

REVISED  
**3rd**  
Edition

CONSUMER GUIDE

# Remodeling Your Bathroom

Avoid 8 costly mistakes



# Introduction

Home improvement has become one of our country's greatest pastimes. According to the US Census Bureau, Americans spent a whopping \$260 billion on home improvements, maintenance and repairs in 2006.

Of all the rooms in your house, your bathroom represents the greatest and fastest return on your remodeling investment. According to Remodeling Magazine, the bible on the topic, more than 86% of your bathroom remodeling expenses can be recouped within a year of resale. Not every room in the house offers such a return.

Few spaces in your home are as personal and practical as the bathroom. Since it serves a number of functions, often for multiple individuals, design is a challenge. Hiring a knowledgeable professional will ensure your desired changes are feasible given the age and location of your existing electrical and plumbing systems, composition of your existing wall and floor and your cavity space. They'll also help you allocate your budget efficiently. Shower components, for example, should be top quality. Shower heads, knobs, behind-the-wall valves, etc., that don't last will lead to frequent repairs, replacements and leaks. Keep in mind that a small leak can result in hundreds of dollars in repair costs, mildew problems and even insect infestation and may mean weeks without a shower. Professionals will also see that things are coordinated efficiently and the job gets done right.

This guide is a culmination of information gathered from the nation's leading bath remodeling companies and the industry's most trusted organizations, such as the National Kitchen & Bath Association. It will help simplify the planning stages, guide you through making decisions and make the whole process less stressful.

Some of the topics covered are:

- *Determining Your Goals*
- *Avoiding Common Mistakes*
- *Choosing A Tub/Shower Material/Method*
- *Rounding Out Your Bathroom*
- *Choosing The Right Contractor*



Now is a great time to attend home shows and visit the showrooms of your local bath remodeling companies, manufacturers and suppliers. Talk to relatives, friends and coworkers who have remodeled their bathrooms. What have they learned, what or who would they recommend?

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# 5 Signs It's Time To Remodel Your Bathroom

## 1. Things Start Going Wrong

All bathrooms are prone to everyday wear and tear, but when your caulk keeps turning black, your grout starts falling out, things begin to yellow or mildew develops on the walls or ceiling, it's time.

## 2. Your Bathroom's Hopelessly Outdated

"Retro" is a current fad, but the avocado green and harvest gold of the 70s are better suited for the teenagers' bedding, not bathroom fixtures. Replacing outdated fixtures with new, neutral colored ones allows you to change your look often by simply repainting and replacing bath coordinates.

## 3. You're Thinking Of Selling Your House

Updating the bathroom adds value to your home, so much that the project may pay for itself. The bathroom and kitchen are the first things most buyers look at since they're seen as expensive to remodel. If given the choice, most buy homes with updated kitchens and baths.

## 4. Your Needs Have Changed

Marriage, the arrival of a baby, or parents moving into the home all have significant impacts on bathroom needs. Additional people need more storage and older adults may find it difficult to enter and exit a bathtub safely.

## 5. Your Bathroom's Not Your Style

If there's nothing distinctive about your bathroom or the details just don't reflect your style, change things. Bathroom fixtures are like furniture: they should reflect your personality and style. You can make a big impact on your bathroom with just a few key style changes.



# 6 Essential Steps To A Successful Bath Remodel

## Step 1—Determine Your Goals

Do you simply need new paint and fixtures or is a total renovation in order? To figure this out, focus on why you're remodeling. Get input from everyone that will be using the bathroom to find out what they need and want and ask yourself the following:

### What is the bathroom's current condition?

Attacking grimy tile with bleach or industrial tile cleaning solution, polishing the fixtures, and adding brighter lights can put the sparkle back in your bathroom and costs less than a renovation. But if the bathroom is out-of-date, falling apart or just boring, consider more intense changes.

### If you could only change one thing about your bathroom, what would it be?

Really think about this—your response will determine your top priority and become the focus of your planning process. No matter what else you may want, make sure this issue gets addressed.

### How many people will be using the bathroom?

If a family shares one bathroom it may be a good idea to have a separate area for the toilet and shower so that someone can be showering while another person uses the mirror and vanity.

