



Category: Bathrooms, Featured, Going Green

## Green Luxury in the Bathroom

by Mitch Chrismer

Once upon a time, in order to feel luxurious in a bathroom one would simply light some candles and settle into the bath with a good book. Oh, how the times have changed. In today's world, luxury is expected in contemporary bathrooms. From flat screen televisions set behind mirrors to warming drawers for towels, the pampering possibilities are endless. And as modern bathrooms continue to emulate luxurious spas, the growing trend is to go green.

Energy and water savings are paramount in today's luxury bathrooms, as the world concerns itself with the environment much more so than in years past. Bathrooms are the biggest user of water in the entire house, so any reduction helps. Modern toilets use less water per flush, shower heads mix air bubbles into the water stream to reduce water flow, and tankless water heaters are becoming increasingly commonplace, saving both energy and water. For obvious reasons, the trend toward the green side is here to stay, and manufacturers of bathroom fixtures are producing more products that reflect this change in ideology.



While the trend is apparent to most, what exactly is spurring this evolution to spa-like bathrooms? Only a few decades ago, bathrooms were as small as closets and only served a functional purpose. Now, bathrooms are tripling and quadrupling in size in order to include the myriad luxurious amenities. According to Eric Balstad, a certified kitchen designer with Parrish Construction, a cultural shift in America is inspiring this movement toward extravagance in the bathroom. "Women are driving this, because they enjoy the spa-like experience more than men. Today there are more working women with more money than in years past. Guys just spend 20 minutes, do their business, and they're out. Women want to be pampered and have more time to themselves."

Though women may be the motivating force behind this trend, men certainly can't complain because they are reaping the benefits as well. What guy wouldn't enjoy watching the Rockies beat the D-Backs on a flat screen television hidden behind a mirror? Or, who wouldn't appreciate

LED lights hidden inside the floor tile? As one heads to the bathroom in the middle of the night, the soft lights come on to illuminate the path. And is there anybody who wouldn't enjoy having a heated towel waiting as they step out of the shower onto their hydronically heated tile?

Perhaps the best thing about updating the bathroom to more closely resemble a spa is that in doing so, it is possible to help the environment, in addition to making the bathroom experience more hygienic as a whole. A Rinnai Tankless Water Heater will deliver hot water to fixtures twice as fast as old water tanks, saving time, energy and water.

The Hansgrohe company is introducing touchless technology into the home, allowing users to turn on water from a faucet simply by placing their hands under the spout, thus making the bathroom more hygienic by reducing potential contact with nasty germs. Not to mention, as **Balstad** states, "it just looks cool."

Speaking of new showers, one of the coolest features available today are rain heads coupled with body sprays. Lefty Longa, general manager of Hutter Wholesale, terms this "the full-body car wash." This technology makes for a completely unique shower experience with streams of water coming from all directions using multiple jets and heads. A Kohler Digital Programmable Water Controller only enhances the experience by controlling the temperature and intensity of each individual showerhead with a master panel that is programmable to fit each user's desired specifications. As Longa points out, why not turn the bathroom "into a spa experience?"

The popularity of greener and more luxurious bathrooms is chiefly inspired by Japanese design and technology, according to Balstad. While remote-controlled toilets that talk to their "masters" have yet to make a splash in the U.S., many other aspects of the Japanese bathroom are showing up in American bathrooms. One such example is Toto's Aquia Dual Flush Toilet. When the user selects No. 1, the toilet will flush using only 0.9 gallons of water. When the No. 2 function is selected, the toilet flushes with 1.6 gallons of water.

As **Balstad** states, "personal hygiene is taken more seriously in Japan, and is now catching on in the United States." Another Japanese feature that is destined to balloon in popularity in the U.S. is a new, powerful, touchless hand dryer that dries hands in seconds. Thomas Perito, manager of Dream Home Designs in Denver, said his is "the only showroom in the United States to feature the Japanese Toto hand dryer." The showroom features other fixtures and innovative products that would freshen up any design.

When it comes to the bathroom, there are limitless options that one can incorporate when remodeling. Doing so with an eye toward saving some of Colorado's limited water resources and energy supplies is a great way to save some green while greening the bathroom.

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*Photo provided by Kohler Co.*

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