

bathrooms

the next big thing

Patterned tiles, freestanding tubs and form and function – Gabrielle Chariton talks to HIA designers about the next big thing in bathrooms.

As Australians become increasingly time-poor, bathrooms are becoming the haven to which we retreat. This has had a huge impact on design trends, with streamlined cabinetry and earthy finishes such as stone and timber providing a serene 'day-spa' appeal.

There's also an emerging push towards minimising maintenance: clients want bathrooms that stay tidy, with easy-clean surfaces and plenty of storage.

Super-size me

In new homes, the amount of floor space allocated to the bathroom, particularly the ensuite, is growing.

In many instances, the main bedroom is becoming something of a 'boudoir', often with only a semi-enclosed wardrobe or even a bathtub used to divide the sleeping and bathing area.

'You used to have a box for the bedroom, a box for the walk-in wardrobe, and a box for the bathroom, but none of them worked effectively,' explains Mimmi Freebody, award-winning bathroom designer and owner of MMM Interiors. 'So, by running it more like a suite, you get better functionality and more space to work in.'

In renovation projects, where the requisite space often isn't physically available, designers are simply faking it. Streamlined, wall-mounted vanities, cabinetry recessed into the wall, frameless glass panels around the shower and creating a seamless floor using the Smartile drain system all help create the illusion of spaciousness.

While freestanding bathtubs and double vanities are often *de-rigueur* in

new bathrooms, Randall Morrison, national chair of HIA Kitchens & Bathrooms and owner of Bathrooms Are Us in Brisbane, says that these fittings require so much floorspace that they're often unfeasible for renovations. In these instances, he says, 'people are ditching baths in favour of bigger showers. Dual showers are still the trend, especially combo-duals – so you have an overhead shower as well as a lift-off handpiece with a diverter.'

Colours, finishes and textures

With bathrooms being designed primarily as spaces in which to relax, neutrals still dominate the colour palette. However HIA award-winning designer Jasmine McClelland says colour is creeping in – but 'it's still easy on the eye, not confrontational'.

So, what colours will we be seeing in 2013? Jasmine lists greys, whites and wood veneers accented with combinations of muted shades of yellow, blue, green and tan. 'It's really quite a retro look but with a more modern interpretation,' she says.

Preferred finishes are natural concrete, stone, and woodgrains such as teak veneer. 'All those natural surfaces, all touchy-feely things,' Jasmine says. The big news for this year is satin and matte finishes, which she describes as softer and more tactile than gloss finishes.

Randall says that, in Brisbane, he's using rectified, vitrified polished porcelain tiles in large sizes – six-by-threes and bigger – which creates an understated yet opulent aesthetic. As well as composite stone, he's doing countertops and cabinetry in soft, earthy laminates which visually add texture, such as those from the Laminex Silkfinish range.

Mimmi agrees that texture is important: 'We're using a variety of materials such as panelling, resins, glass, textured glass, and glass with patterns and designs sandblasted into it,' she says.



Photo courtesy Jasmine McClelland

The emergence of pattern is perhaps one of the more exciting new trends. Delicate, simplistic floral motifs are appearing on tiles, within mosaics, or even on accent pieces such as feature panels or etched onto frosted glass.

Bathrooms 2013

What's new in bathroom design this year:

- combining luxury in finish and aesthetics with practicality and easy maintenance
- polished concrete, timber veneer, resins, natural and reconstituted stone with satin or matte finishes create a luxurious base
- subtle 'pops' of muted colour used as accents or on tiles – greys, greens, earthy oranges, browns and blues
- pattern is coming in – either on tiles, incorporated into a mosaic, or etched into frosted glass
- mosaic and 'penny' tiles in tumbled marble, glass and ceramics are still popular
- freestanding bathtub where space permits
- oversized shower recess with fixed glass surrounds
- streamlined vanity, cabinetry and floor design to create the illusion of space
- feature light fittings and well-designed LED accent lighting can make or break the bathroom.

'More patterned tiles are coming onto the market,' Randall says. 'We're seeing stencilled patterns such as florals or sprays.' But, he adds, rather than dominating the décor and being used throughout the whole room, they're placed on a single wall as a feature.

