

Tired of your old, outdated master bathroom?

Remodeling will make your home more valuable and give you a whole new lease on life

by Gestin Suttle

If your master bathroom is so small that it feels more like a phone booth with running water, it could be time to “scrub” that old water closet and create a new, luxurious master suite to soothe your body and soul.

If you live in a home built 20 years ago or more, chances are the master bathroom in your house is small and outdated. The good news is that you don't have to buy a brand new \$700,000 house to be able to enjoy a newer, nicer, more luxurious master bath. You can remodel the space you already have.

“The only limitations are money and imagination,” said Todd Lachmann, owner of Classic Kitchens & Baths in Issaquah.

Want a hand-blown glass sink that makes you think you are royalty while in the “throne room?” Wishing for a steam shower that melts away your stress? Pining for a heated floor that keeps your toes cozy? All are possible – and even becoming common – with modern master bathroom redesigns.

“People who choose to remodel their



Roger MacPherson of McPherson Construction & Design uses glass block as a design element in many of the master bathrooms he remodels, or builds from scratch. A glass block window and a glass block shower make this exquisite master bathroom suite elegant, while providing light and privacy at the same time. Photo courtesy of MacPherson Construction & Design.

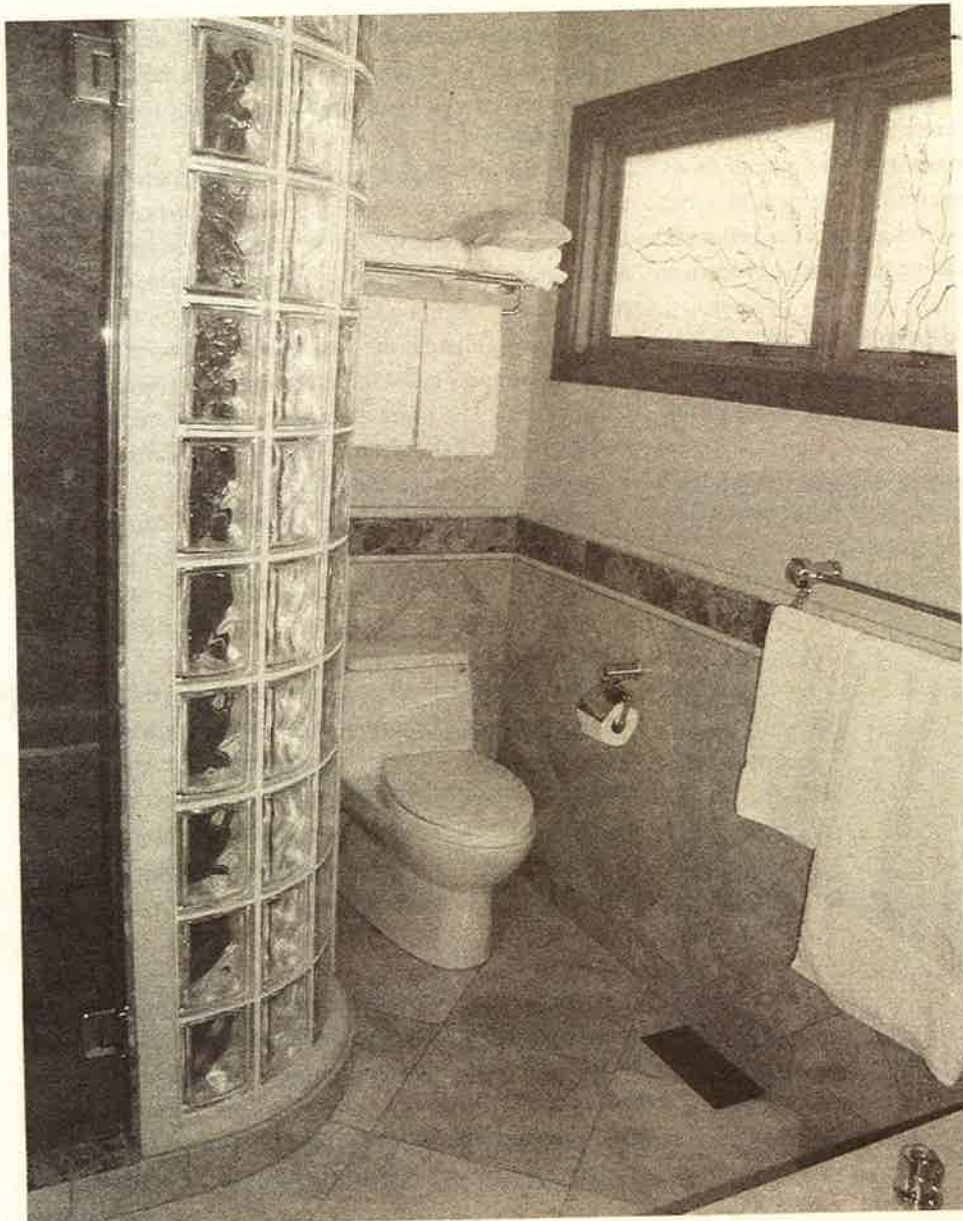
master bathrooms are looking for a haven rather than just a place to shower and change,” said Diane Cottam, a designer with Classic Kitchens & Baths. “They’re going for more luxury.”

