

Personal SPACE

By Sharon Roberts

Bathroom designed by
Bistany Design

You've spent the last twenty minutes relaxing under hot water pulsating across your shoulders and back from several angles. You step out of the shower onto a heated stone floor, grabbing a towel from a warming rack while listening to soothing music. You wrap yourself in a plush robe hanging in a walnut wardrobe, pour yourself a rich cup of steaming coffee and sit back in a comfortable chair, propping your feet on a matching ottoman. Sound like your favorite spa or fitness club? It certainly isn't your mother's master bath. But this vision of a spa-like retreat is increasingly becoming a master bathroom reality for many.

People spend up to seven years of their lives in the bathroom and they are looking for this area of the home to offer them more in terms of luxury and relaxation than ever before. Master baths have come a long way from being tucked behind the hallway bath with barely enough space to turn around. Those typically held a tiny shower, a toilet and a small vanity with a sink topped by a mirrored medicine cabinet. The bigger bathroom usually was the one shared by the children.

Over the past thirty years, master baths have grown ~ to the point where they are sometimes even grander in size than some or all of the bedrooms in the home. "Homeowners come to us today wanting a bathroom and dressing space that fits their individual needs," explains Tom Luper, owner of Designing Kitchens & Baths of Rural Hall, north of Winston-Salem. "They like their own space and get along better when they're not cramped."

When people wake up in the morning, they want to make the most of their time. So, designers are building what Jodi Manuel, a designer at Designing Kitchens & Baths, calls "morning kitchens." These niches may include refrigerator drawers for cream, juice, butter, and cream cheese, a toaster for a quick breakfast bagel, or a bottle of wine for unwinding in the evening. "I find that people want a calm, soothing space to start and end their day," says Manuel. Common today are coffee machines, which save the time and effort of going to the kitchen, especially if a master suite is on the second floor. "They can get up, get dressed and eat breakfast and never leave the bathroom."

Gina Arledge, owner of The Kitchen Studio in Greensboro, agrees. "From this one spot, homeowners have everything they can possibly need. In an increasing number of households today, the husbands and wives both work longer hours, with a larger portion of their time at home spent in the bathroom getting ready for work or ready for bed. The amenities of today's bathroom offer them greater comfort and convenience." In both new construction and renovation, master bathroom design has become a major focus for homeowners.

Nearly 5 million bathrooms will be remodeled this year, up from 4.1 million six years ago, according to the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. The average cost of renovating a bathroom is \$10,088. At the high end, homeowners may spend as much as \$70,000 to build one in a new house or renovate one, which often requires new piping, electrical work and knocking out walls. Homeowners can expect to recoup about ninety percent of their investment in bathroom remodeling when they sell their home, according to the NARI. Whether the bathroom is a renovation or part of new construction, the homeowner is always seeking comfort, serenity and beauty.

"The homes that we're working on are renovations where our clients generally plan on living there for a long time, or they're building their 'dream home,'" says Caren Bistany, of Bistany Design in Charlotte. "And they're expressing themselves

through the design choices they're making. Other areas of the home have long been a personal expression of who they are, while also offering them a high level of comfort. This has really become the case in the master bath as well."

Caren acknowledges that bathroom renovations can be costly in order to achieve what is desired. "In older homes, we are often restrained by the foot print of the existing space, so we have to



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Cabinet Studio

add on or convert other rooms in order to accommodate the new plans. This can even involve borrowing unused space from the master bedroom, a secondary bedroom or closets to make room for the bath or dressing areas. We have to be careful and give consideration to the load bearing walls as well as the rerouting of the plumbing and electrical work."

Debra Holliday, owner of Cabinet Studio in Winston-Salem, believes the desire to stay in the same home and create a calm and safe place is partly a reaction to the heightened insecurity and unrest since the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001. "With all of the tensions worldwide, I think people look more to their homes as a place of safety and relaxation," says Holliday. "They put a lot of merit in the comfort of their homes as a place that provides calmness, peacefulness and reassurance." Holliday estimates that before 9/11, about 65 percent of her business was in new homes. "That has gradually swung to about 50-50," she says. "We were bracing for losses in sales after 9/11, but the exact opposite occurred. We're all just kind of turning back to our homes as a place of comfort, with more importance on them and being with family."

Whether these homeowners are renovating or building new, they want a retreat, a place to de-stress, where they can escape the daily pressures and rejuvenate. They want to do so without bumping into each other. Says Holliday, "I think a continuing focus and theme has been on creating a space where multiple functions can take place. We're creating designs where two people can share that area and be comfortable together. There are multiple spaces or 'rooms' within the bathroom. For example, there's often a true water closet with walls and doors, which allows another person to be taking a shower or putting on makeup."