'It's almost like having wallpaper on the tiles,' adds Jasmine. 'Urban Edge has just brought out a collection called Azulej. They're beautiful, soft, simplistic patterns in muted greys, as well as yellows, browns and blues' – again referencing that Danish sixties era, but rendered in a much cleaner, fresher way. 'We're combining this with teak veneers, but still using the greys, such as grey concrete, which gives a very soft foundation.'

Lighting

'Lighting is becoming a huge part of the bathroom design,' Mimmi says. 'We're using uplighting more, LED recessed lighting ... recent technology and improvements in those sorts of areas have really upped the ante in the bathroom, so you create mood with lighting as well as with other materials.'

Jasmine adds: 'I think if you're on a tight budget, lighting is like a man's tie. It's very easy to change, but it gives the wow factor. It creates the mood.' She advises designers to invest in a feature light, such as an oversized, eye-catching pendant, which adds plenty of visual sizzle for minimal outlay.



Photo courtesy Randall Morrison

Practicalities

Today's bathrooms need to be as clutter-free and easy to clean as they are to relax in, and this is having a huge impact on both design and material selection. 'Form and function is an even balance. If it doesn't function, then it's not worth having,' Jasmine says. 'You really need it to be aesthetically beautiful but also practical for a busy family.'

As such, Jasmine says that top-mounted basins are, for her, a thing of the past. 'I'm using a lot of basins now that are underslung. It's so easy to wipe clean.'

Similarly, Mimmi says: 'People have always complained about tile grout, so they're looking for singular surfaces. Materials such as Corian are becoming more popular for those very seamless surfaces. Even the tile manufacturers are coming out with tiles that are 1200 by 1800 [mm] – so they're more like slabs than tiles.'

Around the shower, Randall Morrison says he's using fixed glass panels rather than a swinging or sliding door, which looks elegant and is a snap to maintain. 'We put a nano-seal on the inside of the glass so it doesn't hold any of the soap scum and is a lot easier to keep clean,' he says.

And finally, clever storage helps keep the bathroom clutter-free. 'We're installing things like laundry hampers – where a pull-out, tilt-down basket is incorporated in the vanity so you don't actually see it,' says Randall. Wall-mounted vanities are preferred, because 'you've got less clutter – it makes a room flow better and look larger.' ■

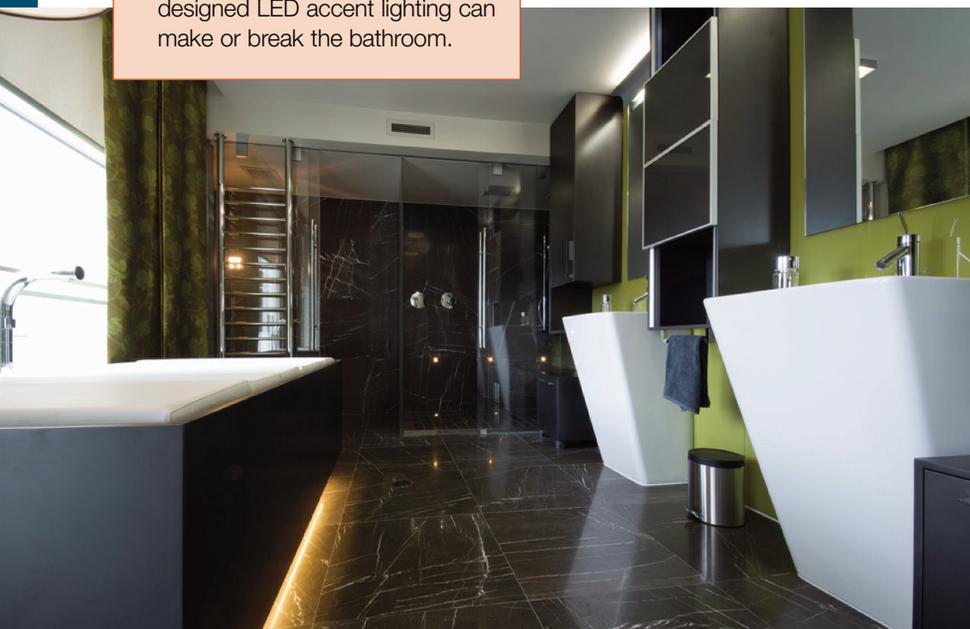


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