If you live in a home that is 20 or more years old, your master bathroom might need more than just a little updating. Older master baths were often cramped and not considered a focal point of the master bedroom suite.

Some older homes had tiny shower stalls that measured as little as 30-inches wide. “You could barely get into them. They were like phone booths,” said John Ambrose, owner of Sun Remodeling in Issaquah. “They wouldn’t even pass today’s modern building codes.”

If an older home even had a master bathroom, it usually resembled what is now considered the kids’ bathroom, said Roger MacPherson, owner of MacPherson Construction & Design in Sammamish.

In fact, the entire “master suite” of today “is much different from the old master



suite of yesterday,” he said. Such older homes often contained just a small tub and shower combination, or a dark and confined shower stall in their master bathrooms, MacPherson said. Many did not have the double sinks that are now considered standard.

Still, your home need not be that old to make you think you want to flush your old master bath and begin again. Perhaps you’ve seen the newer homes with their spacious master suites and now you have bathroom envy.

Many of MacPherson’s redesigns have more than doubled the master bathroom’s size; it’s common for one of his projects to go from an 84-square-foot bathroom to a 200-square foot one, he said.

If your bathroom is just a small offshoot of your master bedroom, then you are probably going to have to knock out a wall and take over another room in order to transform your master bath into the kind you see in magazines. There’s only so much space you can create in an existing room, home remodelers say. “You have to steal space,” MacPherson said. “Most of the time we lose a small kid’s bedroom.”

Sometimes the extra room can come

from an adjacent closet. Ambrose recently added 35% to the size of a master bath simply by removing a wall from a walk-in closet.

A master bathroom remodel gives homeowners one of the best returns on their investments. In the Seattle area, homeowners can recover more than their outlay for an “upscale” bathroom remodel. According to Remodeling magazine’s 2003 Cost vs. Value Report, local residents can expect to recoup 105.2 percent of their upscale bathroom’s remodeling costs.

That’s good news considering that the \$27,553 Seattle-area average price tag for an upscale bathroom redesign is higher than the national average of \$23,544, according to the report. Such a project includes expanding an existing 5-foot by 7-foot bathroom to a 9-by-9-foot space within a home’s existing footprint. That average price includes replacing a tub with a custom 4-by-6-foot shower with top-quality fittings and a full-body-wash shower-wall, tile enclosure, glass block surround, adding a bidet, stone tops in a custom vanity cabinet with dual designer sinks, a tile floor and a humidistat-controlled exhaust fan.

continued on next page

The extensive renovation of this 200-square-foot, second-story master bath in the Bridal Trails area of Bellevue included enlarging the shower area and enclosing it with a curved glass block wall. The glass block wall allows light from the two etched-glass bathroom windows to flow into the shower, while at the same time acting as a “privacy curtain” between the shower and the toilet. Todd Lachmann of Classic Kitchens and Baths designed the remodel. Peak Builders of Fall City was the contractor. Photo courtesy of Classic Kitchens and Baths.

