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doctor spec

watch your glass

skillfully speced, glass adds sparkle to kitchens and baths.

by nigel f. maynard

glass is the second oldest man-made substance after bronze. A ubiquitous material in windows and doors, it's been largely overlooked as a spec elsewhere in the house since the 1980s. But that's starting to change—again. While all-glass houses are still few and far between, a growing number of architects are sliding glass into limited but powerful applications. The most frequent locale for a touch of glass? Kitchens and baths.

True, custom-home clients are not exactly embracing modern architecture these days, but they do have greater tolerance for a high-tech look in their kitchens and baths. In these rooms, a frustrated modernist can let loose a little. What's more, a combination of advancements has made glass an even more practical and stylish choice for residential applications. According to Roger MacPherson, of MacPherson Construction & Design in Sammamish, Wash., glass fabrication technology has improved considerably in the last few years and more products made with glass are available.



Left: Courtesy Joel Berman Glass Studios, photo by Martin Tessler; Right: Courtesy Nathan Allen Glass Studios
Cast glass can be used to striking effect in a variety of applications. Shown: Joel Berman's textured sinks and countertop (left), and Nathan Allan's 3/4-inch countertop over river rock (right).

cast away

For versatility and strength, residential architects most often spec cast glass, a generic term for glass that's been heated in a kiln and shaped in molds. Cast glass may have three-dimensional patterns, textures, tints, or colors, and it can transmit light while providing privacy.

Unlike sandblasted or etched glass—where a layer of the surface is removed—cast glass is nonporous and therefore very forgiving, says Kirby Rea, marketing director for Joel Berman Glass Studios in Vancouver, British Columbia. “With regular flat glass, dirt,

smearing, and dust show up immediately,” says Rea, whose company developed a technique for casting and reclaiming tempered glass. “Cast glass requires almost no maintenance.”

Almost anything is available in glass—sinks, sink pedestals, countertops, shower and cabinet doors, tiles, panels, partitions—but the bath basin is perhaps the most popular. Glass basins come in any color, style, size, and configuration, and the range of manufacturers that offer them is extensive.

Porcher, an upscale division of American Standard in Piscataway, N.J., makes the Glacier line of frosted-

and etched-glass sinks and pedestals. It also produces a line of European-style, above-counter basins in various combinations of materials, like copper fused between layers of iridescent glass. If you prefer an integrated sink and countertop, Denver-based Cherry Creek Enterprises offers the stylish Vitraform laminated-glass counter sink in a number of configurations. And for something different, Los Angeles-based AquaDreams offers a line of vibrant “fusion” sinks whose color is added to the glass while in its liquid state.

These sinks are awash in
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Ann Sacks' glass tiles come in a style range that includes jewels (left) and transparent or patterned fields (center and right).



high style, but they're not for the faint of budget. A freestanding single basin from Cherry Creek costs about \$1,400, and a Glacier sink and pedestal from Porcher runs about \$3,200. A 21-inch single sink from AquaDreams costs about \$4,000, but your clients will have to pony up \$16,000 for an 85-inch double.

tiling around

Glass tiles are another increasingly popular spec. Available in various colors and sizes, they have qualities



Strong enough for floor applications, glass mosaics are used in Ann Sacks' 9-by-12-foot "rug."

ceramic can only dream of. "What you don't get with typical ceramic tile is depth," says MacPherson, who holds two architectural degrees but is not a licensed architect. "Glass tiles, on the other hand, give you color, translucency, and light." And to create an even more lively space, lighting can be

positioned to hit the tiles in a dramatic way, he adds.

Generally thinner than ceramic, glass tiles can be cast in 1/2-inch-thick sizes for flooring applications. Gerhard Linse, owner and chief designer of Gerhard Linse Designs, a design/build firm in Ottawa, does not generally recommend glass tiles for large expanses of floor, but says they're fine for accent work. "They should be used in small areas where scratching will be minimal," he says.

Tiles vary in price, but they can quickly fatten a lean budget. Old Hancock Glass Tile in Nashua, N.H., for example, offers hand-pressed, 100 percent recycled-glass tiles in custom and stock designs at \$18 for a 4-by-4-inch piece. Yasemin Cut Glass in Larkspur, Colo., fabricates hand-cut and acid-polished, rock-crystal tiles that range in price from \$9.50 to \$95 per tile. The tiles are available clear in 6-by-6-inch and 12-by-12-inch sizes or with a sterling-silver, 24K gold, or custom-painted backing.

