Shopping for sinks and so on

When you begin shopping for bathroom materials and fixtures, you'll discover from the get-go that you have way too many choices. There's no easy way to escape this except to dive in, swim around, and come up for air as you peruse the aisles of home and bathroom design centers. And don't forget to push back from your computer screen every so often to take a breather from crawling from Web site to Web site while looking for materials and ideas.

Where can you find the best selection of bathroom fixtures and materials? They're everywhere. But unless you live near a bathroom design center or large home center, the materials usually aren't in one place. Kitchen and bath design centers and the big-box home improvement stores have the lion's share of bathroom components. And they offer design services that are hard to beat.

Flooring retailers, ceramic tile, and lighting centers have the largest selection of specialty materials, and they offer installation services for their products. The staff members tend to be well versed in their subject and can offer suggestions or a creative solution to a problem. They usually have more time to spend with customers, so they're a good starting point.

14 Part I: Bathroom Spaces: Ahhh, the Possibilities

Bathroom remodeling involves more than just choosing a bathtub and toilet. The behind-the-walls and under-the-flooring materials are casts of characters all to themselves. But they're important for you to know about because they provide the smooth surface and foundation for the fixtures and finishing materials. Eventually, you'll become comfortable citing the difference between green board and cement board, two materials of considerable importance. You can find all this and more in Chapter 5.

And speaking of things behind the walls, wait until you get up close and personal with the mechanical systems of your new bathroom. Chapter 8 takes you behind the walls to discover how the plumbing, electrical, and ventilation systems work so you can make prudent choices and understand what changes you can make and those you can't. Even the more mundane chore of spotting electrical outlets in the new bathroom takes on new meaning when you create a wiring plan to locate outlets for everyone's personal electronics.

Finding your style

Are you high style or low country? Do you know the difference? Do you care? The major manufacturers of plumbing fixtures have coordinated their products in eye-catching suites and collections of styles to take the guesswork out of knowing what style toilet looks best with what style of bathtub. These collections include toilets, bidets, sinks, and bathtubs, with faucets and fittings that complement each other. The styles range from contemporary to traditional and country to Victorian, just to name a few.

Getting Started

Take your time going through the process of planning your new bathroom. The choices are many, and the decisions aren't trivial. Spend as much time as you can afford planning and refining your ideas. If you're in doubt about the fixture style you like, double back to others you once considered. Take a fresh look at the tiles you like. You should absolutely love everything going into your new bathroom. Unless someone has a gun to your head, don't be pressured by the idea you have to do it now. It's your bathroom. You want to make it the best it can be. Devote time to looking at as many choices as you can. And when you know what you want, strike! Go for it! Just do it! And enjoy your new bathroom.