



Photo courtesy of Drury Design

10 Hot Design Trends

to Make Your Bath Both Chic and Functional

By Lisa Sloan

Maybe this is the year you plan to transform your ho-hum bath into an everyday oasis. Or perhaps you're still simply dreaming of your someday sanctuary. Here's a peek at 10 features area designers and builders predict will be popular in the most chic and comfortable bathrooms in the western suburbs in the coming year.

1. Neutral Territory

Neutral colors, particularly gray and white in various warm to cool shades, continue to be top picks for the bath, with some choosing to incorporate classic navy or black for a bit of drama. Color comes into play via accents and artwork.

Linda Larisch, senior designer for Drury Design in Glen Ellyn, believes subdued color schemes are sought after because they influence the feel of the space. “It’s basically your serenity spa area versus the kitchen, which is an entertainment area. You’re seeing softer, simpler, calming palettes in the bath for those reasons.”

And neutral looks have longevity. “People are always trying to avoid trendy decisions,” says Larry Rych, president of Imperial Kitchens and Baths, Inc. in Brookfield. “They remember mom and grandma being tricked into harvest gold and avocado green and they don’t want that to happen to them.”

2. Clean and Crisp Cabinetry

White painted cabinetry will continue its reign, both for its connotation of cleanliness and its timeless style, followed closely by gray painted finishes.

“We are seeing a lot more painted cabinetry versus stained, and more creative custom designs because people want something unique for their home, not a cookie-cutter look,” says Ryan Dunham, co-owner of Oakley Home Builders, Inc. in Downers Grove.

Even so, traditional wood will never be out of style. “As for wood tones, all the cooler browns are trending, from bleached driftwood to espresso,” says Sharon Norris, selections coordinator/designer for Reliable Home Improvement in Naperville.

Clean, simple lines and door styles, as well as floating vanities and open shelving

are popular when it comes to the form of the cabinetry. “Lines are sleeker, straighter, smoother, with less molding and trim,” says Sue McDowell, co-owner of McDowell Remodeling in St. Charles.

“In everything from fixtures to cabinet styles, we are seeing more contemporary looks than ever before,” says Bruce George, president of Charles Vincent George Architects in Naperville. “Even the transitional homeowner is leaning toward modern paired with small details and materials that add character.”

3. Savvy Storage Solutions

Storage towers atop the vanity as part of custom cabinetry, either between sinks or tucked into a corner, will continue to be popular, as well as bigger, deeper vanity drawers that can accommodate items such as extra towels. Enclosed outlets for items like razors and hair dryers follow this trend. “People want more storage so they can get things off the counter,” McDowell says. “Our lives are so crazy and busy that putting stuff away makes us feel better. We all need a little Zen.”

“People are looking for as much extra storage and ease of use as possible,” says Patty Rosignal, co-owner of River Oak Cabinetry & Design in Plainfield, who also sees a rise in increased drawer storage, countertop tower cabinets and tall linen cabinets with rollout shelves and hampers. “Some of the

features popular in kitchens are now transferring into baths,” she adds.

4. Creative Counterpoints

Engineered stone, such as quartz, has become the preferred material for countertops, especially since these man-made materials look closer than ever to the real thing, but they are easier



Photo courtesy of Charles Vincent George Architects

to maintain. “Quartz is leading the way versus granite and marble for countertops or bench seats,” says Norris.

Rych says he also expects that quartz tops with a faux marble look will continue to grow in popularity, especially as manufacturers develop a matte finish.

However, some homeowners still prefer natural stone, including Larisch, who says her clients are split 50/50 between the two types of countertop material. She, for one, appreciates that water is absorbed into natural stone, rather than sitting atop the surface, as is the case with engineered materials.



Before You Remodel — Six Tips from the Pros

We asked our experts for their best advice for homeowners about to begin a bathroom remodeling project, and here's what they had to say.

1. Look to the future. If you plan to stay in your home for years to come, plan ahead for aging in place, recommends Larry Rych, of Imperial Kitchens & Baths, who advises such clients to install items such as grab bars and shower seats (or the structure to support them), as well as higher toilets and low-threshold showers. "Consider not only what you will need today, but what you will need in 15 years," he says.