Ultraglas in Chatsworth, Calif., manufactures embossed glass tiles in standard and custom colors, patterns, and designs that cost \$60 to \$90 per square foot. And Portland, Ore.-based Ann Sacks Tile & Stone has 12 lines of glass tiles ranging in price from \$5 to \$150 per square foot. Sizes go up to

2-foot-square panels, and the company says pieces can be custom ordered in 3/4-inch thickness for floor applications. Custom tiles can also be ordered from Nathan Allan Glass Studios in Richmond, British Columbia, and from Joel Berman, whose Tactiles line is available at Ann Sacks showrooms.

building blocks

Glass block is a low-tech product recently reincarnated in high-end applications. "People remember the 1950s glass block in the basement window," says MacPherson, "so they see it as an inexpensive product. But we use it as a focal point in the kitchen and bath because it is very versatile."

Architect Howard Goldstein is also a big fan. "I spec a lot of it, often in kitchens as a window, but also as a backsplash between the countertop and the cabinet," says the principal of Washington, D.C.-based Schick Goldstein. "It also works well in the bathroom as a divider between the shower and the main bath."

Glass block is a bargain—from \$3 to \$5 per block, depending on the thickness and pattern, says Kristi Crapo for Pittsburgh Corning Glass Block in Pittsburgh. But installation adds to the cost dramatically, and truly unique and complex designs require a skilled mason.

Profilite (or channel glass) is another way to integrate glass partitions in kitchens and baths. It's a translucent, linear cast-glass structural wall manufactured in Europe and distributed here by Westcrowns in Shallotte, N.C. The system is made of supporting glass channels within an extruded metal perimeter frame, but it does not need horizontal or vertical supports, says Sam Wright, vice president of sales and marketing for Westcrowns.

Lorcan O'Herlihy, who was the first to spec the product in this country about 10 years ago, has been using it extensively in his practice. "The product is ideal for separating kitchens from living areas, bedroom walls, and bathrooms," says the principal of Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects in Culver City, Calif. "It comes in different colors and transparencies, so you have privacy while you bring in light."

Profilite is not for the budget bound, however. Installation cost varies from region to region, but Wright says you can expect your clients to pay anywhere from \$35 to \$55 per square foot installed—sans fancy and complex configurations.

tread lightly

Though a greater temptation than ever, glass is a challenging spec, warns

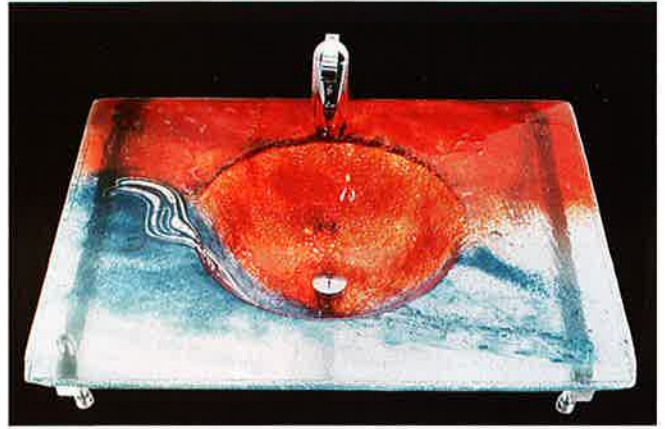
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MacPherson. It's very expensive, and you must know what it can and cannot do. Fortunately, there are cost-cutting measures that architects can apply. For one, show some restraint. Unless you're Philip Johnson, a little goes a long way. Says Rea, "You can make glass tiles more effective as a focal point—as accents in a floor, or jewels in a ceramic-tiled wall." Also, using larger panels and clear glazes keeps the cost down, he adds.

Goldstein claims that using prefabricated glass block panels is a good cost-controlling measure. "The

prefabricated panels can be installed by a carpenter instead of a mason," he says. Some manufacturers, like Pittsburgh Corning, offer prefabricated shower systems that cost less than their standard products.

Architects must also understand the dynamics of glass, says Barry Mappelink, director of Nathan Allan Glass Studios. For instance, with countertops, they must be mindful of the substrate because it will show through the glass. And countertops should be speckled in at least a 3/4-inch thickness of untempered glass, which will allow



This color-fused sink from AquaDreams is beautiful and vibrant—but it will cost your clients about \$4,000.

them to be repaired if they sustain small damage. On the other hand, Mappelink says, for safety reasons most building codes require tempered glass for shower doors and partitions.

Glass is a splendid blend of form and function. Its transparency enables it to

divide space without conquering it, its depth and faceting add vitality and visual interest even in minute amounts, and its wide appeal makes it an easy client pleaser. No wonder so many architects are taking a shine to it—all over again. ra

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