Tired of your old, outdated master bathroom?

continued from page 3

When asked what could be accomplished with a budget of as little as \$10,000, Ambrose replied: "A typical remodel of a master bath is going to be in the neighborhood of \$25,000 on up, depending on how big and how luxurious you want the room to be. A homeowner with a budget of \$10,000 who is not handy should realistically only expect to be able to give the room a freshened up look" Ambrose added. "This is typically referred to as a 'pull and replace remodel.' No major reconfiguration, no addition of floor footprint, just the replacement of worn items."

Higher-end bathroom facelifts that require major reconstruction can easily push the budget beyond \$50,000. Jeff Bowlby, president of the Sammamish remodeling firm Revisioneers, is in the design stages of a bathroom remodel that will be in the neighborhood of \$80,000. "It'll be exquisite," said Bowlby.

"We've done cosmetic upgrades beginning around \$5,000, but feature-rich projects that stay within the existing envelope are often closer to the \$20,000 to \$30,000 range," Bowlby added.

A Deluge of Shower Options

Choices for showers today include hydro-massage showers and showers that recreate a steam-room experience. "Modern, upscale showerheads offer a full cone of water rather than a ring," Lachmann said. So instead of a soft-to-hard needle spray, showerheads can deliver luxuries such as a "champagne" spray, which injects air into a gentle, personal waterfall. "The result is almost a 'seltzer water' effect, Lachmann added.

With modern devices that better control water pres-

sure, custom showers can emulate a spa experience right at home, with several showerheads, hand-held showers and body sprays that squirt water at varying levels. These features can be adjustable for different body sizes and types.

Homes of all ages can be retrofitted for updated showers and baths while still maintaining a period look, Lachmann explained. "You can get the best of the best technology in a 1910s home, something the Seattle Historical Society would approve of."

When simply replacing old fixtures with new, plumbing issues are usually not a concern because plumbing systems have been standardized for many years, Bowlby said.



Above-counter vessels have become very fashionable in recent years as an alternative to standard bathroom sinks. John Ambrose of Sun Remodeling combined this vitreous glass bowl, made by Hectarus of Canada, with a wall-mounted faucet finished in brushed nickel to make quite a fashion statement in this bathroom remodel. Photo courtesy of Sun Remodeling.

"New fixtures and hardware are often times accommodated by the pipes that were there," he said. "Plumbing isn't like computer or stereo equipment. If you want to upgrade, it's pretty easy."

On the other hand, moving or adding new fixtures can add complexity. For example, steam showers, which typically include a compact steam generator that can be installed in a nearby cabinet or other free space up to 50 feet away, usually require additional plumbing for water, waste and venting. These units turn ordinary showers into home steam rooms and make for a deluxe home spa experience, Cottam said. The units themselves sell for around \$1,500 but the required shower accommodations can add \$5,000 to \$6,000 to that cost, she said.

Still, while all the shower sprays and steam features add a luxurious touch, Bowlby contends that most of his shower remodels include one simple thing — a bench. "It makes a lot of sense to include such a practical feature in a bathroom makeover," he added.

"Remodeling a bathroom alone can be a practical move because so many of the new fixtures are designed to be energy efficient," Lachmann said. For instance, the new toilets use less water than their older counterparts and most showerheads are now low-flow. Some of the new luxury showers re-circulate water, and some whirlpools re-heat their own water, Ambrose said.

Soaking It All In

Clients still want soaking tubs in their master baths, even though many people confess that they don't use them all that often, Cottam said. And if they have the space, they now prefer the bigger ones — 6-foot in length — rather than the standard 5-foot length, Cottam said. That's because people are getting bigger themselves, she explained.

continued on page 6

Tired of your old, outdated master bathroom?

continued from page 4

Whirlpools have either water or air blasts that massage necks, backs and feet, and can infuse a bubbly fizz from below. Some deluxe tubs even include multi-colored mood lights that make the bath water look tinted, Ambrose said.