The Kitchen Studio

Taking that concept one step further, Arledge says she's currently working on two new homes with "his" and "her" master bath suites. "That way you don't just have separate vanities, you have completely separate rooms," she states. The space required for "his" and "her" bathrooms and dressing rooms can run up to 700 square feet, explains Luper, while describing his "dream" bathroom, which includes a vestibule separating the entrances to the "his" and "her" bathrooms. "This way, each is able to choose exactly they want and what will work best for them."

Homeowners also are opting for oversized, multi-jet, walk-in showers without doors that are big enough for more than one person, and asking less for the giant Jacuzzi tubs that became popular a decade or so ago. "People are more interested in a soaking type of tub today," explains Holliday. One bathroom item expected to become popular about ten years ago was the bidet. "That really hasn't taken off at all," says Holliday.

Each of the designers agrees that cabinetry which has the look of furniture is extremely popular right now. Homeowners are choosing soft woods such as maple and birch or rich ones like dark cherry with lots of detail that provides an extension of their bedrooms. Bistany describes the cabinetry in a bathroom she recently completed that featured birds eye maple with inlays and another that featured burl mahogany. "We are working with some beautiful exotic woods. We have greater choices today

that will work well with the rest of their home and reflect the homeowners' tastes."

All the designers confirm that homeowners are looking for continuity between the bedroom, dressing room and bath to create an atmosphere of comfort. Other design touches include large wooden vanities with decorative legs, accented by inlaid moulding and stone countertops complementing the decorative hardware and under mounted sinks. Often replacing the traditional medicine cabinet is a separate "tower" storage piece that rests on the countertop and incorporates some open shelves and glass door storage, including specific niches for medicines and toiletry items.

Creating an assortment of niches for specific items is carrying over from kitchen design into bathrooms, as homeowners seek drawers designed for the storage of jewelry, toothbrushes and makeup, and drawers with electrical outlets built into the back so they can leave their hair and shaving accessories plugged in for easy access. "People seem to really like to compartmentalize as much as possible and have a space for everything," says Bistany. "They want convenient and well organized storage." Designers also are incorporating pull-out hampers, trash cans, lingerie chests and wardrobe closets into cabinetry.

Homeowners are also expressing themselves through artwork in the bathrooms. "The warmth of the space is enhanced by placing art pieces in open display areas,"

Bistany notes. Designers are including cabinet niches as showcases for their clients' artwork.

How much you will spend depends on what is important to you. Luper says that his company has had millionaire clients who want a basic, functional bathroom, while others want to create the total spa effect. "It's such a broad range. If we are meeting with someone who can afford the best and

wants the best, we give them our ideas of what the best is. We work with them to create a very personal environment that satisfies their needs and gives them the feeling that they desire. We lead them through a process where their input provides us with a creative framework from which we are able to fill in the details."

The light, airy and natural tone set by the cabinetry, lighting and fixtures is also reflected in the flooring.

Natural stone is popular, and may be heated from beneath for extra comfort. "There's a lot of emphasis on tile design," says Arledge. "But with natural stone, probably the number one complaint is that it's cold. It's not unusual for tile to be heated from underneath."

Arledge explains that homeowners are taking the opportunity to indulge themselves in other ways as well. "The master bath used to be about function but this has shifted to comfort. It's a space filled with enhancements that lighten your mood, creating an experience that is both relaxing and uplifting. Among the items you may find in the master bath today are upholstered furniture, chandeliers, fireplaces, televisions built into mirrors, sound and lighting systems, steam showers and shower heads in a variety of positions to provide a pulsating massage." Also popular are circular hydro-therapeutic tubs, big enough for two and equipped with a remote control for adjusting the water temperature and the power of the jet sprays.



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Some tubs include chromotherapy lighting effect. Chromotherapy involves a gradual cycling through the colors of the rainbow and is based on the belief that certain colors provide a therapeutic mental and emotional effect. The lights may be built into the bath or in combination with lights above and beside the tub. These tubs are deep soaking tubs, and the soothing effects of the lights are enhanced by the sound of water falling from the tub into a moat where it is circulated back into the tub.

Other non-traditional trends being incorporated into today's master baths include exterior doors leading to private master suite patios, custom etched and stained glass windows, custom tiles and glazes to create their private utopia. "I think everybody's busy, running full-speed at everything, and I find that they want calm, soothing spaces where they can relax and take care of themselves," says Manuel. "They want that private, quiet moment, when the phone isn't ringing and the kids aren't screaming ~ it's their 60 seconds of peace.

"We're feathering our nests. The whole house is a lot more about the way it feels as opposed to what it looks like. We all want to feel good."

Sharon Roberts is a former newspaper reporter turned freelance writer who resides with her family in Charlotte.



Designing Kitchens & Baths