2. Be open to possibilities. Think that fancy bath you fell in love with on Houzz is beyond your reach? Think again, says Ryan Dunham of Oakley Home Builders. "Don't be afraid to approach your designer and builder with whatever ideas you have. You may not be able to afford everything in that bath you love online, but we can break it down and determine what elements you are drawn to and help you pick and choose to get a similar look that fits your budget."

3. Get real about your budget. The first step toward remodeling is to take the time to figure out how much you are able to and want to invest in your project, considering the value of your home and how long you plan to live there. "You can accomplish a lot at any budget, but it helps to have an idea upfront," says Sue McDowell, of McDowell Remodeling.

4. Reach for a star. If there is one singular element you must have for your bath, start there. If you're not sure, start with the floor, advises Sharon Norris of Reliable Home Improvement. "Unless there is something you want to completely base the design around, start from the floor and build up," she says. If you've found too many stand-out elements, you might need to simplify. As Norris points out, "Not everything in your room can be a star or you won't know where to look. Pick one or two stars; everything else is a supporting character."

5. Focus on function. Remember that your bath needs more than just good looks. "Think about function first and then the design," advises Patty Rosignal of River Oak, noting that some elements that are visually appealing might not be practical for your lifestyle. For example, floating cabinets with open shelving mean less storage and more floor to clean, which may be fine for some homeowners, but not for others.

6. Make it your own. Create a bathroom that's personalized for you. "Design it for yourself, not your realtor," says Linda Larisch of Drury Design, who points out that planning something for potential resale might not pay off anyway. "Half the time, when the home is sold, it gets redone. Think about how you use the space and how you can make your experience of waking up or getting ready for bed that much more enjoyable and relaxing."

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5. Tile Stories

Tile continues its reign as the most popular of all materials both for flooring and walls and, as such, often commands attention. "There is so much hard surface (material) in the bathroom that it becomes the focal point," notes Larisch.

Tiny subway tiles are being replaced by much-larger formats, including tiles that are 12" x 24" or even larger. Installations with a rectified edge and minimal grout lines produce a seamless feel.

Another longed-for look is mid-century style, with small mosaic tiles, typically in black and white. Those still drawn to subway tiles might select them in bigger sizes, such as 4" x 10" or 4" x 12," as opposed to traditional 3" x 6" tiles.

The tile industry has also become adept at mimicking natural products such as stone or wood. "Today, you can find porcelain tile where you are hard-pressed to tell it's not marble," says Rosignal.

Though mosaics that include smaller tiles or glass or metal accents are still in vogue, encaustic or concrete tiles, both of which are unglazed, are increasingly bringing design into play with patterns that mimic wallpaper.

"You might have a very clean designed bath with simple square edges but then have a very detailed tile pattern, with neutral geometric shapes," says George. "It's almost like bringing artwork into a contemporary, simple palette."

6. Gold Metal Winners

When it comes to fixtures and hardware, consumers are going for the gold. "Gold is making a comeback, from the faucet to the shower," says Gina Mazzone, architectural designer at LaMantia Design & Remodeling in Hinsdale.

The gold finishes of today have a different feel than those seen in years past. "It's not the polished brass your mother

had, but more of a warmer satiny brass,” says Norris.

“Gold is back,” agrees Brandi Rezendes, Aquae Sulis showroom consultant for WM F. Meyer Co. in Aurora. “And people are pairing it with more bold colors, such as dark blue.”

Larisch has also seen an increased interest in other warm-toned metals, including brushed brass, copper and bronze.

The ultimate low-maintenance classic – chrome – will continue to be a mainstay for its durability, shine and affordability. And most designers say metals can be mixed – you can choose chrome fixtures and save the gold for the lighting and hardware, if you like.

7. Texture Triumphs

“If you want to accent something, add texture,” says Rych, offering the example of a mosaic that features tiles of the same size, shape and color but in a variety of textures, such as matte, gloss, metal flake or striated.

Rosignal agrees: “People love texture.” She notes that look-alike or natural stone and wood elements are great ways to add interest to a space without introducing more patterns or colors.

Although it might seem that tile is the best type of shower floor, certain wood species can also work well in the space. “A lot more people are using wood in showers now,” says George. “Teak and redwood floor slats are decay resistant and handle themselves really well.”

8. Sensational Showers

The shower continues to be the showpiece of the bathroom, expanding into floor space vacated by eliminating the tub or swapping a built-in for a less-bulky freestanding soaker tub.