Air-jetted tubs are becoming increasingly popular because of concerns that small amounts of water can remain in the water jets' pipes, where mold and bacteria can thrive if the bath is not used frequently, according to published reports. And with air jets, bath oils and salts can be used generously because there's no opportunity for those products to be recycled and clog the system.

As for tub material choices, they include the standard cast iron, enameled steel or a plastic, either fiberglass or acrylic. Plastic is the most flexible option because it can be shaped a variety of ways.

All Is Vanity

Bigger tubs aren't the only changes for folks who don't shop in the petite section. "Taller vanities are making regular appearances in master bathroom remodels," Lachmann said. "Standard bathroom cabinet height is 32 inches, but can be raised up to 36 inches or higher for more comfort."

Taller folks can even opt for a higher toilet, said Lachmann. Instead of a 14.5 to 15.5-inch seat height, clients can get an 18-inch height, he said.

A single, solid surface in natural stone, such as limestone, or slab synthetic materials are taking the place of tiles for the vanity, said Emma Stern, designer with Classic Kitchens and Baths. A slab counter also works well for under-mounted sinks, in which

bowls are positioned beneath the counter and the opening and sides are flush with the counter, instead of the typical mount, in which the sink's lip sits on top of the counter.

Stern also sees many clients opting for vanities that look more like freestanding furniture pieces, reminiscent of those seen in historic homes.

Topping the sinks and tubs are the fixtures, arguably the most noticeable accessory of any bathroom. Remodelers report seeing a surge in matte finishes for fixtures instead of the high-shine brass and chrome of earlier years. "Brushed nickel is by far the dominant finish for fixtures," Lachmann said, "but oil-rubbed bronze and copper are rapidly gaining in popularity."

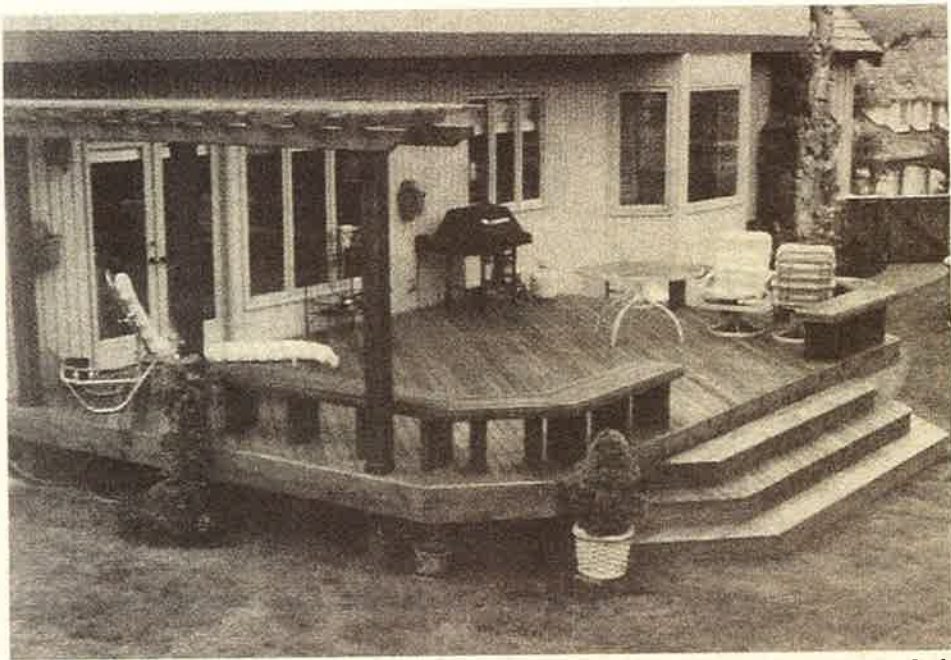
As for the sink itself, anything that can hold water can be a choice for sinks. Glass remains stylish in today's updated master baths, Stern said. One look at the glass sinks on display at Classic Kitchen and Baths and you see why they are so admired: A glass bowl with a tinge of shamrock green, a silver sink on a cobalt blue glass counter, and a lime-hued crackle glass bowl all demonstrate how glass can add sleek, clean lines to modernize a room.

