

Starting POINTS

Make the right choices for your new bathroom – before you splash the cash

WORDS KERRY RAMSEY

The bathroom may be the smallest room in the house, but it's also one of the busiest, so a well-planned space is essential if you want to make the most of this high-traffic area. Before you start demolishing walls, consider your requirements. A family bathroom, for example, needs generous storage, a decent bath and fuss-free finishes, while a busy couple may prefer a chic ensuite, complete with double basins, a high-tech shower and a boutique-hotel look. "The modern ensuite often features more mod cons – dual showers, open-plan layout, unique design features – than the main bathroom, as it is used more frequently by homeowners, while the main bathroom is used by visitors or children," says Tim Dawson of Tradelink. Write down your wishlist and your must-haves, and think outside the box; you may believe you can't fit in a standout bath, but compromising on the size of the vanity, for example, may just make it happen!

PLANNING MAKES PERFECT

The next steps are the tough ones: working out your budget, choosing the design and selecting products. Measure your space and draw the layout to scale on graph paper, noting doors, windows and fixtures; it's also worth consulting a planner such as tradelink.com.au/planner.html. A few essentials to note: a shower recess should be at least 900mm x 900mm; an average bath is approximately 1650mm long and 800mm wide; and you should allow at least 600mm in front of the toilet and around 200mm either side of the bowl. If you're overhauling an existing space, moving fixtures may be tempting but it can really push the price up. It's more cost-efficient to replace them, and allocate new storage and lighting for an up-to-the-minute look.

BUDGET BREAKDOWN

Renovation costs can vary dramatically, depending on labour, design and products. Len Nucifora of Harvey Norman Bathrooms & Tiles and Domayne Design Bathrooms Centre advises that a new bathroom can cost from \$18,000 to \$40,000. "On average, a full renovation – from demolition to completion – takes three to four working weeks," says Len. Don't forget to include a 10 to 15 per cent contingency in your costs – an unexpected waterproofing issue could easily blow your budget.

STYLE STATEMENT

The right finishes and fixtures can make the difference between creating a serene oasis or a muddled mess. Flick through magazines and visit showrooms to get the right feel. Your own preference – such as a curvaceous bath or brilliant mosaics – can make a focal point, while fittings work well if you opt for one look. Keep your room clutter-free for a calm feel. A clever combination of storage – such as deep drawers and a mirror-fronted cabinet – is both functional and fabulous.



'Paris' freestanding bath, \$1295, Recollections.

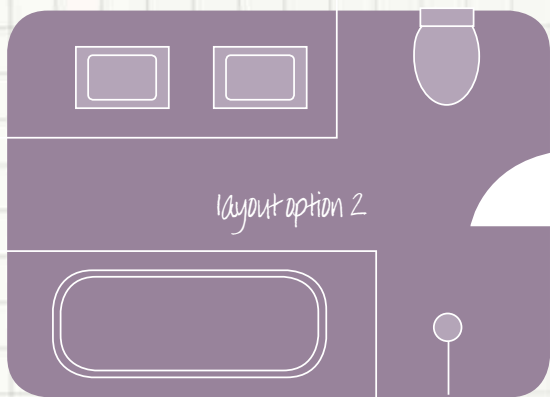


TRICKY ISSUES

Transforming a poky bathroom into a spacious sanctuary isn't easy; one solution is to steal space from an adjoining area. In older homes, which often have a bathroom and a separate toilet next door, demolishing the joining wall can create a surprising amount of extra space. Illumination is a key issue, and it can pay to consult a lighting designer. "Lights don't necessarily have to come from the centre of the room and should be strategically placed in order to give the bathroom life," says Tim. "Illuminating the corners and above the vanity will light the room."

FINAL TOUCHES

Bathrooms use nearly half of the average home's water, so when planning, specify water-saving mixers and showerheads, dual-flush toilets and flow restrictors to the bath tap, as well as an exterior rainwater tank; for more advice, go to waterrating.gov.au. In-floor heating has become *de rigueur* for new bathrooms. Suitable under stone or tiles, the system has to be installed by a licensed electrician early in the renovation stages. Also, bear in mind that heated towel rails may need to be a certain distance from any wet area.



Kado Lure freestanding rectangle bath, \$2250, Reece.



Gugliemi 'Sprint' basin mixer, \$315, Tradelink.



'Deco' pedestal basin, \$199, Recollections. Stockists, page 220

"The modern ensuite often features more mod cons than the main bathroom, as it is used more frequently by homeowners, while the main bathroom is used by visitors or children" ~ Tim Dawson, Tradelink

Trade secrets

"Renovating a bathroom covers almost as many trades as building a new home!" says Jamie Barr of Total Bathroom Renovations, referring to the carpentry, plumbing, electrical, sheeting, waterproofing, tiling, sealing, plastering and painting involved. "You need to get it right first time, or it can cost you dearly in the end." If there's no major plumbing to be done, you can either engage a builder who will provide sub-contractors, or hire the tradespeople yourself; during this process, you will also have to select and supply all bath fittings and fixtures. Check that all tradespeople are licensed, and visit masterbuilders.asn.au to make sure you understand the home warranty insurance requirements in your state.

For a larger project, a bathroom specialist might suit time-poor renovators, and if you're dreaming of a pamper palace, it may be worth talking to an architect or interior designer who will offer visionary design and expertise. 