### Who will be using the bathroom?

Consider every users' gender, height and age. Elderly users will appreciate grab bars, shower seating, adjustable shower heads, higher toilets, and easily accessible shower areas. Children will be well served by lower fixtures, faucet controls and storage, and men usually appreciate the additional up-front space that elongated toilets offer.

### How long will you be using the bathroom?

If you're remodeling to help sell your house or plan on selling soon, this may not be the time to add your dream whirlpool tub. It still makes sense to remodel, however, since bath remodeling offers an excellent return on investment.

### How much money do you have for the project?

How much money can you realistically afford? To establish your budget, consider where you're willing to spend the most money, what's the total you're willing to spend and how much you can or are willing to borrow.



## Can any existing fixtures be used?

Incorporating existing fixtures into the new design drastically cuts costs. You'll want to seriously consider acrylic bath liner systems (explained fully in the "Choosing Materials" section that follows), if you face one or more of the following challenges:

- **Your tile was set in a wet-bed of wired cement.** *The only way to remove "mud-set" tile is to smash it out with a sledge hammer. This process is loud, dusty, creates a huge mess and adds several labor hours (and thus cost) to your project.*
- **You only have one bathroom.** *The time required for your remodeling project will affect your day-to-day life. You'll have to plan your life and manage around the ongoing work. Be sure to have a portable toilet brought in and make bathing arrangements before your project begins. Perhaps you can clean up at a local gym or a neighbor's house.*

## Step 2—Should You Do It Yourself Or Hire A Contractor?

Carefully weigh the pros and cons of taking on an entire bathroom remodeling project. Knowledge—including admitting your strengths and weaknesses—is the key to successfully completing any project on time and on (or under) budget.

It's difficult to be mindful of all the issues one may encounter during a bath remodel. Lack of experience usually results in poor planning. Skipped stages means revisits, extra work, extra costs and days, and sometimes weeks, of delay. Other problems, such as buying fixtures or faucets that are unsuitable or even unusable, are common when those doing the project don't routinely do bath remodeling.

### Scope of Work

While we encourage you to participate in less complex tasks, such as choosing color schemes, painting, wallpapering or even installing simple accessories such as robe hooks, we strongly advise you to avoid handling any plumbing, electrical or complex installations yourself.

We highly suggest using an experienced bath remodeling contractor if you're doing any of the following, since all require specific skills and knowledge of your local building and plumbing codes:

- *Moving a toilet, sink, tub or shower*
- *Removing or adding walls*
- *Installing venting that runs through the roof*



Other projects require less skill. If you feel you have the knowledge and can spare the time, you may want to try the following tasks yourself:

- *Replacing a faucet, sink or toilet using existing plumbing*
- *Installing shower or shower tub combination doors*
- *Installing shelves or light fixtures*

## Step 3—Avoiding Common Mistakes: Planning Ahead

One of the most common mistakes made by homeowners and professionals alike is planning without considering the crucial basics such as cavity space, existing materials (concrete walls, floors, etc.) and existing plumbing and electrical wiring. To help you avoid the most common and costly mistakes, we've laid out 8 helpful tips to ensure your job is done right.

### The 8 Most Common Mistakes and How To Avoid Them

#### 1. Underestimating Costs

Altering the floor, walls, ceiling, or installing sunken fixtures will take additional time, money and most likely, specialty contractors.

#### 2. Overlooking Limitations

The position of your doors, windows, skylights, plumbing and wiring will impact your remodel. Consider the amount of cavity space in the walls, ceiling, and under the floor as well as the building materials used—e.g., concrete, wood, tiles, plasterboard—when designing the new floor plan. If repositioning is an option, be sure to allow extra time and money.

#### 3. Miscalculating Capacity

Adding different or additional fixtures and features will most likely require upgrading, changing or adding more plumbing and wiring. A bidet, for example, requires additional plumbing. Laundry facilities require special wiring and additional drainage pipes and a free-standing tub requires special plumbing and, most likely, a specialty plumber.

#### 4. Letting Small Things Slide

Install new shutoff valves to your tub/shower faucet, sink and toilet if they are over 5 years old, function poorly or don't exist. The time and expense is minimal compared to the risk you're taking in flooding your new bathroom. Clear or replace any slow moving drains, too, since slow moving water will prematurely age and damage your new fixtures.

