

It's All IN THE Details

A BATHROOM RENOVATION
can add great value to a home, but
professionals share the important steps
to consider during the process.

BY MATT COSENTINO

As the interest in home renovations continues to soar, the room that usually comes to mind first is the kitchen. After all, it's where homeowners spend the most time during their daily routines and it is also the heart of get-togethers with family and friends throughout the year.

But while a kitchen remodel might be the star of the show, contractors remind us not to overlook a very important supporting character—the bathroom. A renovation in one or more bathrooms can not only add functionality and style to the spaces but also long-term value and return on investment.

"Bathrooms are probably even more popular to do than kitchens," says David Cerami of Home-Tech Renovations. "A kitchen project is obviously a little more glamorous because it's entertainment

central when you have people over. But as far as need is concerned, there are two to three times more bathrooms than kitchens in suburban households so bathroom renovations are very popular."

A bathroom project probably won't be as burdensome as a kitchen either, adds Kyle Eisele of Coast Tile & Marble Supply Inc.

"A lot of times people will buy a house and the bathroom has been there for years and still has green or pink tiles on the wall," he says. "It's one of the projects people feel as though they can tackle relatively easily. Where a kitchen may seem like an overwhelming process, typically people feel a little more comfortable trying to redo a bathroom."

Still, there are many important steps to follow, and local professionals have shared with us their tips for ensuring a successful project.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT COMPANY

With plenty of competition in the marketplace, finding the right contractor to handle a bathroom renovation can be confusing, especially for homeowners who have never attempted such a project. Chris Fascella of Fascella Construction Corporation offers a list of qualifications to be on the lookout for in a company right out of the gate.

“No. 1 is they have to have a design professional to work along with the homeowner in conjunction with the contractor, preferably an in-house design professional,” he says. “I feel that is a very strong piece. The next piece is they should be able to give you a list of client references and have good reviews. That’s very, very important. Also, if they



come out to your home and they can’t generate an estimate for a bathroom renovation within three to five days, they’re not the right contractor because they’re either too busy or very disorganized. Finally, make sure you get a certificate of insurance naming you as an additional insured for the duration of the project.”

Mark Howell of Shore Glass and Doors adds that experience is a must and he is always willing to have past customers speak with new ones and share the story of their project.

“I would say important qualifications are how long the company has been in business, what kind of reviews they have on their website and if [the homeowner] has gotten any referrals from friends,” he says.

Cerami agrees that experience is important but suggests that specialization in a particular area—in this case bathroom remodeling—is preferable over someone who has spent years as a general contractor. He also thinks homeowners should look for someone who has professional accreditations and belongs to organizations such as the National Kitchen and Bath Association and the National Association of the Remodeling Industry.

“I think a lot of contractors who take the time to be part of professional organizations generally are going to be a little more diligent about how they treat customers and what they do,” he says. “Also, homeowners should interview at least two to three different people to see if there’s a fit.”

Since there are several different aspects to a bathroom remodel, having access to a wide range of materials in one place is also crucial, according to Mike Werner of AAA Hellenic Marble.

“It helps to be able to put all of the elements of a project together and be able to reference one another,” he says. “In other words, you have a company that will supply the slab material for the vanity tops, the tiles for the tile installation and the cabinets. Having all of those different elements in one location can be very helpful.”

SETTING REALISTIC GOALS

Many homeowners have preconceived notions going into a project based on their favorite remodeling shows on HGTV or stories they’ve heard from friends and family. One of the responsibilities of the professional

they’re working with is to keep the budget and goals in check.

“One of the first things we do is set the expectations; knowing the look they’re going for versus an allotted budget,” Werner says. “Ultimately it’s very important for the client when they come in to start making selections to have several different ideas of things they like. We’ve been doing this a long time and we can always offer guidance on the aesthetics of things, but we are a designer showroom



so it’s kind of difficult if the client hasn’t established any kind of direction they want to pursue. Once they have that information, we can help guide a nice balance between aesthetics and the budgetary number.”

Transparency from the beginning is another key factor, particularly when it comes to cost. For example, Eisele points to not just the price of the tile but everything that goes along with it, like grout and capping.

“A lot of times people come in and there’s a bit of shock factor when they realize all of the little things that go into a project and add up to the total cost in the end,” he says. “We’re very upfront with people. ... You want to be sure going into the project so you can properly prepare for it. It’s not a quick thing either; a lot of people think they can get in and out but that’s probably the worst way to do a bathroom remodel when you’re going to be living with that bathroom for five to 15 years.”

For that reason, Fascella explains that companies should be able to provide customers a detailed estimate and plan for the project.

“When we do an estimate, it doesn’t just say, ‘Renovate bathroom according to plans,’” he says. “It starts with permits all the way down through final cleanup. It includes general demolition, framing, electrical, plumbing. The whole thing is broken down to 20 or 30 different

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line items depending on how big the project is. If a contractor does not want to break out the different phases ... and show you the different costs, be wary."