Glass walls that open up the room and make it appear larger are favored over showers tucked behind walls or knee



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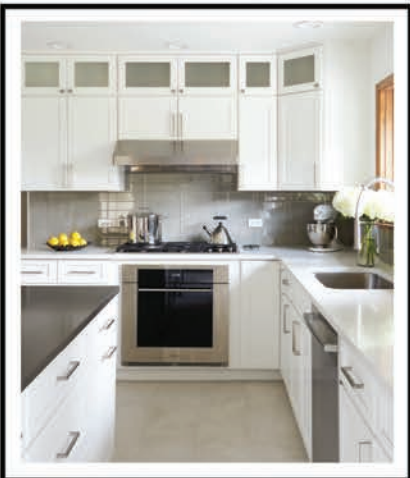
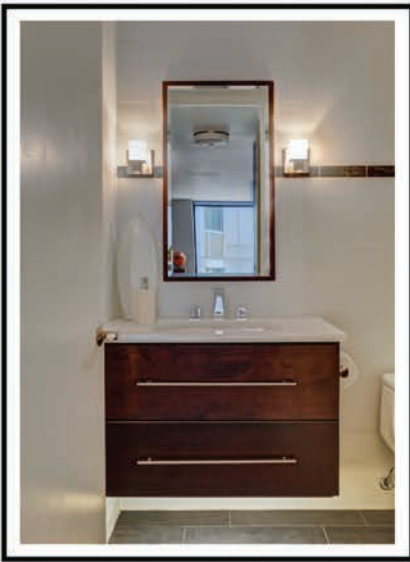
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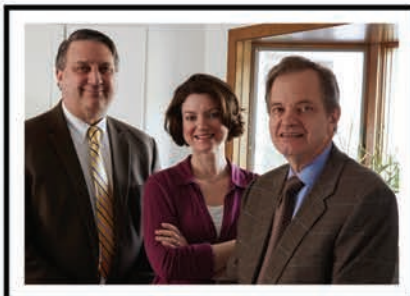
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walls. “Everyone wants their showers to be as open as they can be, with lots of glass so they are nice and bright,” says Rosignal.

Though some still enjoy body sprays, a rain showerhead paired with a hand-held shower head is becoming the more popular combination. Steam showers are still favored by many. “People want a rain head and handheld, maybe steam, and a couple of body sprays, but not like a few years ago when it was like a car wash,” says Norris.

Showerheads themselves are being used to create a bathing experience that addresses all the senses – with options that convey sound through built-in speakers, infuse the air with scents such as eucalyptus or lavender via aromatherapy cartridges, illuminate the water with color-changing LED lights or even inject the water droplets with air so they feel larger when they hit your skin.

9. High Tech Highlights

Even those who don’t desire all those bells and whistles may seek digital controls, featuring keypads or push-buttons situated either inside or outside of the shower. Some can even be accessed via smart phone. “You can get your shower ready and warmed up without getting out of bed,” says Rezendes.

Other technological features reflect the integration of media into the bath, including vanity mirror televisions, waterproof in-shower televisions, and ceiling- or wall-mounted wireless

Photo courtesy of Dnury Design



Bluetooth speakers. “It’s a way to stay connected to the world while getting ready,” says Larisch.

More tech-savvy amenities include the still-popular heated floors, plus new heat systems that can be used for shower floors and seats, as well as heated storage drawers that ensure a toasty towel is always at hand.

Even the toilet has gone high-tech,

with “intelligent” design features such as a soft-close lid, a sensor that raises and lowers the lid as you enter or exit the room, adjustable heated seats, bidet seats and integrated cleaning features.

10. Powder Room Panache

While the master bath is a soothing retreat, the more-public powder room is becoming an outlet for creativity. “It’s a small room with big impact,” says Norris, who had a recent client who chose to cover the powder room walls with concrete tile in a bold black-and-white star pattern.

In addition to tiled accents, striking wallpaper or wall treatments help these rooms shine, along with unique touches, such as furniture-style vanities, wall-mounted sinks and distinctive lighting. “Since guests use these rooms all the time, homeowners like a higher level of finish, and you can really have some fun with your choices,” says Dunham.

Because the size of the room calls for smaller quantities of materials, it frees homeowners to experiment, knowing that they can easily change things up a few years down the road. ■