#### 5. Ignoring Ventilation

You won't enjoy your new bathroom if it's uncomfortably warm, cold or humid after a shower or bath. If poor ventilation has led to mold and mildew issues, fix it now—even if that means bringing in specialists to evaluate, test and perform mold remediation. You don't want an unusable bathroom or, worse yet, house because you ignored it.



## 6. Disregarding Design And Decor

Keep in mind that vertical lines draw the eye upwards, adding height to a room. Light colored wall materials that extend to the ceiling, if even just around the tub/shower area, will make a smaller bathroom feel much larger. Slightly darker tones of paint or wall paper can add interest, but be careful to avoid busy patterns. A high quality, eggshell finish paint, that's specially formulated for bathroom use is a great choice. It's easy to clean and inhibits the growth of mildew.

## 7. Forgetting The Users

Every user should be able to access and use every element of the bathroom safely and comfortably. When choosing fixtures, always consider the height, age, physical limitations and size of each user. If you need a refresher, revisit Step 1 on page 4.

## 8. Making Poor Choices

The reality is your bathroom takes a daily beating, so it pays to buy quality. Few of us, however, have budgets as large as we'd like, so we have to buy wisely. Making poor fixture and material choices are the most costly and frustrating mistakes of all, so an entire section is dedicated to it. Since the most troublesome and often addressed area in any bath remodeling is the tub/shower area, we'll start here and cover it most extensively.

# Step 4—Choosing Your Tub/Shower

Every user should be able to access the shower area easily and safely. Shower heads should be at a comfortable height for everyone. If you have a variety of heights, an adjustable shower head is an excellent choice. Faucet controls and drains should be within comfortable reach and be easy for everyone to operate. Removable shower heads are a must-have for those needing assistance in the shower, and they also make cleaning a breeze!

## Size and Shape

Bathtubs and showers come in all shapes and sizes and what you choose depends mainly on the needs and preferences of those in your household. Bathers will say depth matters more than size and a generous slope makes for comfortable reclining. Consider an extra-deep soaker tub that features a nice back slope and arm rests that fits into a standard 5 foot bathtub space.

Avoid garden tubs if any user has any physical limitations. Garden tubs can also be difficult to clean and they take a lot of time and water to fill. If safety or accessibility are concerns, you may want to skip a bathtub altogether and opt for a large shower. If seating is necessary or desired, simply add a shower seat.

Several manufacturers now offer shower basins that fit within the space of a standard 5 foot bathtub, with the drain at the end to match the tub plumbing. This will allow you to replace your existing bathtub with a large shower without any major renovations—a huge cost savings!

## Material

Recent trends have shifted to acrylic from more traditional materials such as steel, cast iron, fiberglass, ceramic tile and terrazzo. A quality acrylic fixture will not discolor, chip or crack. Acrylic also cleans easily and retains heat very well. Most of the well known, most trusted manufacturers, such as Jacuzzi™, Kohler™ and Maxx™ now offer full lines of acrylic bathtubs and showers.

Traditionally, walls have been covered with porcelain or ceramic tiles, but a waterproof solution for the spaces between the tiles has never been perfected. Grout products are made of colored sand and require a high amount of maintenance. Bath products and cleaning materials continually wear away at grout, which provides a feeding ground for mold and mildew and requiring removal and replacement every 2-5 years. Many homes still have tile and grout and experience problems with mold and water damage. Replacing or covering tile products is necessary for a water-tight, mold-free bath.

Every new shower or bathtub sold in the United States is required by law to have a slip-resistant bottom. Here's another instance where acrylic is at an advantage: because acrylic is formed, slip resistance can be molded, rather than etched into it. Etching slip resistance into a finish simply "opens up" the smooth glossy finish so it's not slippery. The problem is that the etched area becomes an instant dirt magnet. Just walk down the bathtub aisle of your local home improvement center to see the results of etching.

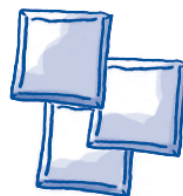
A final note of caution: don't confuse fiberglass with acrylic! Fiberglass is composed of several layers: fiberglass mesh, coated with a resin, then a thin layer of colorant and an even thinner layer of gel coat to give it shine. It can be very difficult to tell the difference between fiberglass and acrylic and, to further complicate matters, sometimes acrylic is reinforced with fiberglass. Do your research and consult with a seasoned professional.