MATERIAL SELECTION

Shopping for the materials to use in a bathroom remodel can be exciting for the homeowners but they should also do their homework. When it comes to flooring, vanity tops or shower tiles, there is more to the decisions than style and look.

"Color and pattern and all of that is one thing, but there's a whole other end to it which is the maintenance factor and the durability factor," Eisele says. "We provide that insight into navigating your entire bathroom selection. Do you want to be sealing your marble floor once a year or do you want to put in a porcelain tile that is just going to have to be wiped down here and there because it's much easier to maintain? Do you want to put glass that might chip or ceramic that is less expensive? There are so many different parts and we're able to help them make the decisions based on their price point, cleaning factors and maintenance. That all comes with experience and knowledge of the products."

Presenting a client with all of the options makes for the best final decision.

"If somebody establishes a natural stone look that they really like, we all know that marble requires a little more care and maintenance, so a good alternative would be exploring a nice porcelain tile that offers the same look but it can be more moderately priced or just a fraction of the cost of the natural stone and holds up extremely well in the application," Werner says.

"But a lot of times when somebody falls in love with that particular look there's not really an exact alternative so what we will typically do at that point is educate the client, make them aware of what they're going to be up against having that particular material in their bathroom. We will guide them on the care and maintenance and everything that goes along with it."

A relatively new product that has been in high demand, according to Eisele, is 5 foot-by-10-foot porcelain tile, even though it is a bit more expensive to install. "People like the fact that it's not real marble slabs, it's easy to clean and there's no grout joints," he says. "Everybody comes in talking about how much they hate grout ... and anybody who hears there is no grout joints jumps out of their shoes with excitement."

POPULAR REQUESTS

Fascella has noticed a major trend of people wanting to age in place, so they are either converting bathrooms in their own homes or in the homes of their adult children to be more accommodating. He and Cerami also agree that most clients are looking to remove soaking tubs in favor of walk-in showers.

"People definitely want larger, multi-function showers," Cerami says.



"They're doing away with the fiberglass tubs that are jammed into a corner and they never seem to use. If there's space and the budget permits, they tend to go with the free-standing tubs that are more of an art piece within the room. They also want in-floor heat systems, architectural lightings, built-in medicine cabinets and things like that."

Howell's company specializes in the fabrication and installation of frameless shower doors but offers much more for bathroom remodels.

"[People like] the elegance of frameless shower doors. They really enhance the look of the bathroom and they're very functional," he says. "We also do mirrors and accessories like towel holders, toilet paper holders, toothbrush holders, door knobs and hardware."

Eisele's company does a lot of business at the Jersey Shore to aqua colors will always be popular, but customers are also becoming bolder in their color choices.

"We're seeing some more powerful colors which is interesting, because for the last three to five years it's typically been white and gray consistently," he says. "Of course in the Shore towns everybody loves the ocean blues, but we are starting to get a couple more pops of color in the palette like mint green."

While the professionals say that most clients focus their renovation efforts on the master bath, others will invest in the guest bathroom to make

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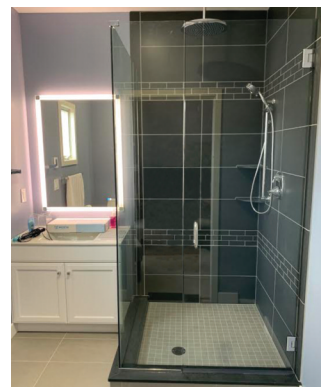


the space inviting for visitors. A powder room can also be a room to try some different design elements, such as wall-mounted faucets, vessel sinks or self-flushing toilets, according to Cerami.

“Powder rooms may have amenities that are more European, such as a toilet and bidet combination,” he says. “We see things that are a little more unique in powder rooms and make them special. Wall treatments are also nice to do, depending on someone’s style. We make these rooms more designer-oriented because all of our guests use them when they come over.”

At the end of the day, whether it’s a spa-like master bath or a stylish powder room, having a professional who can handle the entire project from start to finish will make for a pleasant experience.

“You may rip up a bathroom and find that you have five different problems you didn’t expect,” Eisele says. “You want somebody who has seen these issues, knows how to handle them and is going to be able to educate you through the process while not taking advantage of you or having to bring in someone else in the middle of the project. You want to be working with someone who is going to help you and guide you through every aspect of the job because it can be overwhelming.” **H&H**



RESOURCES

AAA Hellenic Marble

West Chester, Pa.
(610) 344-7700
HellenicMarble.com

Coast Tile & Marble Supply Inc.

Egg Harbor, N.J.
(609) 646-9346
CoastTile.net

Fascella Construction Corporation

Upper Black Eddy, Pa.
(610) 847-6862
FascellaCorp.com

HomeTech Renovations

Lower Gwynedd, Pa.
(215) 646-7477
HTRenovations.com

Shore Glass and Doors

Northfield, N.J.
(609) 641-5880
ShoreGlassAndDoor.com