Small glass tile mosaics are also popular in the shower and as a backsplash, and give a bathroom a chic, artsy look.

Glass is also an attractive alternative for walls and windows, MacPherson said. He uses glass blocks in the bathroom to provide light and privacy at the same time; it's an ideal solution for bathrooms that face a neighbor's house, he added. Glass blocks are also good choices to block off an area between a vanity and toilet. "It's somewhat translucent, but still allows for privacy," MacPherson explained.

And because glass blocks come in such

continued on page 9



Issaquah Cedar & Lumber provided all of the lumber for this functional, one-level deck, which features a trellis, benches around the perimeter, and steps to the back yard. Photo courtesy of Issaquah Cedar & Lumber.

aren't just an add-on to a house," said Simonson. "They really increase the value of a home." ♦

For more information:

Issaquah Cedar and Lumber,
5728 E Lake Sammamish Pkwy S.E.,
Issaquah. (425) 392-3631.

To contact Bob Simonson, owner of **Pro-Dek,**
(425) 557-6478 or visit www.pro-dek.com.

To contact Dick Holub, president of **DLH Inc.,** call (425) 222-7249 or go online to

www.dlhinc.com.

To find out about **municipal building permit requirements,** visit www.mybuildingpermit.com.

To find out about **deck building requirements** in unincorporated King County, check out http://www.metrokc.gov/ddes/faq/faq_permreq.htm#deck.

For **tips on hiring a contractor,** see <http://www.lni.wa.gov/IPUB/625-084-000.pdf>.

Tired of your old, outdated master bathroom?

continued from page 6

diverse patterns, shapes and sizes, they can be used in myriad ways. For instance, MacPherson likes to use them for showers, where curved blocks allow him to construct a stall without doors. They also are much nicer than clear glass because they don't have to be squeegeed after each use but still look bright.

Designer blocks come with patterns etched into them and MacPherson has even used some with colored fiber-optic lights sandwiched between the blocks that rotate multiple hues on a color wheel to create a high-tech feel.

Underfoot

Carpet is definitely out for the master bath, with vinyl close on its heels. In many of the homes built in the 1980s and '90s, "We see carpet in the bathrooms, and that was just a mistake," Ambrose said. The result is unseen mold and dry rot from trapped moisture. In the master bath, tile, in either its glazed or natural stone form, is a much better choice," he said.

MacPherson and many other remodelers now steer clients toward natural stone flooring. "We're seeing a lot of limestone, which gives you natural warmth and beauty," he said. "Think of all the churches in France and Italy – they're all limestone," he said.

"It gives you that elegance."

Some man-made products are designed to emulate stone and are considered more durable, but MacPherson said that if the natural stone is sealed properly, it can last just as long and is more striking.

When choosing a stone floor, it's critical to heat it so that it doesn't freeze the footies first thing out of the shower. Radiant heat strips under the tiles work well and allow for heat regulation, MacPherson said. Strips are better than heat mats, which just heat one small area rather than the whole bath floor, he said.

Lachmann has the latest in floor-heat technology on display at Classic Kitchens & Baths. It is a 24-volt self-regulating system that uses a thin, flexible, semi-conductive polymer heating element. "It cannot over-heat, does not need an expensive thermostat, and can be installed under any floor covering," Lachmann explained.

Whatever choices people make in recreating their master bathrooms, it's sure to also rejuvenate their everyday existence, MacPherson said. "It adds to your quality of life. That's the bottom line," he said.

Contact names and phone numbers for the designers/contractors featured in this article are as follows: Todd Lachmann, Diane Cottam, and Emma Stern, Classic Kitchens & Baths: (425) 392-0300; John Ambrose, Sun Remodeling: (425) 837-0079; Jeff Bowlby, Revisioneers: (206) 999-6400; Roger MacPherson, MacPherson Construction & Design: (425) 391-3333. ♦