## What About Bath Liners?

If you're like most folks, you probably know little, if anything, about bath liners. The idea was developed for the hotel industry over 20 years ago. Since then, "lining" bathtubs has really advanced—mainly by changing to acrylic, rather than PVC and other plastics. Liners are an excellent way to save valuable budget dollars and days, if not weeks, of valuable time.

Acrylic is used to line tubs, shower basins, walls and ceilings. Liners come in a variety of colors, patterns and designs to easily match your style. Various accessories, e.g., shelves, soap dishes, seats, grab bars, etc., are available and can be installed in any location and height. With such flexibility, it's easy to keep shower products within easy reach and out of water spray.

What's most valuable about this technology is that, when installed properly, liners offer a permanent waterproof barrier for the shower area. Acrylic is non-porous so it doesn't absorb water, which completely eliminates mildew and leaks common with tile-based materials and their necessary porous grout lines. Also unlike grout, acrylic is super easy to clean.





Only consider companies that custom mold their tub and shower basin liners with heat, using your actual fixture as a form. Liners are formed off-site, not from **your** fixture but from exact molds in a manufacturing facility. Companies that don't custom-form their liners cost less but use fillers such as foam to "make them fit." You are then left with gaps and uneven surfaces between the material and your old tub. This poor fit will inevitably lead to cracks around the drain, allowing water between your tub and the liner.

Although acrylic varies little between companies, installation methods and materials do. Here are some important factors you must consider when choosing a liner company:

- 1. Adhesive type** – *butyl tape (or butyl rubber), which is the same adhesive that holds the windshield in your car, coupled with silicone adhesive, is an absolute must. Foam strips, off-the-shelf adhesives and similar materials just simply don't hold up over time.*
- 2. Experience** – *of the person who's actually doing the installation. A very specific skill set and knowledge base are necessary for a permanent, trouble-free installation.*
- 3. Waterproofing** – *get specifics from the company. Liners must be installed with butyl rubber and drains and overflows generously waterproofed with silicone. Vertical corners should be waterproofed (we found seams to be OK, even preferable).*
- 4. Finishing** – *avoid companies that use "T channel" or detached strips to finish off the edges. Rounded edges formed right to your walls give a nice clean, finished look that doesn't deteriorate over time.*
- 5. Wall type** – *tub/shower surrounds are either one-piece or multi-piece. One-piece systems only work in bathrooms with 3 standard walls around the tub. Cathedral, arched or sloped ceilings require customization of a multi-piece system. We found multi-piece to be just as waterproof as one-piece systems—when installed properly, of course—and are not prone to horizontal cracking in the corners, which the one-piece systems have proven to be.*

## Step 5—Rounding Out Your Bathroom: The Other Elements

### Enclosures/Doors

How you keep the water in your shower is pretty much a matter of preference. The new curved curtain rods contain water better than the conventional straight rods. Doors, however, generally do the best job but involve more maintenance.



If you haven't been a door fan in the past, take another look. Quality doors operate from the top, rather than hard-to-clean bottom tracks. They have countless glass designs, frameless styles and handles/towel bars that "float" in the glass. Custom doors, created for your space, are preferable over less expensive, off-the-shelf doors. They provide excellent water containment and have little overlap for a clean look and easier maintenance.

### Faucets

Make sure you've allocated enough money to buy quality fixtures. As we mentioned earlier, fixtures (shower heads, knobs, behind-the-wall valves, etc.) that don't last will lead to frequent repairs, replacements and leaks.

Brand-name fixtures, like Moen® faucets, are completely washerless and come with a lifetime warranty. The shower valves use a one-piece cartridge and are easy to install and repair. Matching sink and tub/shower faucets simplify your design tasks.

Think twice about just reusing your old faucets. A remodel is a perfect time to upgrade to today's temperature- and pressure-balancing valves. They keep your water temperature and pressure consistent, which means that your water won't reduce to a freezing or burning trickle when someone flushes a toilet.

### Flooring

Floor options are wide and include vinyl, linoleum, cork, wood, laminates, bamboo, tile, marble, concrete and more. Whatever material you choose, be sure to carefully consider functionality, durability, style, slip-resistance and maintenance. Humidity and temperature changes in the bathroom wreak havoc on wood and laminate flooring. We found porcelain floor tile to be an excellent choice.

