

Renovating for a Refreshing Bath Area

Writer Kathryn C. Swords
Photographer Terry Sweeny



Updating your home's bathrooms not only increases the resale value of your home, it also adds value to your everyday life. An inviting atmosphere in which to start your day contributes to a positive frame of mind. The bath area is also a relaxing retreat at the end of the day.

Although many do-it-yourself homeowners believe a fresh coat of paint is sufficient, Ami Austin of Ami Austin Interior Design, invites us to take our creativity further by evaluating the overall design of the bath, formulating a plan and staying with it to completion.

Q: Is re-modeling a bathroom a wise long-term investment?

A: Definitely. The return on investment can be up to 86 percent or higher. No one wants to buy a project in today's real estate market. If they do, it will lower the sale price of the home.

Q: What is the best way to avoid getting lost in the myriad of choices and styles?

A: Make a plan and stick to it. If you have to do things in stages to get the look you will ultimately be happy with, then plan to be uncomfortable for a while. In the long run, you will be happier if you keep your eye on the prize.

Q: How much should homeowners plan to invest when creating a different look?

A: Today's bathrooms have many options, and it is easy to want everything you see in the magazine. Once you have decided on the features and design, pick what you must have and incorporate those features into the design. In the last month, I have designed and remodeled seven different bathrooms. In one, we just changed the paint and the wall texture and added new towels—\$400. However, expect to budget about \$8,000 for a full bath remodel.

Q: What can transform a powder room from "ho-hum" to "wow"?

A: Typically, powder rooms are smaller and easier to show off. An elegant vessel sink, more elaborate wall or ceiling treatments, sconces or chandeliers will enhance the look.

Q: Are there different considerations to be made between re-doing a powder room and re-doing a master, guest or children's bathroom?

A: Yes, most definitely. Powder room: think public. Master: think all about you. Children: think all about change. If they love Dora or a Super hero today, I assure you they will be thinking Hanna, Taylor Swift or football hero tomorrow. Go for clean lines and lots of throw-away accessories.

Renovating for a Refreshing Bath Area

Writer Kathryn C. Swords
Photographer Terry Sweeny



Q: Is wallpapering a wise choice?

A: For a power room, it is perfect. If the bath is small and not well ventilated, wallpaper will not work. It will curl. A faux finish will work better to add texture or interest in that environment.

Q: When considering lighting, what works best?

A: Lighting should be done in a tiered effect. For your master bath you need task lighting to see what you need to see, and ambient lighting, soft or mood lighting, to be able to relax. You should have more than a single source for lighting, so plan on lighting your shower and ceiling areas with recessed lights. I love chandeliers and sconces in bathrooms. No matter the style, they can totally transform the space.

Q: What is an easy way to handle dated cabinetry?

A: You can reface the cabinet doors and/or faux finish existing cabinetry. Adding new hardware can also bring lots of new looks to existing cabinetry.

Q: If re-tiling, what can take it to the next level?

A: One word: Mosaics. Tile or marble is hands-down the best for flooring, the bigger the stone the better. Functionality first, so please make sure you can walk without slipping. I like a slightly porous texture for safety.

Q: What is “in” as far as overall bathroom design?

A: Clean and functional.

Q: A word about window treatments?

A: If you are lucky enough to have a natural light source in the bath, please embrace it. Privacy is an issue, especially if you have a large window over the bathtub, as most master baths do these days. Where the bath is located plays a huge role. A bath facing the front of the home would be completely different than a bath facing the side or back of the home. You don't want a window that screams “bath” from the front of the home with a large stained glass window.

Q: What is a final word of advice about what do-it-yourself homeowners commonly overlook?

A: The plan needs to be cohesive and complement the architecture and overall style of the home.

We can easily forget the goal when we get caught up in the project. It is almost overwhelming to consider every detail. Sloppy tile jobs and shortcuts can easily run the best plans we have in our minds.

Plan for every detail from plumbing costs to code requirements to electrical outlet placement. Structural requirements can derail any plan. And please use a licensed contractor, as code violations can be dangerous and costly.