Unlike ceramic tile, porcelain tiles are more durable and the tile color goes all the way through. If you have a small bathroom, choose larger tiles, like 12" x 12", to create the illusion of space. Larger, darker, textured floor tiles have fewer grout lines and hide dirt well in between cleanings. Also, always choose a dark grout for floor tile.



### Toilets

It's best to stick with tried-and-true manufacturers such as Kohler®, Moen® and American Standard®. Warranties vary, so look for no less than 5 year coverage.

Taller toilets (sometimes referred to as ADA toilets) are an excellent choice for tall or elderly people, and most men prefer the added space offered by an elongated bowl. One piece toilets, often referred to as "low-boys", are easier to clean but carry a hefty price tag. For affordable cleanability, try a Bemis® removable seat, which has a handy self-closing feature. Large toilet seats such as the Big John® fit any toilet and add 6" to the seating area—providing ultimate comfort and stability for larger and older members of the family.

## Sinks

Although you have hundreds of options, there are 2 main types: sinks that rest upon a pedestal or some type of furniture and those that hang from the wall. In smaller bathrooms that contain less storage space, pedestal or wall hung sinks can create the illusion of space. Just make sure you have adequate storage space, since clutter makes a bathroom look smaller.

The type and material of the sink you choose will rely upon the room's purpose and the needs of the primary users. Counter space is important in primary baths and durability is paramount in rooms used by children and teenagers. A nice double bowl solid-surface vanity top with a no-drip edge (an edge that turns up slightly around the perimeter) is a great choice for a bath used by multiple children.

## Cabinetry

You'll be best served by solid wood cabinets, rather than those made from cheaper particle board. While wood expands and contracts naturally in the bathroom humidity, particle board only expands. Over time, it just simply warps and must be replaced.

Cabinet sizing and placement is the key to well balanced, functional and adequate storage. Placing a toilet topper above the toilet provides additional storage in rooms short on floor space. Medicine cabinets that mount on the wall rather than into it require less effort to install and can be larger, since you don't have to consider stud location behind your wall.

You'll want to make sure your cabinetry is proportionate in width and depth to the rest of the room. For example, check that doors swing freely from other fixtures and make sure the height is comfortable for the users. Taller family members will appreciate taller styles and children will be most comfortable with standard heights.

## Bath Accessories

Solid brass accessories are more expensive, but present the best value because of their durability. They won't tarnish and are available in nearly any finish. The "Euro paper holder" is simply a "hook" design that doesn't work on a tension spring roller like traditional toilet tissue holders; you simply slip rolls on and off.

Be sure to place an adequate amount of towel bar storage in the bathroom and certainly at least one within reach of the shower area. We found the new multi-rod towel bars increase towel storage space, but are terribly heavy when supporting multiple wet towels. They also don't provide enough air space for adequate drying and protrude too far from the wall for most bathrooms. Take the time to plan and choose wisely, like placing a hand towel ring within easy reach of the sink.

## Step 6—Choosing The Right Contractor

As we've discovered, remodeling your bathroom is a rather complex and relatively expensive undertaking. You can save yourself a lot of time, money, headache and hassle by taking the time to find the right company. How can you tell if one company is any better, any worse or any different than another? How do you know whom to hire without being an expert yourself?

### Getting Estimates

Perhaps the most tempting way to choose a contractor or company is based on price. When comparing estimates, just make sure you fully understand how they differ. The price will vary based on the scope of the job, the quality of the products being installed, materials being used, the warranty being provided and even the experience of the company. Make sure you know what products are being installed and review the written warranty information carefully. Don't automatically choose the lowest bidder. Ask for explanations of price variations. Upon close examination, you may find higher prices are justified and choose to spend more.

### What To Look For In A Company

In choosing a company or contractor, you want to consider the points we've already covered. Make sure that they have extensive experience with bathroom remodeling so they understand the order of the remodeling steps. If any one portion is done in the wrong order, your project will be delayed, extra work will have to be done and you'll be paying extra costs.

The company must have enough knowledge to give proper consideration to your bath area, what materials currently exist in your bathroom, existing plumbing and electrical wiring, etc., to plan properly. You'll also want guidance on the pros and cons of different brands and materials and help in purchasing fixtures that are suitable to your home, project and lifestyle.

Be wary of companies that use subcontractors. For projects using multiple subcontractors, order and timing of tasks are crucial. One miscommunication can delay an entire project. These time delays can add weeks onto your job and are often a tremendous source of frustration.

Watch the details of the installation warranties. Nearly all manufacturers' product warranties contain provisions excluding damage due to installation error and disclaim responsibility for labor charges and/or damage incurred in installation. It's important that your contractor will stand behind their installation for at least one year and that they provide their warranties to you in writing.

Lastly, consider that you'll most likely be spending a lot of time and money with this contractor. Appointments should be handled promptly and professionally. The level of respect they show you gives great insight into their reputability. It can also directly impact the success of your project and weigh heavily on your overall satisfaction.



# Checklist–Choosing the Right Contractor

What to look for	Contractor A	Contractor B	Contractor C
A current certificate of insurance			
A current business license			
A member of the BBB			
Has no outstanding complaints with the BBB			
Has an office and regular office hours			
Belongs to their local Chamber of Commerce, the NKBA, NARI and/or other professional organizations			
Can provide 3 references regarding how warranty issues are handled			
Can provide a reference list that includes customers both recent and long ago			
Business and vendor references that attest to the company's stability			
Articles, awards, etc., to prove they have a good reputation			
Allows you to actually check their references and don't pressure you into deciding today			
Has examples of jobs similar to yours			
Will have staff working on the project, not subcontractors			
Has a written policy on daily cleanup and thorough clean up at the end of the project			
Has established strict conduct rules for their workers to follow			

# Checklist–Choosing a Method of Remodeling

Method Comparison	Porcelain Refinishing	Replacement	Replace & Relocate	Acrylic Liner
Initial Cost	Very Low	High	Very High	Low
Long Term Cost	High	Varies	Varies	Very Low
Down Time	48-72 Hours	Days-Weeks	Weeks-Months	8-12 Hours
Warranty	1-5 Years	90 days-1 Year	90 days-1 Year	5 Years-Lifetime
Limitations	Few	Entrance/Space	Entrance/Space	None
Replace Plumbing	No	Yes	Yes	No
Disrupt Floor	No	Yes	Yes	No
Disrupt Walls	No	Yes	Yes	No



## Checklist—Choosing a Material for Shower Wall and Bathtub

Wall & Bathtub Material Comparison	Acrylic	Ceramic Tile	Corian	Granite	Fiberglass	Manufactured Stone	Glass Block
Cleaning	Excellent	Very Poor	Good	Good	Very Poor	Good	Poor
Waterproof Factor	Excellent	Very Poor	Poor	Poor	Good	Good	Good
Maintenance	Excellent	Very Poor	Good	Poor	Poor	Good	Poor
Color Choices	Very Good	Excellent	Very Good	Very Good	Good	Very Good	Poor
Appearance over time	Excellent	Poor	Good	Good	Very Poor	Good	Poor
Stays True to Color	Excellent	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good	Very Poor	Very Good	Good
Overall Cost	Excellent	Very Poor	Poor	Poor	Very Poor	Poor	Good
Design Choices	Excellent	Excellent	Poor	Poor	Very Poor	Poor	Good
Customization	Excellent	Excellent	Poor	Poor	Very Poor	Poor	Good
Mildew Prevention	Excellent	Very Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor

## Checklist—Choosing a Shower Basin Material

Shower Base Material Comparison	Acrylic	Tile & Grout	Corian	Granite	Fiberglass	Terazzo	Cement
Warranty	Excellent	Very Poor	Excellent	Excellent	Poor	Good	Good
Cleaning Ease	Excellent	Very Poor	Very Good	Very Good	Poor	Very Poor	Very Poor
Maintenance	Excellent	Very Poor	Good	Good	Good	Poor	Poor
Color Choices	Very Good	Excellent	Good	Good	Good	Poor	Good
Durability	Excellent	Poor	Good	Excellent	Poor	Very Good	Very Good
Color Over Time	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Very Poor	Very Good	Very Good
Water Barrier	Excellent	Very Poor	Excellent	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Excellent